

Loving Your Way to Awakening Meditation & Contemplation Homework Week 6

Dear Fellow Travelers on the Bhakti Path,

This week we include the Prayer Practice we worked with in yesterday's call, which I suggest you work with this week during a couple of your meditation sessions. Otherwise, please continue the meditation practice we've been doing all along (its below!). As you begin to integrate the protocols we've been doing together, you'll find that there are several powerful techniques described in these homework pages. At this point, my suggestion is that you consider the practices that have been particularly powerful or helpful for you and continue them. Some you will be drawn to practice daily, others weekly, others once in a while. All these practices can kindle Bhakti, but some of them will be particularly resonant.

So please feel free to be creative, and to work with your own inspiration.

And know that the simple practice of breathing in love and offering love back, or simply recognizing that the breath is love, is often enough to keep you touching love.

It's been such a joy being with you for the last six weeks, feeling your Shakti, reading your wisdom on the listserv, and sensing the strength of this sangam as you support one another both in words and in offering blessing and empathy. What a collection of great souls you are!

This document contains a list of the major practices we've worked with, a section on meditation practices with instructions, same as last two weeks but with the addition of the "new" Prayer Practice we did in class.

It also contains some journaling/partner work prompts, and the sutras we talked about last night.

Enjoy.

I love you,

Sally

Practices We've Been Working With

Below is a list of the practices we've done together. All of them are powerful for deepening your experience of love. Some will be especially powerful, others less so. You get to choose which ones to incorporate into your practice. You'll find instructions for all of them in the 6 homework assignments. Some are formal seated meditation practices; others can be incorporated into your day. Obviously, you won't do them all every day, and some you will only practice occasionally. But these homework pages can be an ongoing resource for you, especially if you do these practices enough so that you can guide yourself, based on the instructions.

And don't forget to chant! Chant to a recording, chant in the car, chant whenever you remember and are in a place to do it!

Formal Meditations from the Course

No matter which meditation practice you do, remember that at some point you want to let go of the technique and rest in your own inner spaciousness.

- **Breathing in love** from the universe, and allowing it to flow through your body, then out into the world.
- **Mantra.** We've been practicing with *Hare Rama Hare Krishna (HRHK)* during the course, but many of you have your own mantra, which has unique resonance for you. If you want to keep exploring HRHK, that's great. If you feel more comfortable with your usual mantra, that's great too. Remember that as you do it, you focus on the internal resonance of it, and for devotional purposes, practice offering it into the heart, or having the feeling that the heart is repeating it from within or find another *bhava* (spiritual attitude) that helps deepen your experience. Mantra is an extraordinarily powerful practice, but we often have to refresh it in one of those creative ways in order to keep it from becoming routine.

Always remember that when the mantra dissolves during a meditation, it's a sign that you can simply rest in the experience of meditation. In other words, unless you start thinking, you can let the mantra go.

- As many of you know, **japa practice** during the day is one of the great methods for continual purification of the mind and energy field and has a miraculous power to return you to a resourceful state.
- **Metta (Loving Kindness) practice**, where you ask that you yourself, another person, or persons, and finally all beings be happy, free of suffering, held in love, safe. Or whatever you feel called to invoke for them
- The **Third Eye/Heart practice**, which is described below.
- **Inner Beloved practice**, also described below. There might be times when you want to do it daily—and it doesn't have to be an elaborate meditation, to redirect your attention to the felt sense of the inner lover/beloved. Even if it doesn't feel

intense at a particular time, it is still removing veils that hide your soul from ordinary awareness.

- **Talking to God (Prayer) practice.** We did this in our final class, and the instructions are below. I encourage you to get as creative with this as you can. The most important thing is finding the right name for invoking Spirit in a felt, personal way, and saying what you feel. Praise, confess, complain, say thank you, ask for help—just keep the dialogue going! Again, you can do this as a formal practice from time to time, or it might be something you do daily. This is also a great practice to do lying in bed before you go to sleep.
- **Tonglen (Sending and Taking) practice.** Once you've developed a rhythm for this, it can be a go-to practice that you can do during the day, whenever you become aware of inner discomfort, or of someone else's suffering or fear. This practice helps connect you to others, and helps you develop radical compassion for yourself as well as others.
- **Reading,** especially the poetry of bhakti poets like Kabir, Rumi, Hafez, and others.

Walking-Around Practices for Touching Love Your Way to Awakening

- Ask, "Is there any love present?"
- Offer your activities to love, to Spirit, to God.
(If you get into the habit of doing this regularly, it will (as many of you know) truly change your attitude towards everything you do.)
- Notice moments when love is present—in an interaction with another person (could be just a smile or "Hello"), a moment in nature, a piece of reading, a compliment, or just a fleeting moment of joy.
- Metta practice especially when you feel out of sorts or when someone close to you is out of sorts.
- Mantra!
- When you feel affection or love for someone, ask yourself how this love connects you to the soul/heart/divinity in that person. When you feel annoyed with them, ask, "May I find the soul-love in this person, no matter how they appear to me."

Meditation Practice

Below is the protocol we've been working with for the last few weeks of the class.

Please begin with ten minutes of Hatha Yoga postures or light stretching to wake up your body. Then do 5 minutes of Nadi Shodhana breathing.

Offer your meditation, asking that it be of benefit to all beings or to a particular person (or animal or place).

Chant the opening mantras that we provided or the mantras of your choosing

Preparatory Grounding

For a minute or two, *practice whole-body attention with the following four steps*. This will both ground you and expand your awareness of yourself as a unified physical entity.

1. Inhale and exhale, feeling the air flowing in and out of your nostrils.
2. Expand your awareness to include the movements that the chest and abdomen make when you breathe.
3. Allow yourself to be aware of your heartbeat or pulse in your body.
4. Include in your awareness the sense of your muscles holding your body in a balanced posture.

Core Practice

Begin by asking, "Let me feel the presence of love, in whatever form she appears now."

With your attention on the breath, *become aware* of the presence around you of a benign, loving energy, the energy of grace and love.

Have the feeling of welcoming or allowing the energy to breathe you, even to hold you.

Feel or sense that your breath is arising and subsiding on its own, drawn by the power of love, which is breathing you.

Have the sense that your heart center opens like the shutter of a camera. Have the sense that love (tenderness, acceptance) is flowing in and out through the heart.

Now, add the mantra:

***Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.***

Or you can use the thought "Trust," as we were doing in class.

Feel that the syllables are being dropped into the heart like flower petals or drops of water.

Feel that the Beloved is saying the mantra to you.

Imagine that the mantra surrounds you like a cloud, and that you are breathing it.

To understand the real power of *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* mantra (or any other deity mantra), try adopting this attitude: Feel that, as a poet saint sings, “When you say these words, you touch God with your tongue. When you think them, your mind and heart become filled with God.” Notice whether taking this attitude creates a more sacred feeling.

As thoughts arise, notice the thought with the feeling that the thought is actually made of particles of love. Love in the form of thought. And let it flow out with the breath.

At a certain point, as your meditation deepens, let go and simply rest inside.

New this week: Prayer Practice: Conversation with God

Begin by deciding on the form of Spirit you are addressing. It doesn’t have to be a personal form, though if you are drawn to one that makes it easier. But for most of us, Spirit is formless or experienced as a felt Presence.

You may imagine Spirit as in front of you, or within you. I suggest experimenting. Sometimes it’s very powerful to conceive of Spirit as an outside Presence that you can talk to and imagining that it is with you as a light or feeling state. Sometimes it’s more natural to sense sacred presence in a fully formless way, surrounding you or within you. It will be different at different times. Even if you are specifically calling on a great being or deity form, at some point that form will dissolve, or be drawn into your own body. This is a sign that the practice is maturing.

- 1) Center yourself in the breath, drawing it in through the heart until you feel connected to your own heart.
- 2) Call to, invite or invoke Spirit to be present, using a name if appropriate, or simply saying something like “I am here. Please be with me.” Do this until you feel a sense of Presence.
- 3) Say thank you for whatever comes to mind that you want to express gratitude for, for the forms of grace in your life, for the sheer fact of life itself, for all the ways you are held, protected, and inspired.
- 4) Speak to Spirit. Say whatever you want to say. Confess, complain, describe, make offerings (“I offer myself just as I am, with all my faults and virtues” is a time-honored way of doing this).
- 5) Ask for what you need, without hesitation. Notice that at a certain point there will be a kind of clicking into place, and you will feel connected.
- 6) Rest in the presence. Allow Spirit to dissolve into your heart.

Inner Beloved Meditation

(An audio of this meditation from Class is available on the Student Page.)

The inner beloved is a unique and very personal presence for each of us. Some of us find the beloved to be a facet of our inner divine self, an aspect of our own inner being. For some of us, the beloved takes the form of a distinct other, even when he or she is being experienced inwardly. Even when we sense the beloved as an inner presence, he or she can appear as a teacher, or a lover, or a deity, someone we can dialogue with, feel guided by, or simply be present with as a guide into the deepening immersion into love.

Not everyone has a distinct sense of the presence of an inner beloved. For some of us, the beloved is always another person—someone you can physically touch or talk to. Or we may find that the idea of a beloved—a second person inner friend or lover or deity—feels dualistic, when our overall experience is of meditation as an immersion in unity. Yet, whether we are aware of it or not, we all have within us a figure of the beloved other. The beloved is a facet of yourself, but she is also other. He is your true soulmate, the one who can never disappear.

In this meditation, allow yourself to be as open as possible to the presence of the Beloved. In whatever way the beloved reveals herself, or hints at his nature, be present with that.

Instruction:

Find your seat—sitting bones grounded, upper torso lifting, shoulders relaxed down the back. Be present with the flow of the breath in your nostrils, taking time to center your attention on the flow. Notice the other parts of your body that move with the breath.

Your eyes are closed. Your hands are palms down on your thighs, or lightly held, one palm resting in the other, on your lap. Your eyelids are soft. Your cheeks are soft.

Place one hand over the center of your chest, and begin to softly think to yourself, “Beloved.” Imagine that you are calling the beloved who is present in your heart. Even if you have never been aware of this presence, let yourself call the beloved. Notice the emotions that arise as you do this. Stay with the calling, letting the word beloved begin to arouse a sense of this inner presence. It might be very subtle. You might be aware of a feeling of warmth, or of mystery. You might not be sure you feel anything. Perhaps you might find yourself remembering someone who is beloved to you, or who has been beloved in the past. Someone who’s presence kindled love within you. Someone you have loved, or been drawn to, or even infatuated with. Recognize, if you can, that this person may have been a guide to your inner beloved.

Now, keeping your awareness in the heart, imagine yourself in a twilight grove. Feel that your eternal beloved, the one you have loved for lifetimes, is present with you. The beloved may have a visible form, or may simply be present as an energy, as a sense of pure presence. Whether the beloved appears to your inner eye, or is simply a felt presence, let yourself sense how personal this being is. How the beloved loves you, with all your personhood, all your quirks, all your insecurities.

Sitting in the presence of the beloved, let yourself Breathe with the beloved's presence, letting his love, her love flow towards you and through you with the breath. Let your sense of the beloved's presence become more and more real. Let yourself breathe out your love to the beloved.

Now, breathe the beloved into your heart. Breathe the beloved in through the center of your chest, and feel that as you do, your heart expands backwards forwards and on all sides. Let yourself feel that you receive the beloved back into your heart. And as you breathe in that very personal, very specific love, the love the beloved has for you, internalize it completely. Feel, "I am loved, and I am love." Let yourself sense from within how the lover, the beloved, and love itself are one. Bringing the beloved into your heart, sense that you yourself are the beloved.

Soft Palate/Heart Practice

- Find the soft palate's location by touching it for a moment with the tip of your tongue, then let the tongue relax on the floor of the mouth.
- Sense the breath flowing through the nostrils, through the nasal passages. Sense it flowing up the back of the throat towards the soft palate.
- Let your focus center on the sensual quality of the breath, how it touches and caresses the nasal passages. Have the feeling "I open to the breath" If you like, you can softly inhale and exhale with Ham and Sa.
- Mentally direct the inhalation to the soft palate, letting the inhalation touch the soft palate and then rise up through the center of the head to the area just inside the skull.
- Exhaling, let the focus flow through the center of the head, the *Ajna* Chakra. Feel the touch of the breath, touching and expanding the area in the center of the head.
- Using your inner senses, explore the sensations in this area. (This is *dharana*, where you use soft focus to deepen your connection to the object.)
- As thoughts arise, notice, and let them go.
- Gradually allow the exhalation to connect the area inside the head to the area of the heart center, behind the breastbone. The breathing now begins to become lighter and more refined. Little by little, begin to feel that the current of breath is moving inside the whole area. Gradually allow the breath to relax and become more and more refined until you experience it as an inner current of energy that now moves from the top of the *Ajna* (just under the skull) down to the top of the heart center. Let yourself settle into this feeling, allowing your attention to become more and more inward.
- You are now poised within the subtle "body" of the upper chakras. There slowly ceases to be a distinction between *Ajna* and heart as you relax into this inner body. Feel as though your awareness is riding the gentle up and down flow of the breath

currents. Now there is nothing to do but rest inside the inner body. So, rest within, letting the attention follow the breath flow, exploring the sensations in this region. You might also receive subtle “signals” to allow that current to expand. Notice the inner sensations as they morph—this is one way to keep the mind focused in *dharana*.

Notice that at some point, you may become aware of a luminosity in the region of the *Ajna*. This is a sign that the area is opening, revealing that the real nature of this center is light. You may also become aware of a feeling of inner satisfaction, contentment, or peace. These are signs that you are flowing from *dharana* to *dhyana*.

Prayer Practice:

Contemplation and Writing Practice

Journal Practice: Write “Today I experienced love when (then recall any incidents when you were aware of feeling affection, tenderness, etc.)

Journal Practice: These are the gifts of love I give. These are gifts of love I receive. Write about both and discuss them with your partner.

Journal Practice: How do you know that Spirit is real? What helps you feel the Presence of Spirit? How can you cultivate that more deeply?

Journal Practice: Write a commentary on this statement by A.H. Almaas:

“The inner journey is a love affair. It has nothing to do with getting things done, with your life in the world. It is entirely about a relationship with God. Our focus is on our relationship with God, the Source, the supreme Spirit, the Self. That in itself is enlightenment.”

Is this true for you? How? How do you see this relationship playing in your life?

Journal and discuss with your partner.

Sutras for Week 6

Below, you'll find Sanskrit transliteration and English translation for Sutras 35, 36, and 37.

Spend a few minutes reading them, and if you are working with one of the commentaries, such as *Narada's Way of Divine Love* by Swami Prabhavananda, or *The Yoga of Spiritual Devotion* by Prem Prakash read through the commentary on each sutra from that book and include its insights in your contemplation.

As you read through these, repeat the Sanskrit three times out loud. (This helps you feel the energy in the sutras, which is considerable.) You can also sing it, draw it, or take it into a Hatha Yoga asana.

Here is a contemplation process to use:

- Say the English to yourself (or sing it!)
- Close your eyes, breathe into the heart, and hold the sutra in awareness for a minute or two.
- Open your eyes and write down any insights, experiences, questions, or conclusions about the meaning of the sutra and your relationship to it.

You can also do this process a partner discussion.

Sutra 50

स तरति स तरति लोकांस्तारायति ॥

sa tarati sa tarati lokāṁs-tārāyati

(The bhakta) crosses the ocean of the world. (The bhakta) crosses the ocean of the world.
(The Bhakta) helps all in the world to cross.

Question: How is this true? How has devotion helped you through difficult and deluding situations?

Sutra 51

अनिर्वचनीयं प्रेमस्वरूपम् ॥

anirvacanīyaṁ prema-svarūpam

The essential nature of love cannot be expressed in words.

Sutra 52

मूकास्वादनवत् ॥

mūkāsvādanavat

It is like one who cannot speak [attempting to describe] flavor.

Sutra 53

प्रकाश्यते क्वापि पात्रे ॥

prakāśyate kvāpi pātre

It reveals itself wherever there is an able vessel.

Sutra 54

गुणरहितं कामनरहितं प्रतिक्षणवर्धमानम्
अविच्छिन्नं सूक्ष्मतरम् अनुभवरूपम् ॥

guṇarahitaṁ kāmanarahitaṁ pratikṣaṇavardhamānam avicchinnaṁ sūkṣmataram
anubhavarūpam

It is free of limiting qualities, free of self-centered desire, ever-expanding, uninterrupted, most subtle, of the nature of inner experience.

Sutra 56

गौणी त्रिधा गुणभेदादर्तादिभेदाद्वा ॥

gauṇī tridhā guṇabhedād-artādi-bhedād-vā

Preparatory [bhakti] is of three kinds according to the difference in one's nature or to difference in distress and so on.

Commentary: The sutra is referring not only to the practices we have been doing (which are preparatory bhakti and which also kindle it), but also to our state and motives for practice. As we discussed in class, most people turn to devotional practice for one of three reasons (which we described in class).

- We are suffering and want help or relief or guidance.
- We want some form of worldly success or advancement (this also includes success in relationships, creative work, your service to others or the world—all of these desires are served when we turn to Spirit.
- We desire spiritual progress, enlightenment or awakening, or realization of Truth.

Question: Looking carefully at your own life, how have these three reasons for invoking and loving spirit been at play in your practice. For most of us, all are present, certainly in the beginning and much of the time.

Question: How have these reasons for connecting with the divine helped build your trust and affection for Spirit?

Question: What does it mean to you that Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that all these devotees—i.e., the ones with these motives—are dear to him?

Sutra 60

शान्तिरूपात् परमानन्दरूपाच्च ॥

śāntirūpāt paramānandarūpāc-ca

It is of the nature of peace, and it is of the nature of supreme joy.

Commentary: This is a description of parabhakti, the “supreme devotion” in which love is experienced fully, and for its own sake.

Question: Have there been moments when you experienced this kind of love? Understand that this is awakened love, enlightened love, the fruit of this journey. Yet along the way, we get glimpses.

Sutra 66

त्रिरूपभङ्गपूर्वकं नित्यदास्यनित्यकान्तभजनात्मकं
प्रेम कार्यं प्रेमैव कार्यम् ॥

tri-rūpa-bhaṅga-pūrvakam nitya-dāsyā-nitya-kānta-bhajanātmakam prema kāryam
premaiva kāryam

The three forms of [conditional love] previously mentioned are surpassed when the self offers devotion [that is like that of] a constant servant or a constant lover. One should act out of love. Truly, one should act out of love.

Commentary: This verse is a very significant teaching on how to pursue the path. Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita,—“Think of yourself as my servant and all other beings as the ones to be served.” In the commentary, Jnaneshwar Maharaj says, “Worshipping me with your own actions, do that which must be done at all times and in all places, now.”

Question: How do you put these practices to work in making it easier for you to act out of love? How do you know when you are acting out of love? How do you know when you aren't? Without guilt-tripping yourself about your imperfections, get into the habit of interrogating yourself in order to make it easier to act out of love (not fake love or the kind of positivity that sidesteps reality!) What does it mean to you to act out of love?