

Week 6: Contemplation & Study Guide

Please listen to this week's class audio one more time.

What's Up for This Week

Asana, Pranayama, and Pratyahara

This week, we're contemplating the sutras on asana, pranayama, and pratyahara—and thus completing our study of Book II.

As always, the handout with all these sutras is available on the Student Page under Resources, which includes Pandit Rajmani's translation and transliteration, with full definitions of the Sanskrit, in case you didn't or couldn't purchase the book *The Practice of the Yoga Sutra*. We have also included his full commentary on Sutras 2-46, 49-51, 54-55 on the course page under this week. (My own commentaries are in the Class recording itself and are also included below as part of the Study Guide.)

My suggestion is that you read through this whole document, then work with one practice every day, and focus your contemplation on it. One approach might be to do this during your meditation time. So on the first day, you would spend a few minutes at the beginning of your practice with the asana-based meditation on the body as space. On the second day, you would add a practice with one of the pranayamas, and let it take you into meditation. Or you can

Revisiting Your Experience of the Course—A Journaling Practice

Set aside half an hour to contemplate how these practices and the study have affected your personal practice, your state of mind, your relationships during the time we've been studying together. You might start by revisiting the homework sheets, reading them over, and/or reading your journals. Then ask yourself:

- What has been revelatory?
- What has felt difficult or challenging?
- What has the process shown you about yourself?
- How would you like to apply all this going forward?
- In what ways has this study and practice changed the way you go about your life and your sadhana?

The Sutras: Practices and Contemplations

SUTRA 2:46

स्थिरसुखमासनम् ॥४६॥

sthiraasukham āsanam || 46 ||

A stable and comfortable posture is asana.

Asana, of course, means “yogic seat”—in other words, a posture in which we can comfortably practice the yoga of meditation. Stability and comfort are what make it yogic, since the purpose of asana in Raja Yoga is to create the body as a vessel for practice—i.e., for going inside.

The commentary on this sutra mentions mostly sitting postures, such as padmasana (cross legged pose with both feet on thighs), virasana (kneeling pose with the butt resting on the calves, usually with a pillow or a kneeling bench for support), and siddhasana (cross-legged posture with the heels drawn together and pressing against the perineum).

That said, in order for a yogic posture to be comfortable, the body normally needs to be flexed and strengthened through other postures.

Sitting in one of these postures balances the flow through the pranic channels (nadis) and changes the energy in the body. This is conducive to health, and by calming the flow of prana in the body, also restores balance to the mind. More subtly, when you practice with awareness, especially breath awareness, in your asana practice, the different intelligences in the body are activated. There are many books on asana that explore the connection between asana and inner psychological transformation.

Gary Kraftsow's [Yoga for Transformation](#) is a good overview but there are many others.

SUTRA 2:47

प्रयत्नशैथिल्यानन्तसमापत्तिभ्याम् ॥४७॥

prayatnaśaithilyānantasamāpattibhyām || 47 ||

[Perfection in asana is attained] by loosening of [tension caused by] effort and by [mental] absorption in the infinite.

Basic point about asana: it should be easeful. Never push yourself past the point where it becomes uncomfortable.

At the same time, we need to do enough tapas to bring the body out of its inertia and resistance to movement! So, the balance of effort and relaxation, (or, precision and letting go) is the first principle of asana.

The secret is to be attentive to deepening your posture up to your edge. This is done by combining breath awareness with the process of settling into the posture. Once the

posture has been set up with precision, soften in it. Find your threshold of comfort, take your stretch or balance right up to that point, staying within the zone of comfort so the posture doesn't hurt, but being mindful of how to release and deepen your engagement with the pose by coordinating micro-movements with the breath.

Once in the pose (especially sitting poses, but you can do it with other poses) meditate on the infinite by imagining space in the body and breathing through the body with the feeling that the breath is like wind flowing through the sky. You can do this visually or kinesthetically, or simply remind yourself, "My body is empty" or "My body is filled with sky-like space".

Notice and tune into the parts of the body that are stretched or brought to consciousness by the posture, and breathe into them with the feeling of spaciousness.

Most of you have an experience of this, but here's an exercise:

Example of Breathing Space into an Asana: Ease into a forward bend (*Uttanasana*), keeping your back straight, bending from the hip joints, and bending the knees if necessary. (You can do this in a sitting posture by clasping your knees and pulling forward, stretching your back isometrically.) With attention to the breath, feel how the breath can help you deepen the stretch. Breathe into the hip-hinge, and notice how the breath will naturally loosen the tightness that might be obstructing you in going fully into the pose.

Now, notice the parts of the body that come to your attention, especially the back and abdomen. Breathe into them.

Notice the tensions, subtle forms of anxiety or resistance, emotions that come up as you hold a pose. Use the observing power of the mind to notice what arises in the pose. Breathe into the areas of discomfort and into the psychological resistance and notice the effect.

You can do this in any posture. If you regularly practice asana, see if you can do this protocol with every pose and notice if it increases your focus, comfort, and ability to hold the posture.

Question for Contemplation: Notice the difference between doing this asana with breath and inner focus and just doing the physical practice.

Asana Meditation: Seated Posture with Meditation on the Infinite Spaciousness

Seat yourself in a straight-backed posture, on a cushion that lets your hips 2-4 inches higher than your knees. You can sit in Half-Lotus, with one foot on the opposite thigh, in Virasana, kneeling with a pillow between your legs to support your buttocks (or using a Japanese kneeling bench), or Siddhasana, with the heels drawn together in front of the

perineum. Or, if you can be comfortable and stable in the simple cross-legged posture *sukhasana*, that's fine. Or sit on a chair, with your feet flat on the floor. Begin by feeling the support of your seat and relax into that supported feeling.

Use the breath to ground your posture, inhaling with the feeling that the breath flows downward, and that the hips and buttocks become heavy and sink into the seat. As you exhale, feel that the breath flows up the torso, lifting the spine up through the crown. The chin is just slightly tucked, the crown floats upward towards the ceiling. The crown should be directly over the perineum.

Breathe using the diaphragm to draw in the inhalation and release the exhalation. The belly will slightly puff out during inhalation and draw back towards the spine on the exhalation.

Let the breath help you as you focus on different tense or tight places in the body. Breathe into any areas of tightness and soften.

Notice the natural releases that occur as your body softens and makes micro-adjustments in the pose.

Sit for ten minutes in the posture, meditating on the inner body as filled with space.

Feel that your torso and belly are empty, like space. With every breath, feel that this inner space slightly expands, even past the borders of the body. Turn your awareness inside and focus on the feeling of space. Bring space into your joints. Let attention settle into that part of the body which feels most easeful—usually the heart or the lower belly or the torso as a whole. Feel that the breath flows through the body like wind through the sky.

Try meditating in this posture—easily doing nothing, sitting with the feeling that the body is filled with space.

Journal about the practice.

Asana Meditation II: Sitting as Still as a Mountain

Sit in a yogic asana **without moving** for ten minutes. You can do this straight-backed on a chair if necessary, but if possible, try and sit in a cross-legged posture, using a cushion or a mat to raise your hips above your knees. Let the mind flow through the body, using the breath to adjust any discomfort.

Imagine that your body is a mountain or a pyramid. Become completely passive and turn the mind within. Breathe with diaphragm. If discomfort arises, breathe it out. What happens? Is there a point where the mind settles down? Is there a point where the mind surrenders to the position? Can you prolong it?

Ask yourself: How does the position of my body affect my concentration? What is the felt difference between a slumping posture and a more upright one?

Experiment with different approaches to physical discomfort—shifting position, breathing into the space of the constriction, coaching yourself to soften. Journal about the results.

Question for Partner: Discuss with your partner how your asana practice has impacted your life and/or your health.

SUTRA 2:49

तस्मिन्सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोगतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः ॥४९॥

tasminsati śvāsapraśvāsayorgativicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ | | 49 | |

Complete mastery over the roaming tendencies of inhalation and exhalation is pranayama; it is to be practiced only after mastering asana.

Commentary: Pranayama means “to stretch or extend the prana.” This goes beyond deep breathing (which has its own benefits, both physical and psychological) to include pausing between inhalations and exhalations in order to activate the underlying well-spring of prana that is called “the breath inside the breath.”

The “roaming tendencies” refer to erratic, uneven breathing, which is calmed and regulated through the different pranayamas.

The word Prana has two meanings. First, it is used to indicate the force that regulates the inhalation. This is what we call the “lesser prana.” Second, it is the primordial life-force, also known as Spanda (vibratory resonance or pulsation), or prana shakti—the “greater Prana”. Prana is actually a form of the universal Shakti, also known as Kundalini, **thus it is inherently creative and healing**. The so called “greater Prana” pervades the body as well as the universe, powering the organs and nervous system through the channels (nadis) and chakras. Within the body, several different forms of “lesser pranas” regulate the different functions like digestion (samana), circulation of gases in the body (vyana), elimination (apana), rising kundalini (udana), etc. These pranas are hard to feel with your senses because they are very subtle; the breath is the form of prana that we can directly feel and direct with, thus it is the basis of pranayama practice.

Prana and mind are mutually dependent; thus, regulation of breathing will affect psychological states. Troubled or erratic breathing contributes to disease and mental agitation. To work with prana skillfully demands that you be able to keep the body still and stable. For that reason, hatha yoga masters like BKS Iyengar did not encourage students to do pranayama until they could sit in a stable and comfortable posture for some time.

Pranayama practice is the methodology by which we consciously draw prana into particular areas of the body. First, we learn to tune into the breath’s movements and follow their flow. Then we learn how to direct the flow to particular areas—usually the tip of nostrils flowing up into the center of the head, or into the heart, lower belly or navel center, but you can do it with any body part, and this will bring more consciousness to the area. Then we learn to pause or hold the breath in this area for short periods of time.

Classical pranayama can involve practices like Ujjayi (the full deep yogic breath), Bhastrika (the strong bellows breath), Kapilavati (skull-shining—another panting breath), Nadi Shodhana (nadi shodhana). These can be practiced without pausing to hold the breath, but true pranayama in Raja and Hatha Yoga usually involves practicing the pause, known as kumbhaka. Kumbhaka means “pot-shaped”, and it refers to the fact that holding the breath creates a vessel in which you can directly experience the subtle currents of prana shakti, and even direct them. Mastering kumbhaka—that is, being able to hold the breath comfortably for a little while—can allow the breathing to flow through the central channel, the sushumna. Once the breath moves into the central channel, the breath stops flowing through the nostrils, or simply becomes very subtle. When practiced with bandhas, this practice arouses Kundalini.

Kumbhaka is essentially an alchemical practice, because when we access the prana in the still space of the unmoving breath, the prana shakti will emerge from within the breath, will expand, and will naturally dissolve samskaras. For this reason, pranayama is considered one of the most skillful forms of tapas, because it directly acts to remove the “veils” of inner and outer tension and confusion and obscuration that form in the physical and subtle bodies.

In the *Vijnana Bhairava Tantra*, which some of you have studied, pranayama is taught as a sahaja (natural) breath, where you follow the inhalation to the heart with the subtle sound HAM, and focus on the natural pause at the end of the inhalation, then follow the exhalation to the crown with SA and focus above the crown for a second or two. In other words, you don't try to prolong the pause, instead you gradually let the breath settle until the pause has become natural. *HINT*: In the tantric traditions, the pause at the end of the exhalation is considered to be the most powerful place to focus.

This practice, which is described in verses 24 and 25 of the *Vijnana Bhairava*, is described in the Yoga Sutra 2:51 as “the fourth pranayama.” See 2:51 below for more about this.

Questions for journaling or partner discussion

In your experience, is there any way in which breathing has felt restricted or difficult for you? Have you experienced fear or holding in the breath, either because of asthma or anxiety? What challenges have you felt in doing pranayama or breath-based meditation? How have you worked with them?

If you're working with a partner, share some of the breath practices that you find helpful.

In what ways have you experienced healing through breath practice? Have you had breakthroughs in the way you breathe? What have they been? Journal about this and/o discuss it with your partner.

SUTRA 2:50

वाह्याभ्यन्तरस्तम्भवृत्तिः देशकालसङ्ख्याभिः परिदृष्टो दीर्घसूक्ष्मः ॥५०॥

bāhyābhyantarastambhavṛttirdeśakālasamkhyābhiḥ paridrṣṭo dīrghasūkṣmaḥ | | 50 | |

[Pranayama with breath retention could be] threefold: external, internal, or stopping the breath wherever it is. Each is monitored by space, time, and number, and each is characterized by its length and subtlety.

External pranayama is pausing the breath after exhalation. Internal pranayama means pausing after inhalation. The third type is done in the middle of an exhalation or inhalation, as in viloma pranayama. Explicit instructions on these practices are beyond the scope of this commentary, but there is some really detailed and helpful information on them in the books listed below, by Gary Kraftsow and Richard Rosen.

For classical pranayama practice, the flow of breath should be measured, using (1) counting (1,2,3, etc.), (2) use of mantra (a few repetitions of mantra if you are inhaling/exhaling/holding for a longer time), or (3) noting the internal or external space where the inhalation or exhalation ends. For most people, the external space is 12 fingers or 3 fists distance outside the body, and the internal space is the corresponding space inside. If you are breathing in and out of the heart center, you would measure the outer space by using your own fists, starting at the bottom of the nostrils. If it is the space of the crown, you would measure by placing your right fist (with the side of the index finger against the crown) and stacking the left fist above it, then removing your right fist and stacking that on top of the left.

In Tantra, these spaces outside the body are known as dvadashanta-s (literally, “space of 12”). The Space of 12 is the border of your personal energetic body (sometimes called your subtle body, and visible to those with “sight” as your aura!) which interpenetrates the physical but extends beyond it. In my classes, we work with meditations on the space above the crown, the space 12 fingers outside the chest either in front or in back, and the space below the coccyx. These points are junctions where the personal energy meets the universal energy, so meditating on one of these spaces is considered a natural portal into the energy of Shiva/Shakti, or a “doorway to the infinite”.

There are several different possible ratios for the length of the different components of the breath. Some pranayamas use an equal ration (where all phases of the breath are the same length) while others use an unequal one (where one phase is longer than the other). For unequal breathing, a normal pattern would be 1-2-3-2, where the exhalation is longer than the inhalation, or 1-2-3-4 (The numbers represent the ratio, not the lengths of the breaths).

The equal breathing practice we did in class is a 4-4-4-4 ratio. We measured by mantra repetition, but it can also be done by counting breaths. This is a calming breath, good for relieving stress and anxiety, among its other effects.

Simple Four-Count Pranayama with Pause

Inhale for four counts (Two repetitions of HamSa, four heartbeats, or simply counting 1-2-3-4)

Hold for four counts

Exhale for four counts

Hold for four counts.

I like to measure the duration of each section by my own heartbeat, which makes it much easier to sink into the practice. If you can sense your own heartbeat, I recommend this, otherwise I suggest counting with two repetitions of HamSa mantra. At a certain point, you will get a sense of the natural rhythm of the practice, and at that point begin to pay attention to the felt sense that arises during the pauses. Notice whether it “feels” right to pause after the inhalation or after the exhalation, and then begin to focus on that space.

Do this practice only as long as feels comfortable. If you have asthma and holding the breath feels problematic, try pausing for only one count.

Four Count Pranayama with Vertical Breathing

You can do this pranayama with the vertical breath meditation we have been practicing, where you inhale to the heart with Ham, and exhale to the crown with Sa. In this case, you would hold the breath for just as long as feels comfortable (usually the equivalent of 2-4 counts), just to get a sense of the stillness at the beginning and end of the inhalation and exhalation.

Vertical Meditation with Hamsa and a brief hold

Begin the practice we have been doing in meditation, inhaling down to the heart with Ham, exhaling upwards through the center of the head and out the crown with Sa. At the end of each inhalation and exhalation, hold the breath for two heartbeats.

Once you get a sense of the pause, don't try and hold the breath, but let the pause arise naturally. This is sahaja pranayama, also known as “the fourth pranayama.”

SUTRA 2:51

बाह्याभ्यन्तरविषयाक्षेपी चतुर्थः ॥५१॥

bāhyābhyantaraviṣayākṣepī caturthaḥ || 51 ||

The fourth pranayama transcends the domain of external and internal pranayamas.

This practice is far more subtle than the pranayamas discussed in the previous sutra and its related practices. The designation “fourth” refers to an esoteric concept from Vedanta: The human organism is said to inhabit three “bodies”—gross, subtle, and causal—corresponding to the waking, dream, and deep sleep states. The “fourth body” (turya), also known as the “supra causal,” is the inner state of clarity and transcendence we occupy in deep awakeness and awake meditation. It is a body of awareness, in which we experience our identity with the Self, and in which we are the Witness. It is an effortless state that arises on its own. The fourth pranayama is so-called because it leads directly to effortless meditative states. In the fourth pranayama, we start by making a subtle effort, but naturally become aware of the flow of prana shakti that underlies the breath. This creates a spontaneous awareness of the energy that begins to awaken in the still space. While the other pranayamas “churn” and arouse energy in the body, the fourth pranayama creates stillness and natural expansion of the prana shakti, so it is therefore as much a meditation technique as a pranayama.

Our vertical breath practice is one example of the techniques regarded as aspects of the Fourth Pranayama. Here is another, which we did during class, and which is based on a practice that Pandit Rajmani describes in his commentary on 2:51. It is a very significant meditation practice in its own right.

Exercise: The Fourth Pranayama (*Pranayama segueing into meditation*)

Begin by noticing the felt sense of the breath entering your nostrils, and “marking” it with your awareness. Follow the breath through the nostrils and notice it flowing upwards past the corners of the eyes, through the region behind the eyebrows and up into the space behind the forehead. Let the mind simply stay with the flow of the breath as it moves upwards—don’t try to force or direct it.

As you follow this pattern for 3-5 breaths, you’ll become sensitive to the felt sensations in the different parts of the inner passage. Energy begins to gather in these parts of the head.

In the next part of the practice, as you inhale, bring your awareness to the area at the tip of your nostrils. Your attention is now “stationed” in front of your face—which means that you are focusing in the pranic body that surrounds your physical body. Continue to inhale along the pathway in front of your face, through the area corresponding to the eyes, then to the space between the eyebrows, then to the center of the forehead and beyond.

Without pausing, exhale downwards as far as the exhalation wants to travel, paying close attention to the sensations at every stage.

At a certain point, it may feel as if your breathing is taking place inside a subtle tubular “chamber” which may include your physical body or be experienced in front of it. Or the breath may want to settle in the region of the forehead, outside and inside—which is the Ajna Chakra.

That’s all. The breath flows naturally, and will tend to slow as you feel the energetic flow there. To allow this practice to mature, you need to do it for at least ten minutes at first. As it becomes more and more natural, the experience of the wider pranic body becomes natural and may even happen just after you begin. This practice leads naturally into meditation. The breath becomes slow and effortless, and you might find yourself coming to a more and more restful state. Then, you just let yourself be, allowing the pranic body to envelop you.

As this practice matures, you may find that your mind naturally starts to rest in the area in front of and inside the forehead—the Ajna Chakra. As this happens, let it be. You may start to see a kind of luminosity in this space, or simply feel energy expanding. As the energy expands, if you feel pressure, follow the tendency of the space to widen, to expand outwards, and to enlarge. It’s fine to meditate with focus here, letting the breath arise and subside naturally. Or stay with the vertical pattern. Here, follow the natural unfolding of the practice. What is happening is that the process is naturally moving from pranayama to pratyahara (internal focus) and into dharana (meditative focus).

Contemplation: Set aside some time to try these different pranayamas. Be very mindful about the effects, and journal about them. If you are working with a partner, it would be great to practice then together, taking turns giving the instructions.

SUTRA 2:52

ततः क्षीयते प्रकाशावरणम् ॥५२॥

tataḥ kṣīyate prakāśāvaraṇam | | 52 | |

Then the veil over the light is attenuated.

SUTRA 2:53

धारणासु च योग्यता मनसः ॥५३॥

dhāraṇāsu ca yogyatā manasaḥ | | 53 | |

The mind is also qualified for concentrations.

As you practice the meditation above, you begin to experience the pranic currents both inside and outside your head. These are usually experienced kinesthetically, as a pulsation,

but can also be “seen” with the inner visual sense as a luminosity. As you fall more inside the practice you no longer have to pay attention to the breathing itself, but rather are drawn to simply being present with the space around the head—in front of the face to a distance of 12 fingers, above the head, and also inside. Just be with whatever arises, letting go of thoughts as you would in any meditation practice.

The space that opens is the alchemical space of transformation, and it’s that which begins to attenuate your “obscurations”, the coverings that obscure the inner light. This is quite a literal process, meaning that as you continue with this, the space you “see” with closed eyes begins to take on luminosity. The luminosity may not be a bright light, more often a soft glowing quality. It may be whitish or bluish. And as this process continues, there may be active visions of the Ajna itself, sometimes in the form of an eye, or of a flame, or of a blue dot, which may appear and disappear. This is the natural sign that the literal darkness that obscures the higher centers is being lifted.

As these phenomena occur, stay present with the space, without attaching to the experiences that arise, but enjoying them! And don’t worry if they don’t come at first. For me, it took some time to “see” anything there. But the inner alchemical changes happened long before I had visual experiences in the Ajna.

Through this gentle attention to the space, you become more and more poised in the Ajna Chakra, which is the primary “space” for meditation in Patanjali’s Raja Yoga tradition. This begins to open naturally, and then our practice is simply to rest there.

And this is a natural “seat” for meditation, where you can visualize a flame, or a mantra, or which you can use as an anchor point for awareness of awareness—at which point, you are doing a concentrative meditation (dharana).

For Partner Practice: Do this practice together with your partner and discuss the effects and the results.

Contemplation for journaling or discussion with your partner: How have I experienced breath practice shifting my concentration or turning the mind inside? How have I experienced it as actively healing? Which practices have I found particularly healing? In what ways do I use it in daily life?

Pratyahara

SUTRA 2:54

स्वविषयासम्प्रयोगे चित्तस्य स्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणां प्रत्याहारः ॥५४॥

svaviṣayāsamprayoge cittasyasvarūpānukāra ivendriyāṇāṁ pratyāhāraḥ | | 54 | |

Lacking contact with their respective objects, when senses assume the nature of mind it is pratyahara.

Pratyahara means withdrawing the mind into a focal point within the body.

As we work with the breath, we naturally discover that joining the mind and the breath will bring attention inside, especially when we focus on particular parts of the inner or physical body. In other words, we can direct the breath into the nostrils, or into the heart center, or into the Ajna, or through the vertical pathway, or use the breath to help us focus on different energetic points along the physical body or inside it. This disconnects the mind from its outgoing tendency to follow the pull of the senses, which normally pull our attention outwards.

Pratyahara literally means “to not consume”. Normally, the manas grasps at whatever the senses contact, names it, categorizes it, and takes a position about it (“I like this” “I don’t like it.”). This is the natural function of the mind, which lets us function in the world. In pratyahara, the mind disconnects from the senses, so that even when something is heard or felt (a sound or sensation or even a sight) the mind is able to let it be. In time, when you practice inner focus or inner attention, there can be awareness of a particular sound or sensation etc, but it doesn’t draw you outward.

Over time, the concrete and identifiable sensations, sounds, etcetera melt into inner pulsations of energy. For instance, when you are doing pratyahara by focusing on the touch of the breath in the nostrils, you feel it first as a sensation, but after a while that sensation begins to feel like a vibration or an energetic pulsation. This occurs naturally when we do these breath-based meditations and pranayamas, or when we practice with a mantra. The mind and breath join and begin to flow inward into the subtle energy field. Then there is a natural resting in the flow. For example, the sense of luminosity in the Ajna Chakra might become a resting place for the mind. The sense of space inside the body might become the focal point of attention. The energetic vertical flow that opens during the Heart-Ajna breathing might capture your mind so that you are just being in it. This is the natural first step in concentration and meditation, and it happens naturally through pranayama. The outgoing experience of the senses focusing on outer objects becomes an inner sensory experience that keeps the mind inside.

So, the classical approach to pratyahara is to focus your mind on an inner center, a chakra, or simply on the flow of the breath.

Pratyahara Exercise: Focus your attention on the area of the heart center, just behind the sternum. Breathe in and out gently, keeping your focus inside. That's it! You can try it with any of the other chakras. In fact, this is a great walking around practice. See how long you can go through the day keeping your mind inwardly focused—either on the heart, or perhaps on the area of the hara, the inner belly, an inch or so below the navel. Use the breath to help draw your attention inward. You can do this as an open-eyed practice...focusing inward while walking, talking, cooking. Notice how it naturally centers you, makes you less distracted.

Eventually, this inner focus becomes full-on concentration (**dharana**) and leads into meditation.

Notice how this happens as you do this pratyahara practice.

Non-Dual Pratyahara: There is a tantric approach to this, which we practiced in class. This is a thought experiment where you sit with eyes open and remind yourself, “Whatever I see, whatever I hear, whatever I sense is Shakti. Wherever my mind goes is divine energy.”

Or you can experiment with different sentences, such as, “All this is arising inside consciousness” or “All this is love”.

Exercise: Try this. Notice what happens to your mind in the process. There should be a shift in the way the world appears—much less alien, separate, much more shimmery and familiar. The sense of separation from “outside” lessens, and more than that, the objects in the outer world stop being so attractive or unattractive.

Journal about this or discuss it with your partner.

Further Reading

Yoga for Transformation by Gary Kraftsow (especially the chapters on *Energizing the Vital*)

Explains the technicalities, with good diagrams and illustrations.

The Yoga of Breath by Richard Rosen

Particularly good for beginning or deepening your practice, because he takes you step by step not only through the different pranayamas, but through the subtle aspects of the practice and everything you might experience as you do pranayama.

Breath by James Nestor

A science writer describes the anatomy and importance of proper breathing.