

## **Week 6: Meditation and Open-Eyed Practices**

Dear Ones,

Please listen to the call at least one more time this week. It was pretty subtle, and a few listens will yield more insight!

### **Daily Meditation Practice**

For your daily meditation practice for the week, please continue with the meditation protocol we've been working with throughout the class. (Breathing into the heart with ham on the inhalation, exhaling into the Ajna with Sa on the exhalation.) You could also focus on the Lotus of the Heart practice we were doing last week. (I've included it below, as well as in the Week 5 Meditation handout). If you are also drawn to the Soft Palate practice as a major meditation focus, I'd recommend doing each of them at separate times. Both these practices are very related to our overall meditation protocol.

### **Optional or Bonus Meditations from This Week's Class**

#### **Meditation on the Space where the Mantra Arises and Subsides**

This is a practice for entering into the mind itself, by cultivating the space at the end of the mantra (repeated silently in the mind). This practice is related to the one below, and it might be interesting, if you have time, to do them together!

1. After settling into meditation, begin repeating *Om Namah Shivaya*.
2. Focus on the space that opens up at the end of "ya" and begin to notice that the mantra actually dissolves into the mind-field at the end of each repetition. At first, the space will feel like it's in a particular "place" inside your mind. After a while, you realize that the space inside the mind has no physical or subtle-body location, though it might be easier to find it near the heart region or in front of the head.
3. Stay focused on that space and begin to notice how the mantra also arises from within the field of the mind.
4. What is your experience when you let the mantra arise and subside with awareness that its dissolving into and arising from the energetic space of the mind stuff itself?

5. For some of you, there may be an authentic and palpable opening into the essence of the mind field, an actual shift out of the subtle mind into the supra-causal, the field of pure light and awareness that is the source of your experience. This shift is indescribable, but you know when it has happened! As in all these practices, we do it with our own effort, while realizing that the intrinsic grace within the mantra will in time take the practice to another level.

### **Meditation on the Mind Field: Cutting an Opening in Your Field of Awareness as a Way of Expanding Your Own Consciousness (Chitta)**

Below, I include instructions for the meditation we did in class for entering the field of the mind (and the field of *Prakriti*) by imagining a hole in the field you see in front of your eyes, and bringing your attention through it, then beginning to slowly move your attention through the field of mind-stuff (Chitta) that presents itself in front of your inner senses. This practice, once you get the hang of it, can shift your understanding about what the mind is, and also allow you to begin to recognize how close and present the field of *Prakriti* is. In other words, it jumpstarts the process we saw in Sutra I:45, in which the mind is defined as the subtlest of all meditative objects: "...that which ultimately dissolves into irreferable *Prakriti*."

In my experience, this practice, if you stay with it long enough, lets you become very comfortable with expanding your own consciousness and allows you to begin to get a natural felt-sense of non-duality, of the pulsing formless presence behind all our personal experience—that presence the Buddhists call Big Mind, which in the Yoga Sutra vision is *Prakriti*.

1. Close your eyes and notice the field of energy that appears in front of you. Note what you 'see' with your inner eye—usually a scintillating field of luminosity (or darkness) that seems to pulse and move dynamically.
2. Imagine an opening or a hole in the field and take your attention through it.
3. Let yourself travel in this field, moving in any direction, but noticing whether you find any borders or boundaries here. One way to move through the field is to let yourself open into it or allow yourself to absorb or "eat" what appears in front of you, so you are letting your meditating self take in the field as it appears moment by moment. Be aware of what occurs.
4. This is a good practice for opening past perceived barriers in your meditation practice.

## Review and Daily Meditation Recommendations

As you know, we began this Course with meditations based on vertical breathing, breathing down through the nasal passages, with conscious attention to the touch of the breath, into the heart center, then exhaling upwards to the Ajna, from the heart center to the Ajna, accompanying the breath with the mantra Ham Sa (pronounced *hum sa*). This practice is in the first Meditation Protocol Homework (Week 1) and I recommend this as one you can use as a daily meditation, combined with the asana, pranayama, and intention-setting practices we recommended.

We have offered several variations on this practice, notably the ones contained in last week's homework. These include:

1. Meditation on the Lotus of the Heart (see Week 5 Homework)
2. Meditation on the Talu Chakra and Ajna, including pranayama “aimed” at the soft palate (Talu Chakra) as a gateway into the Ajna
3. Pranayama—A practice of Kapalabhati or Nadi Shodhana for those who feel comfortable with it, or simple ujjayi with attention to the Soft Palate.
4. I also recommend the Meditation on Your Enlightened Self from Week 5 as a practice to do at least once or twice a week.

## Walking-Around Open-Eyed Practices:

1. Mantra repetition—Do it walking, during housework or gardening.
2. Holding the non-dual attitude of “Wherever my mind goes is Shakti”
3. Working with thoughts in meditation with “Drop it!”
4. When the mind feels cluttered or negative or anxious or angry, ask yourself “Can I let go of this?” and softly breathe it out with the thought “Let go”.
5. Practicing surrender (*Ishwara Pranidhan*) according to the suggestions in Week Two.
6. Keeping your attention in the Heart Center as you go through the day.

As you practice these, consider what your experience is with each, and journal about it. Tracking your experience with a meditation practice is important, and will actually allow you to experience more creativity and agency in your practice.

**Questions to ask yourself after a meditation session:**

- What was the energetic experience of this meditation?
- Did the point of concentration we worked with help my focus? Did I enjoy it?
- Was there a sense of subtle luminosity? A feeling of pleasure or joy? What were the qualities of them, if they appeared?

**Meditation in the Lotus of the Heart**

Find the anchor point on the chest: about 4-5 finger widths above the U-Shaped notch that connects the ribs. This is just above the solar plexus. Bring your awareness inside from that point. the heart center extends upward from there. For some people, it is easier to find higher in the chest, beneath the sternum.

Begin by breathing into the Heart with Hum and Suh, feeling the touch of the breath flowing into this region. Feel the breath as a tide that rolls into the heart and rolls out. As you settle into this meditation, sense or imagine the presence in the heart of a subtle luminosity. It may be “seen” or experienced as a spaciousness or as an inner feeling of energy, pulsation and presence. Give yourself time to sense into this felt state in the heart.

If it feels natural, let each exhalation gently expand the feeling of the heart center past the skin boundary, so that it feels as if your torso is a soft cocoon of energy and subtle luminosity that you can rest in. Let each breath softly pulse through the whole region, settling deeper into the heart, as if you are rocking on the waves of breath in the heart.

***To sense Presence in the heart, I offer a couple of suggestions.***

From time to time, silently “call” the to the heart, “Beloved” and notice the feeling called forth as you do.

Or have the thought “I Am”, sensing it being felt or spoken within the heart. Have the feeling that the words I AM are a direct voice expressing the Self, the deep essential Being within the heart. Then let go of the words and feel your being, your self-sense, extending through the heart. Take rest there.

For some of you, it might be powerful to gradually open into the back heart. With the inhalation, allow the breath to flow backwards, as if opening through the back body into the region behind the body. sense the sensations at your back, and within those sensations, feel that you are being embraced from behind. You might feel sensations of pleasure or lightness there, or simply a sense of presence or vibratory energy. Don’t

expect anything, just sense into that region behind you, as if it is a backrest that supports you from behind. See if you can allow that backrest to reveal itself as a loving Presence that protects and holds you. Connect yourself to that presence and see if you can merge your self- sense into it.

If you have a deity or guru practice, breathe the feeling of deity presence into the heart, and merge your focus into that sense of deity presence as an inner, comforting refuge—friend, mother/father,

## **Additional Meditation Practice**

### **The Soft-Palate/Ajna Chakra Practice**

The soft palate is the seat of the Talu Chakra (palatal chakra) which is the lower part of the Ajna Chakra. This practice activates the limbic brain and helps clear the brain stem. It is also the seat in the body where the subtle power of inner visioning can be activated. Soft-Palate focus both kindles awareness of the Ajna and triggers your ability to perceive subtle forms through the inner sense of vision. As you practice this, allow your awareness of the soft palate to extend upwards to the region above it, which is the Ajna. The Ajna Chakra is in the middle of the head, parallel to the forehead, about ¼ inch above the eyebrows.

Find your soft palate by curling back your tongue and touching the tip to the soft palate, which is towards the back of the throat, just past the bonier hard palate.

Soften the face, shoulders and neck. If you feel tightness arising during the practice, remember to soften.

Inhale through the nostrils, aiming the breath at the soft palate. The touch of the breath should activate your awareness of it, giving you a felt sense of this region. With the exhalation, merge your attention in the whole region of the soft palate and the area above.

Include the mantra Hum with the inhalation, and Suh with the exhalation. The “m” sound in Hum should be nasalized, not so much a hard “m” as a nasal “ng”, which at some point you may feel actually vibrating the soft palate. With Suh, allow the mantra and the exhalation to pulsate through the soft palate, spreading your awareness into the region above.

This is a strong practice, and you may feel buzzy or spacey as you do it. You may also feel the energy rising to your crown. If you get a headache while doing the practice, stop. However, a slight feeling of pressure or discomfort in the region is not a sign that something is wrong, but a sign that the chakra is being opened.

After a few minutes, add a 2-4 count pause after the exhalation, and focus on what you “see” in the region of the soft palate/Ajna chakra. As you relax into the process you will begin to notice increasingly subtle sensations in the region, and perhaps subtle illumination and sensations of pleasure. Many people report that over time they get a visual sense of a subtly circular region in the head, which can be seen as a bounded sensation of illumination or simply felt as luminous clarity. This can become a focal point for meditation. (*As I say, this may be sensed visually or feel like more of a sensation of pulsation or expansive touch.*) In other words, what you “see” up here is what Patanjali called an “inner sense object”, meaning a form that can only be perceived by the inner senses. Focus on such an inner vision or sensation of touch can carry your mind inward, creating a sense of peace and inner flow. It’s a very satisfying way to meditate, that can take you deep, and will ultimately make you aware of the pure Awareness that is the substratum of the mind. The visual will usually morph, appearing and dissolving or changing shape, and often give rise to a sense of pure space or awareness. Let yourself stay present to it with soft focus, letting go of thoughts, and see where it takes you.

As you become anchored in this practice, you may notice that the energy of prana—the subtle luminosity or feeling of pulsation there—has a tendency to expand, such that you begin to feel a presence there that opens past the boundaries of your skull. This is a sign that you have transitioned into the subtle body, which both interpenetrates and extends beyond the physical body. Here, you can release and just rest there, letting what happens happen, and letting go of thoughts when they arise. You may notice that the thoughts seem to be “within” the field of subtle awareness, observable as phenomena that arise and subside.

Journal about the practice when you are done.

## **Meditation on the Form of Your Enlightened Self**

Based on Sutra I:37 (Meditation on the mind of a being who is free from desires)

Spend a few minutes grounding yourself by following the breath as it flows in and out through the heart center.

Imagine that you are seated face to face with the enlightened version of yourself. This is your own form, irradiated with positive feelings, with light, or simply with clarity and pulsing energy. Sense the freedom and expansive sweetness within this vision of yourself. This is the most alive and mature version of you, the you who has fulfilled his or her fullest spiritual potential.

What is the feeling of sitting before this being?

Connect your heart with their heart.

Inhaling, feel that you draw in the enlightened loving qualities of the enlightened self in front of you.

Exhaling, breathe back affection, gratitude and whatever other feelings arise.

Finally, inhale the presence of that being into your heart, and feel that the enlightened you spreads through your body, becoming a full part of you.