

Meditation and the Three Faces of Spirit *Meditation and Contemplation Homework*

Week Two: January 19-26, 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.
- 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."

I. Core Practice: Prayer as Meditation

- 2) Begin by imagining yourself in a place that feels peaceful and sacred. It should be a place where you feel happy and at ease – a garden, a beach, a mountain meadow. If possible, it should be a place where you have had a sense of divine presence, of God or spirit.
- 3) Feel yourself comfortably seated there. Notice that the atmosphere is calm, soft, warm. You are completely comfortable and at ease. You feel the beauty of the place, and you let it soothe your spirit.
- 4) 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.

- 5) Now imagine a cloudless sky in front of you. The sky is blue, clear, sparkling. Now in that sky, imagine the presence of the being that most closely represents the divine to you. It could be Buddha or Jesus or the Divine Mother, it could be your teacher or a saint you love.

Or, you might imagine this divine presence as formless, as light, as a golden sun or a light-filled mist. However you imagine or invoke this form of the divine, feel deeply that this is the form God, spirit, has taken for your sake, out of love for you.

See yourself bowing deeply and reverently before this divine presence. Have the feeling of emptying yourself so that you can be filled.

This is 'the God who knows your name,' the personal protector, lover, Friend of the heart. Have the sense that this being incarnates all the power and love of the creative force of the universe. See this being beaming love towards you. Allow yourself to recognize how deeply you need this love, this blessing. Let yourself want it— but without grasping. Feel that as you recognize your own need, the divine being answers it with waves of blessing and love. Open and receive the love and the invitation of this being.

Now, with your attention in the heart, begin to speak to this being. You may have a lot to say, or perhaps just a little. Begin by thanking this being for being present with you. You might say, "Thank you for being with me. I am deeply grateful to you for being here. Please help me to open to love."

Now, say whatever you want to say. It may be a lot or not much. You may want to pour out your confusion or your unhappiness or your need for forgiveness. If you are afraid, if you are sick and in need of healing, say that. Don't censure, or try to make your words appropriate or pretty. Say whatever you want to say, as if you were speaking to your most intimate friend, to a friend more intimate than anyone you have ever known. Your words might be prayers—"Please open my heart. Please let me be filled with love." or "May I forgive"

or “May I be healed” Acknowledge your neediness, your longings. Don’t feel that your prayers need to be exalted or selfless. Be as you are with the divine being of your heart.

As you sit, as you speak to this being, feel that that its form glows, becoming more and more brilliant. Feel the light, blessing and energy of this form pouring into you through the heart. With every breath, soft healing light pours into your heart and through your body. Let yourself breath it in, and breathe it through your body.

Now, relax into your heart. Let the breath come in and flow out through your heart. Sit with that awareness. Let the thought “I am loved” flow with your inhalation, dropping into the heart. Let your awareness drop deeper and deeper into the heart.

In this practice, you may find that another word, or mantra, arises. It might be ‘trust’ or ‘love’ or ‘hamsa’ or ‘sweetness’ or another word that opens your heart. If that happens, stay with the word that spontaneously arises.

If thoughts arise, notice the thought, gently breathe it out, and return to the heart and the feeling of settling more and more deeply into the energy of the heart.

Walking Around Contemplations

1) You can continue with the walking-around practices from last week, especially the practice of letting yourself be seen by the universe, and the practice of mantra.

2) *Practicing Presence*

Your main walking-around contemplation will be to take time, whenever you remember, to invoke the presence of this personal divinity, the “God who knows your name.” The practice is to keep turning to this sense of the nearness of the divine, the being of your heart. This is a famous contemplative practice called ‘the practice of the presence of God.’ In this you simply bring to mind the sense of presence, the feeling that the divine being is very near you, perhaps on your shoulder, perhaps walking beside you, perhaps sitting in your heart. Experiment with this. Remember, it isn’t necessary to have a full-blown Experience of divine presence. Simple remembrance is enough. And when you remember, ask for help. For strength. For guidance. For love. For wisdom. For patience. For whatever you need or want in this moment—for yourself or for others.

Let this be a practice of intimacy with the divine Friend, with Spirit as your protector, your guide, your lover. Let it unfold.

3) *Alternative Practice: I am Loved*

Have the thought, at intervals during the day: “I am loved. I am accepted as I am. I am loved.”

Journal about your experience—including doubts, resistances, etcetera.

And remember, when doubts, dryness, fears come up, offer them to the Being who is with you, and know that they are being lifted from you.

Allow yourself to explore this practice as an experiment, without expectation or doubt. This is a practice that mystics have done for eons. What can it be for you?