

Meditation and the Three Faces of Spirit Meditation and Contemplation Homework

Week One: January 12-18, 2011

Set aside at least 20 minutes for meditation daily. You can meditate at any time, though the early morning hours and the hours of early evening are considered optimum.

As you sit for meditation, following the posture alignment instructions:

Posture Alignment

- After seating yourself in a comfortable posture with your spine erect (if you're sitting on the floor, make sure that your knees are at least 2-3 inches higher than your hips):
- Inhale, letting the hips and thighs and sitting bones become heavy and sink into the seat.
- Exhale, allowing the inner body to lift, up through the crown. The lift is not done with your muscles, but with the power of the breath.
- Inhale, letting the chest lift and open.
- Exhale, allowing the shoulder blades to release down the back.
- Inhaling, gently imagine that the sides of your ears move back, just enough so that your head and neck feel aligned with your shoulders. Your chin should tilt just slightly downward.

Releasing Tension in the Body

Once you've found the posture, take a few moments to scan the body—the face, the neck and shoulders, the belly, the thighs, the arms and fingers. As you bring your attention to each part of the body, have the thought of softening, releasing.

This allows your body to open into a more effortless meditation,

Invoking Meditation

- Begin by offering your meditation for the sake of all beings.
- Chant, read, or say aloud or to yourself the Om Namah Shivaya Gurave mantras.
- Ask for grace. You can do this in whatever way feel appropriate to you. If you are connected to a teacher or saint or deity, put your awareness in your heart, contact the feeling of that being's presence, and ask, "Please give me the grace to meditate deeply." Or simply ask the universe: "Please give me the grace to open to my deepest meditation today."

Core Practice: Meditation on Breathing Divine Energy, or Spirit, into the Body

This is a deceptively simple but deeply transformative practice. As you develop it, it can become something you do all through the day. It is literally uplifting, because it connects you to Spirit in a very immediate way. And it is also relaxing. In doing it, you meditate with a light attention, not focusing heavily, but allowing the breath to guide your focus, and to open your awareness of the spirit that lives in the breath and the air itself.

We are always connected to Spirit, of course, because our very being is laced through with divine energy. Yet, as we know, it takes attention and effort to be aware of this. This practice does it.

Bring your attention to the heart center, in the middle of the chest. You can put your hand over your heart to guide your awareness there. Begin to breathe with the feeling that your breath is coming in and out through the heart.

As the breath flows in, recognize that it arises from the very heart of the universe. Spirit itself is breathing you.

Let your attention flow closely with the breath, with the recognition “I am breathing divine energy into my body.” If you are comfortable with the word ‘God’, I find that it is particularly powerful to have the thought of breathing God into the body. But experiment with the awareness. Try one way of phrasing the thought, and see if it has power for you. Experiment with I am breathing God into my body. I am breathing Shakti, divine conscious energy into my body. I am breathing light into my body. I am breathing love into my body.” For some of you, breathing in God will resonate deeply. For others, the thought of light, or Shakti.

Also, remember that you don’t have to repeat the phrase like a mantra. You can repeat it consciously a few times, then perhaps take one word from the phrase—“God” “Light” “Spirit” “Shakti” or simply hold the awareness.

The key is to have the *feeling* of divinity flowing into you with the breath.

With the exhalation, have the feeling that you are breathing divinity *through* your body.

As thoughts arise, breathe them out with the sense that they too are made of divine energy.

Walking Around Contemplation

During the day, whenever you remember, have the thought, “All this is divine energy. Whatever appears, inside my body or outside, is divine energy.”

Again, find the word that has the most resonance and power for you. Spirit. God. Light. Shakti.

When thoughts arise—even negative ones, ‘name’ them as divine energy. Look around your house, at the city or the countryside, at the people you meet, with the recognition, “All this is divine energy.”

Notice the effect of this contemplation.

A nice way to remember to do this is to set an alarm on your phone, perhaps three times during the day. Understand that you may have to change the wording to fit your mood, or to keep it from getting stale.

So you might have the thought, “All this is saturated with particles of divinity.” Or, “This thought too is made of light.” Or, “Everything I see is drenched in Spirit.” Or, “All this is made of love.”

The point is to train your mind to recognize the indwelling Spirit, the underlying truth-force within everything.

Om Namah Shivaya (or Hamsa, or I Am)

Remember to practice the ritual of making sacred the moments before bathing, eating, and before beginning your daily work.

Think of the mantra as a way of infusing a sense of sacredness into those activities. Again, if you prefer, you can use the English mantra “I am,” with the sense that you are letting the “I AM” of spirit speak through you. Or you may have the thought of ‘naming’ what you see as divine energy.

The syllables of Om Namah Shivaya and Hamsa mantra have a particular power that comes from the many generations of masters who have repeated it. And for those of you who already have a mantra practice, it will feel very familiar. For those of you who don’t, I’d suggest trying it for a week, with awareness that it is a gesture of offering salutations to the Spirit within and behind all things. And if there is another mantra that has more resonance for you, by all means use that one. The important thing, again, is to have the feeling of honoring the sacredness of your world and your own body.

Letting Yourself be Seen by the Universe

Set aside one half hour this week, and take a walk with the thought of letting yourself be seen by the natural world—the air, the trees, but even, if you are in the city, by the pavements. It is easier to do this practice in nature or in a park, but you can also do it very well in the city. You can also open yourself to the feeling of being seen by Spirit looking through the people around you. However, if you do this, you may want to avoid looking directly into their eyes, which might feel too confrontive to some of you, especially if you are in a crowd! (Also, you want to make sure you are in a safe neighborhood).

The goal of this practice is to open yourself to the divine witnessing Presence that inhabits the world. This is not, as someone said on the listserve, the all-seeing judgmental god (or Santa) that some of us were scared by in childhood. This is the simple witnessing presence, the awareness, the intelligence that abides in everything, and whose nature is not only awareness, but all-accepting love.

So, as you open yourself, recognize that the Presence who sees you also accepts you, fully, completely, in every moment. And that, of course, this same presence also sees through your eyes.