

## Week 1: Meditation and Contemplation Homework

Please make sure you listen to the lecture at least one time and if possible, a second time. And please do read through the sutras that have been translated for you and are on the class page in the Resources section.

### Daily Practice Sequence

#### Before Meditation:

- 1) Begin by chanting the class mantras.
- 2) Practice 3-5 minutes of *Nadi Shodana*\* *pranayama* as follows:
  - Take three deep breaths into the belly, expanding the lower abdomen with the inhalation, and pulling it back towards the spine with the exhalation.
  - Inhale through the left nostril to the count of *Om Shreem Hreem*. As you inhale, feel that a subtle white lunar radiance flows in with the breath.
  - Hold the breath while thinking *Om Shreem Hreem*.
  - Exhale through the right nostril with the mantra, feeling that the exhalation flows as a reddish gold solar light.
  - Hold the breath while silently repeating *Om Shreem Hreem*.
  - Repeat the sequence at least nine times.

\**Nadi Shodana* accesses the three main nadis or subtle pranic channels: the *Ida*, or lunar channel (inhalation); the *Pingala*, or solar channel (exhalation); and the subtle *Sushumna*, where the breath is briefly retained in *kumbhaka*. (*Kumbhaka* means “pot”, indicating that when the breath is retained the body becomes a pot or vessel for prana.)

Not only does this practice clear the nostrils, and help balance your energy, it also activates the flow of subtle *prana shakti* through the body. In *Anava Upaya* practice, the nadis, chakras, and mantras associated with chakras and deities are basic to the processes, and *Nadi Shodana* is one of the basic *pranayamas*.

## Basic Meditation Sequence: Opening the Three Centers and the Central Channel

- Using your hands, find the three centers, the *Muladhara* (base center), the *Hridaya* (heart center), and the *Ajna* (head center).
- Find the perineum between the anus and the sexual organ.
- Place your right hand over the upper chest and bring your attention below it to the center of the body, behind the sternum, the heart.
- Find the *Ajna* by touching the tip of your tongue to the soft palate, and bringing your attention above the soft palate, inside the head. This place is roughly parallel to the area of the forehead one inch above the space between the eyebrows.
- Using the breath, align your posture. The spine should be straight and the base grounded.
- Inhale with your attention in the *Muladhara*. Silently coordinate the mantra *Om Shreem* with each inhalation. See if you can feel the energy of the breath and the mantra activating this center. It might feel slightly arousing—that's ok.
- With the exhalation, sense the mantra *Hreem* flowing upwards from the *Muladhara* into the Heart Center. Then inhale vertically into the heart, and exhale vertically into the *Ajna*.
- The inhalation should be vertical—flowing downward from above the crown. The exhalation should rise softly into the center above. With the inhalation, feel that the breath and the mantra activate the center. You may feel a “buzzy” feeling in the center, or a sense of expansion. With the exhalation, feel a rising flow into the center above.

At first, your felt sense of the center might be dim (particularly with the *Muladhara*, which many of us are not used to accessing). If this is the case, stay with it. As you continue, the energy of the center will begin to awaken, and you'll feel more of a sense of presence.

Be relaxed with this, letting the breath and the mantra find its own pathway. Those of you who are used to Central Channel meditation will find that the meditation eventually starts to activate an upward flow of prana through the center of the body. This flow is subtle, and you don't need to try and force it. Instead, see if you can sense the Presence within the breath, the center and the mantra.

**Continue this sequence for at least 15 minutes.** At a certain point, you may find that a spontaneous variation occurs, which for me takes the form of a natural upward flow of the exhalation through the crown. If that happens, you can either let the breath fountain upwards and “fall” down the body to the *Muladhara*. Or you can simply let the breath dissolve into the region above the crown, and then inhale vertically from above into the base center, and let the sequence continue. In other words, you may find yourself inhaling into the *Muladhara* and then beginning to sense your attention and the breath rising from there into

the heart with the exhalation, inhaling into the heart and feeling the breath rising into the *Ajna* with the inhalation.

The mantra is activated, so it will charge the energy both in the breath flow and in the centers as you practice with it. However, if you are used to meditating with a different mantra, feel free to use that one. Just don't let your mind get distracted wondering, "*Which mantra?*"

The effect of this mediation is many-fold. It should start to give you a felt sense of the ascending and descending energy in the inner body, and you should eventually tune into a natural flow of breath. This is a *kundalini* activating practice, but a very gently one, and the more softly and relaxed your focus, the deeper and sweeter the flow will be.

### **Meditation II: Dropping Thoughts**

Spend some time, either during meditation or just in the course of the day, dropping thoughts. Be rigorous about it. You might start by setting a timer for 3 to 5 minutes, and coach yourself "Drop it!" every time you have a thought. Then notice the effect on your mind. You should notice that the mind tends to be obstreperous—it will pop back up immediately. In time, though it gets the idea and you realize that you can get your mind to chill if you are gently firm with your coaching.

However, you do have to be firm. Not in a hard-ass way, but with great clarity and intention. In this way you use the mind's power of *sankalpa* (intention) to actually discipline the mind. And this, as many of you know, is the real power of yoga!

Take a few minutes to journal after each of these meditations.

## Self-Inquiry

### Based on Sutra III-1: *Atma cittam*—The individual self is the mind.

Sutra I in each book of the *Shiva Sutras* encapsulates the position of the Self at each level of consciousness as it descends and ascends from the fullness of pure free Awareness/Love to the state of the contracted personal self.

Anava Upaya will trace the development of the individual yogi starting from the basic position of egoic contraction. This sutra points out the situation we are in as individuals: when our vastness is reduced in the process of contraction, we no longer experience ourselves as vast free Consciousness. Instead, we identify with the psychic instruments that mediate between the sensory input that seems to come from outside, and our own mind-field.

You, as an individual, are nothing more or less than the state of your mind—which is always changing, but always several steps removed from reality.

By “mind” (*citta*) we mean the contracted consciousness that experiences “me” through the mechanism of the three instruments of perception (known as the *antahkarana*, or inner psychic instrument).

In the contracted state, Pure Awareness recedes to the background of your experience, where it remains as a dim, vague sense of being present to experience, but is not seen or felt. Instead, the experience of receiving sensory input from “out there” takes over. The self defines itself by identifying with some aspects of the flow of experience. This is the job of the “ego”, the *ahamkara* (I-former) which creates a false sense of being an individual by identifying the process of perception and thought as “me” and “mine” and everything else as “not me” and “not mine.”

From this initial confusion arises the flow of reactive thoughts and desires that constitute your inner world. Since you believe the self to be the experiencing subjectivity, you attach to the ideas and stories that arise in the field of the *citta*, react to them, and draw conclusions about yourself based on whatever is arising in the field.

These ideas, insights and perceptions further contract consciousness, binding you to the self-definitions that arise from your conditioning and the effects of your interactions with what you believe are the “others” in the world.

### Based on Sutra III-2: *Jnanam bandah*—Knowledge is binding.

By “knowledge” in this part of the text, *Shiva* means the knowledge that arises in the form of thoughts and perceptions, all of which are based in false identification due to the limitations put in place by *Maya*. True knowledge, according to *Tantra*, is the knowledge of non-duality, the realization that everything is inside one consciousness. Anything you think based on your perception of being a limited subject is intrinsically false and binding and is the cause of suffering.

## Contemplations and Inquiries

Ask yourself the question “Who am I?” and notice the thoughts that arise in response. Look at the way the mind defines you—everything from “Female” or “German” to “athletic” to “a parent” to “unhappy” to “ecstatic.” Notice how many ways the mind identifies with the different aspects of your experience.

Write down some of the answers that arise. Notice the ones that cause particular contractions, like the negativizing self-talk, or comparisons with others, or the judgements about “right” and “wrong” that come up in reaction to events and encounters.

Among these ideas about yourself, see if you can identify ideas that cause particular suffering or particular satisfaction. Ask yourself how these particular self-definitions affect your sense of self. Ask yourself “What would I be if I let all these go?”

Then do it. Imagine yourself letting go of the ways you define yourself. Then, for a moment, or as long as possible, rest in the openness of not having an idea of who you are.

Notice that your *citta* is probably still contracted—that is, you may not have experienced a big expansion. But in this moment of letting go, before the whole self-identification mechanism starts up again, can you notice the part of your inner instrument that can separate itself from thoughts?

This witness-part of you is the resting place from which you can spend a few minutes rigorously dropping ideas and thoughts as soon as they arise.

As you do this, see if you can feel the energy of your own mind-field, the felt, kinesthetic sense of presence that is your individual self-sense, the background consciousness that is the “real” individual you. This is not the True Self. It’s the self as mind-stuff. But it is the platform from which you can begin to become present to the innate Shakti of your mind-field.

Look back over your years of practice. See if you can remember what the normal state of your mind was before you began practicing yoga and meditation.

How has your inner psychic structure shifted over the years since you began practicing? Notice the ways in which you experience more openness, more ability to field changes, less reactivity, more fluidity, more one-pointedness, more tolerance—whatever you are aware of.

These shifts are some of the effects of *Anava Upaya* practice, which begins by creating openings in your *citta* which allow you to interface with yourself and your environment in subtly different ways.