

Open Heart Meditation Homework—March 16-23, 2011

Dear Open Heart Meditators,

It was great to be with all of you this evening.

Here is a review of the practices and the 'assignment' for this week:

In addition, you should have received a handout called Fundamentals of Meditation which you can print out, which contains information about the benefits of meditation as well as basic posture instructions and instructions for journaling.

Your Assignment

In the days to come, please add 15 minutes to your meditation practice each day. Find a time when you can be alone and quiet. Morning and evening are the traditional times for meditation, but you can meditate at any time that is convenient.

Here's the protocol we'll be following this week:

- Find yourself a comfortable setting for meditation, and if you need to, set a timer or alarm to bring yourself out.
- Begin by settling yourself in the meditation posture.
(The five points of posture alignment are in the handout, Fundamentals of Meditation that you will receive tonight.)
- Chant Om three times, or use the mantras we chanted this evening. As you do, have the sense that you are aligning yourself with the grace that opens you to meditation.
- Spend a few moments sitting with the breath, having the feeling that you are breathing in light, and breathing out light.
- Bring your awareness to the heart center. You can do this by finding the place on your sternum, 5 finger-widths below the u-shaped notch at your throat. The heart center is behind the breastbone, in the very center of the body, slightly to the right of center.
- Be aware of the breath flowing into and out of the heart, softly and gently, drawing in particles of light energy. The inhalation flows in and touches the inner heart, gently expanding it. With the exhalation, the heart gently opens and expands. Little by little, you let the breath expand and open the heart energy, bringing your attention towards the back of the heart.
- Allowing the breath to massage your inner heart, explore with your awareness the energy in your heart space, letting your attention flow backwards, to the back heart.
- Rest in the heart, with the breath.

- If thoughts arise, as soon as you notice the thought, label it "Thought." Do this no matter what the content happens to be. Then, without judgment, bring your attention back into the heart-space, and the breath.
- After a while, you can allow the mantra "*Ham*" (pronounced 'hum') to flow in with the inhalation, and 'Sa' to flow out with the exhalation. The mantra means "I am That" –in other words, I am the Self, I am the pure radiance of Consciousness, I am the universe. It speaks to our connection with the All. The mantra also serves as an anchor for the mind. However, the true gift of the mantra is experienced when you let yourself feel the energy of the syllables as it interacts with the energy in the heart. As you breathe with the mantra, feel its resonance, the vibratory energy within the syllables dropping into the heart. Let your thought of *Ham sa* be gentle and soft, resonating with the heart energy. Let ham flow into the heart. With Sa, feel the heart energy softly opening and expanding. Notice how the energetic caress of the breath is deepened and enhanced by the energy within the mantra. Let your attention be soft.
- End your meditation with an Om--seeing if you can let the Om resound in your heart.

Coming Out of Meditation

- Take a few minutes afterwards to write in your journal--even if it's just a few notes. You can ask yourself three questions for journaling: What practice did I do? What happened as I was meditating (changes in breath, feelings arising, shifts in thought-patterns, recognitions, subtle images, expansions, or anything else that seems relevant). Finally, note how you feel as you come out of meditation.
- See if you can keep your attention centered in the heart for a few minutes before you get up from your cushion.
- Then, practice keeping a part of your attention focused in the heart during the day. Notice what brings you out of the heart!
- During the week, pay attention to any insights that arise. Pay attention to your dreams. Notice the ways in which your practice impacts the rest of your day.

Open-Eyed, or Walking-Around Practice

- You can use the practice of heart-centered awareness as an anchor through the day. Whenever you think of it-- in conversation, or while working or walking, bring your attention into the heart, using the breath as your anchor, breathing in and out of the heart-center. Allow yourself to look at the world from your heart. Notice how this affects your viewpoint, your relationships with others, and your sense of what is going on around you.
- Take some micro-meditation breaks during the day. Whenever you remember, stop for a few minutes and breathe into the heart, becoming

aware of the presence in the back heart, or simply letting the breath flow in with 'ham' and out with 'sa.'

A Note to Remember:

This process may bring up emotions, and this means that blocks around your heart are being released. In other words, it's a positive process! If you feel emotions arising, breathe into the heart, and imagine the feelings flowing out with the breath. If tears come, let them come. Tears are a gift of the heart!

Please feel free to send me any questions, and do take advantage of the List Serve!

With love and blessings,
Sally