

Week 1: Homework, Part I — Meditation Protocol

Please meditate for at least 20 minutes in the morning, and if possible, 20 minutes in the evening.

We have uploaded an audio version of these core meditation instructions to the Student Page.

As a preliminary to meditation, I recommend at least 10-15 minutes of yoga asanas or tai chi. (If you normally have a longer asana practice, you can do that before OR after meditation, or at a different time in the day.) For simple meditation prep, I recommend Downward and Upward Dog, Tadasana, Forward Fold, Cat-Cow, Head-to-Knee Pose (with back straight, so your head may not touch the knee), and simple side twist. These energize the body and help open the pranic channels to prepare the body for meditation. Then, instead of Corpse Pose, seat yourself for meditation.

Seat yourself in a straight-backed posture, on a cushion that lets your hips be 2–4 inches higher than your knees. Use props to support your knees if necessary. 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.

Take three long Ujjayi breaths, filling first the lower lungs, then the mid-lungs and finally the top of the lungs. On the exhalation, pull the belly in towards the spine to help the lungs expel old air.

Practice gentle nadi Shodhana breathing for 3–5 minutes, closing the right nostril with your thumb, inhaling through the left nostril for 4 counts, closing the left nostril with the side of the ring finger while you hold for 4 counts, then open the right nostril, close the left, and exhale for 4 counts. Then inhale through the right nostril and repeat the process.

Chant Om at least three times, or more if you are drawn to that.

Chant the Om Namah Shivaya and Sarva Mangala mantras, or the invocations of your choice.

Make an intention for this session. You might start by dedicating the practice, asking that it be of benefit to all beings. Then commit yourself fully to the practice. You might say silently or out loud, “I give my full attention to meditation practice. If my mind wanders, I commit myself to returning it to the practice.” To cultivate reverence, you might practice a moment of gratitude—especially gratitude for the opportunity to practice, or for the spiritual teachings you’ve received over your life. Then have the feeling of opening yourself to the flow of grace that is invisibly present around you. You might ask that your teachers and guides be present, or that a deity or sage whom you feel close to help guide your practice.

For a moment or two, sense the air around your body, feeling the touch of the air on your face and sensing the atmosphere as a loving, supportive presence that will nourish and hold you while you practice.

Notice how these steps help you ease into a relaxed state, in which you can invite meditation. You are already in meditation.

Now, start your concentrative practice.

Sense the breath flowing through the nostrils, through the nasal passages. Sense it flowing down the back of the throat, expanding the region in the center of the chest, behind the sternum. This is the heart center.

Let your focus center on the sensual quality of the breath, how it touches and caresses the nasal passages and throat and nourishes the energy in the heart center. Sense the connection of the breath with your sensual inner body. Your focus is soft, but concentrated, marrying your attention to the breath.

With the exhalation, allow your awareness to flow upward with the breath, up to the center of the head into the *Ajna* chakra.

Commit yourself to maintaining this soft focus throughout the session.

As thoughts arise, notice the thoughts and let them release with the exhalation.

If thoughts become sticky, you might imagine them gently flowing out with the exhalation as you coach yourself, “Let go.”

This is the basic meditation focus for this week. If you have a regular meditation focus that you like, feel free to do that instead. Simply make sure that you are focusing softly and letting go of thoughts.

Here are some ways to creatively enhance your practice:

- Imagine light flowing with the breath. Different forms of light energy are traditionally associated with different “energy signatures.” For instance, white-gold light is said to carry Christ energy, and also to carry the energy of Quan Yin and Bhuvaneshwari. Rose-gold light holds the energy of the nourishing sacred feminine energies, like Lakshmi and Lalita. Lalita’s energy may arise as deep red light, as well. Blue light is associated with higher masculine energies like Shiva and Krishna. Shiva also holds a luminous white or clear energy. You might experiment with cultivating one of these lights as a soft “tendency” in the inhalation and notice whether it deepens your alignment with the breath.
- If it feels right, you can add a mantra to the inhalation. I recommend the breath mantra, *Ham Sa, Ham* on the inhalation, *Sa* on the exhalation. This mantra, which connects your individual “I” with the universal consciousness (it means “I am That”), is also imbued with the energies of my spiritual lineage. You can also feel free to use the mantra that has the most power for you at this time. Focus not on the meaning, but on the vibratory resonance of the mantra as it mingles with the breath.
- From time to time, ask the question, “Who or what knows I’m meditating?” and simply notice if there is a heightened sense of contact with Awareness itself. Then return to the concentrative practice.