

## Week 2: Meditation & Contemplation Homework

The basic instructions below are the same as the ones for last week, since we will be continuing the practice as our basic entrance into meditation.

In addition, I've also included instructions for the *Heart Meditation with the Presence Behind the Heart* that we practiced in class. Please feel free to substitute the *Heart Meditation* if you like or practice it at a separate time. You'll find these instructions at the end of the document.

### Basic Meditation Protocol

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

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. 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 *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 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 inhalation, allow your awareness to flow downward towards the heart, behind the breastbone. With the exhalation let the breath flow upward to the center of the head into the *Ajna* chakra. You may feel a slight expansion of the breath in the upper center. If that happens, feel it expanding through the head.

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.” Or, consciously offer the thoughts to the Great Self, to Source, to God/Goddess.

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.

Another way to enhance the breath practice would be to imagine light, or subtle luminosity flowing 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.

At the end, make an offering of the practice, asking that it be of benefit to all beings.

Then, ask that your day be guided by the higher wisdom that the Yoga Sutra calls *Ishwara*. Find your own words to express this intention to be guided.

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.

***You might also feel drawn to continuing the practice we did in this week’s class. Here are the instructions:***

### **Connecting the Heart with the Great Heart behind your Body**

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 Ham (inhalation) and Sa (exhalation), 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.

Now, 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.

Meditate with the feeling of connection between your heart and the Great Heart.

**Journaling**

Please take a few minutes at the end of meditation to journal about your practice. Consider your experience, and 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?

Also, after meditation, in the moments of quiet post-practice, is a good time to ask yourself “What are the karmic issues that have guided my life to date?” or to work with one of the meta-questions we looked at in the first class (or another question that is arising for you!). 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 in the midst of confusion?
- What do I need to pay attention to now, and what should I ignore?
- Today (or “In this moment”) what matters most?