

## What's in this document

The *Basic Meditation Protocol* that we'll follow during our time together. This meditation, which we practiced together during class, begins with focus and breath directed into the soft palate (the *Talu* chakra), which is a doorway into the *Ajna* Chakra and helps open up the centers between the *Ajna* and the Heart. As you follow this practice, you are doing *dharana* (concentration), and as it expands, you will begin to experience some of the subtle energies within the inner body. The focus starts with the physical point of attention, but as you cultivate this meditation, it should begin to become an experience that is more energetic than physical.

*An important note:* You may find that your focus morphs and the object of focus shift slightly as you practice this. This is fine as long as you aren't trying to figure it out or doubting your experience but follow natural signals you receive from inside.

If you have a meditation protocol you have been following for a long time, you may find that it emerges, and you are drawn to it. If this happens spontaneously, let it. However, I deeply recommend working with the practice below, which is powerfully transformative.

## Basic Meditation Protocol

Please meditate for at least 30 minutes in the morning, and if possible, 10 or 15 minutes in the evening. If you are new to meditation or out of practice, start with 15 minutes and gradually work up to 30, adding one minute a day.

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, even if it means your head may not be able to 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 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 chakra activation breathing in the following manner. This will open and ground your body and bring more prana into your torso as you practice the upper body meditations.
- Find the perineum and take three breaths focusing on the area just above it, inside the body (1<sup>st</sup> chakra). Breathe as if you were breathing horizontally, in and out through the area in front of the body, just above and in front of the perineum.
- Focus on the area just above the pubic bone—the location of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chakra. Take three breaths with the feeling that the breath comes in the front of the body, activates that center, and flows out the front of the body.
- Focus on the navel, inhaling, and exhaling into the navel center three times.
- Focus on the center of the chest, above the sternum, and take three breaths there, at the 4<sup>th</sup> chakra.
- Focus on the base of the throat and take three horizontal breaths there.
- Focus on the nostrils and take three breaths there.
- Chant Om at least three times, or more if you are drawn to that.
- Chant the *Om Namah Shivaya* and *Patanjali* invocation mantras, or the invocations of your choice.
- Make an intention for this session. 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 return it to the practice.”* To cultivate *Ishwara Pranidhan*, 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, placing your attention in the heart, 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 to whom you feel connected help guide your practice. Or you can ask, using these words or your own, *“May this practice be guided by the power of grace (the power of God/Goddess, or the power within, or by the energy of Source”).*
- 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. In fact, you might already be in meditation!

Now, start your concentrative **Soft Palate Practice**.

- Find the soft palate's location by touching it for a moment with the tip of your tongue, then let the tongue relax on the floor of the mouth.
- Sense the breath flowing through the nostrils, through the nasal passages. Sense it flowing up the back of the throat towards the soft palate.
- Let your focus center on the sensual quality of the breath, how it touches and caresses the nasal passages. Have the feeling "I open to the breath" If you like, you can softly inhale and exhale with Ham and Sa.
- Mentally direct the inhalation to the soft palate, letting the inhalation touch the soft palate and then rise up through the center of the head to the area just inside the skull.
- Exhaling, let the focus flow through the center of the head, the *Ajna* Chakra. Feel the touch of the breath, touching and expanding the area in the center of the head.
- Using your inner senses, explore the sensations in this area. (This is *dharana*, where you use soft focus to deepen your connection to the object.)
- As thoughts arise, notice, and let them go.
- Gradually allow the exhalation to connect the area inside the head to the area of the heart center, behind the breastbone. The breathing now begins to become lighter and more refined. Little by little, begin to feel that the current of breath is moving inside the whole area. Gradually allow the breath to relax and become more and more refined until you experience it as an inner current of energy that now moves from the top of the *Ajna* (just under the skull) down to the top of the heart center. Let yourself settle into this feeling, allowing your attention to become more and more inward.
- You are now poised within the subtle 'body' of the upper chakras. There slowly ceases to be a distinction between *Ajna* and heart as you relax into this inner body. Feel as though your awareness is riding the gentle up and down flow of the breath currents. Now there is nothing to do but rest inside the inner body. So, rest within, letting the attention follow the breath flow, exploring the sensations in this region. You might also receive subtle 'signals' to allow that current to expand. Notice the inner sensations as they morph—this is one way to keep the mind focused in *dharana*.

Notice that at some point, you may become aware of a luminosity in the region of the *Ajna*. This is a sign that the area is opening, revealing that the real nature of this center is light. You may also become aware of a feeling of inner satisfaction, contentment, or peace. These are signs that you are flowing from *dharana* to *dhyana*.

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

Please take a few minutes at the end of meditation to journal about your practice. Consider your experience, jot down whatever you would like to record about it, or simply record any insights that have arisen during or after meditation.

### Some questions to ask yourself while journaling:

- What was my energetic experience during this meditation?
- How did the different aspects of the practice impact me?
- What, if anything, did I notice about the practice that I might want to take forward?

After meditation, in the moments of quiet post-practice, it is a good time to ask yourself one of the meta-questions we looked at in the first course. (Remember, these are questions that can help jump start your access to *prajna*, your intuitive wisdom.) I also suggest that you use them from time to time during the day when you notice that you are feeling confused, distracted, or unsure about your priorities.

- How can I know what is true (or real) in the midst of confusion?
- What do I need to pay attention to now, and what should I ignore?
- In this moment, what matters most?

### Why Meditation on the Soft Palate?

The human body is filled with subtle vortexes that can open into the deep awareness lying behind our physical organs. Vyasa mentions five of them as focal points for dharana (yogic concentration) practice.

These are: the tip of the nose, the tip of the tongue, the soft palate, the middle of the tongue, and the root of the tongue. Each of these areas is a portal to a different aspect of the inner world.

The soft palate is the gateway to the inner luminosity that resides in the *Ajna* chakra. Physically, it is connected to the brainstem, where our most primordial impulses are lodged. And these are not just survival instincts. The area also contains our fundamental memories and longings for liberation and connection to our inner awareness.