

Freedom, Ecstasy, and Awakening: *Meditating with the Vijnana Bhairava III*
Telecourse with Sally Kempton

Meditation & Contemplation Homework
Week 1: November 17-23, 2015

First, a definition of Bhairava's name:

Bhairava (pronounced with a slight emphasis on the first syllable) is the form of the divine who appears as the Guru in this dialogue between Shiva and Shakti, known here as Bhairava and Devi.

“Bhairava is he who carries the whole universe,
Who nourishes and supports it
And who is carried by it (*bha*)
He is the resounding presence (rava)
Who by his power of awareness
Protects those who are frightened
By the world of constant change and endless rebirth.”
From *TantraLoka* by Abhinavagupta,

Bhairava in short, is the all-pervading Consciousness, the vast suchness, filled with awareness and bliss. In our personal experience, Bhairava emerges as the pure I-consciousness that reveals itself in our meditation and self-inquiry, as consciousness expands. (The modern phrase ‘consciousness expansion’ is a great description of the process by which our individual self-sense learns to rest in its own freedom and innate largeness.) Abhinavagupta, the great 10th century sage of tantra, writes, “The most perfect Consciousness of Bhairava is in its essence unrestrained, non-relative, delightful flash of knowership.” It is that I-consciousness, that inner knowingness, living within you, that expands through the power of Shakti, as we practice these meditations, ultimately freeing us from the fear that comes from the feeling of separation.

Please meditate for at least 15 minutes each day, using the sequence below.

Daily Meditation Instructions

(based on verses 116 and 29 of the Vijnana Bhairava)

1. Begin by asking that your meditation be of benefit to other beings, or to a particular person (or animal or place).
2. Spend a few minutes settling in your posture. First, make sure that you are balanced on your sitz bones, neither too forward nor too far back. Imagine that lines of energy run from each sitz bone and from your coccyx down into the earth. Feel your base sinking into the seat, and the support of the earth beneath you.
3. Allow your chest to lift and open. And the torso to gently rise from the grounded base.
4. Notice any tension in your shoulders, and release it.
5. Your hands are on your thighs, palms up or palms down, or folded, in your lap, one hand resting in the other.
6. Your tongue rests softly on the floor of the mouth, and your lips are slightly open, allowing the jaw to relax.
7. Imagine your head suspended from a cord that reaches from the crown (the fontanel or brahmarandhra) to the ceiling.
8. Take nine conscious deep breaths. Breathe in down to the belly, letting the belly expand. Exhale FULLY, drawing the belly in a little bit to help you expel all the air. This will bring up the Shakti, the expanding meditative energy in your body.
9. At the end, notice the energy in your body. Become aware of the heartbeat. See if you can be aware of the sensations in your muscles.
10. Let your mind be free and unconfined. Let it be as it is with the understanding that whatever thought arises, wherever the mind goes, it is touching divine Consciousness, pure sacred Presence, and the fullness of Shakti.

As it says in Verse 116: **“Wherever the mind goes, whether inside or outside, everywhere is the state of the one sacred awareness. When that Divine Consciousness, (Shiva) is all-pervading, where can the mind go to avoid Her?”**

This practice—called in Sanskrit a ‘bhavana’, a contemplative attitude—is a foundational inner attitude for opening yourself to the experience of pure awareness as the underlying truth of your being. Obviously, our normal experience is to get carried away by thoughts. All of us are subject to the mentalogue (as one of my students calls it), that constant inner dialogue that accompanies us everywhere and often becomes particularly apparent in meditation. Each thought that arises carries an emotional resonance that often takes us over without our being aware of it. Often unconsciously, we are carried along on a trail of thoughts and feelings, and our inner state is determined by the thoughts we identify with, moment by moment.

When you consider that your thoughts are expressions of Shakti, that Shakti is manifesting as thoughts, you gradually begin to realize that 1) All thinking is actually a movement of thought-bubbles that arise and subside like bubbles in water. 2) That thoughts are just thoughts, made of subtle energy, whether they are positive or negative. Eventually, looking at your thoughts as Shakti, as divine conscious energy manifesting as thought, you begin to be able to let thoughts arise and subside without hanging onto them. Some thoughts will be stickier than others. But if you hold firm to the bhavana, you will gradually become more and more free even in the midst of thinking. This is a particularly powerful practice when you are meditating.

Now, segue into the main meditation practice.

Core Practice For This Week: *Central Channel and Upper Chakras Meditation*

Based on Verse 29 of the *Vijnana Bhairava*: “Meditate on the rising Shakti in the form of lightening, as it moves upwards from center to center until it reaches Dvadashanta—the space 8 fingers above the crown. At the end is the great awakening.”

First, become aware of the central channel, the *Madhya nadi*, also known as the sushumna nadi. Be aware of it as a slender and subtle line of energy that runs from your perineum (between the anus and sexual organ) up through the center of the body, to a space about 8 fingers above the crown of your head. It is towards the back of the body, just in front of the spinal column. For a few moments, allow the breath to flow up and down this channel. The energy of breath, flowing in and down towards the base and out and up through the crown, begins to center you in the awareness of this inner channel. It isn't necessary to visualize it, merely to let the breath and your awareness tune into its presence.

Now, feel that the inhalation flows in and down to the space of the heart, in the center of the chest. Have the thought SO as the breath flows in. The exhalation flows from the heart up through the center at the pit of the throat (the 5th chakra), then to the center of the head above the soft palate, then out the crown, and out the crown to merge in a space about 8 finger widths above the crown. All these 'spaces'—the heart, the space above the crown, and the Sushumna Nadi—are natural doorways into the Madhya Dasha, the open stillness of pure awareness.

As you settle into this practice, the breath will begin to naturally flow in and down this central channel. This inner channel is your 'core', the true center of your subtle body. At first, you may feel that you have to exert effort to 'feel' it. Let the breath reveal its presence to you. Your attention is on the area between the Heart and the Sahasrara, or Upper Dvadashanta, the spaciousness 8 fingers above the head.

As you let the breath flow through the central channel, you may let the mantra SO Ham flow with the breath. **SO** with the inhalation, **HAM** with the exhalation.

Gradually, allow your attention to enter the Madhya (Center), the subtle awareness that opens as the meditation deepens. This experience of subtle awareness is not the same as attention. In attention—which is where we begin—you are aware of what you are focused on, in this case the central channel. When the channel 'opens', you begin to experience

awareness. In awareness, everything within your field is included. Your breathing is included, your body is included, and the area around you is included. As meditation deepens, there is a natural easing into awareness. Your entrance into the spaciousness of awareness may open through the central channel, through the heart, or through the space above the head. Let what happens happen.

Have the recognition that the space within the central channel, the heart, and the crown are filled with the pulsing presence of your own life energy, which is actually divine energy—Shakti. As you hold your attention there, you invite the Shakti at the root of the breath to reveal the Inside of the Inside: the presence of pure Awareness, Bhairava, the essence of All-That-Is, God, divine Presence, pure Consciousness.

You may find that one space begins to dominate, or that your body seems to expand, or other manifestations of expanded energy may occur. These are natural developments in meditation. If it happens, go with it.

Commentary on the Practice: This practice opens your awareness of the central channel in the body, and will ultimately allow you to feel rooted and centered in your own core of consciousness. It is an awareness that unfolds and deepens as you meditate. Eventually, as your experience of the central channel becomes more familiar, it begins to ‘unfold’. The word ‘unfolding’ refers to the mysterious inner process where the limited awareness expands to reveal its inner nature, normally unseen because it is covered by thoughts, images, and emotions. Eventually, your deeper consciousness naturally reveals itself, and you become naturally aware—sometimes as a ‘flash’ of knowing, other times as a deep conviction—that your mind’s real nature is subtle, vast, and aware. In this expansion, there is an opening into deep contentment. In practicing this dharana, you are practicing one of the core bridge practices that connect the individual self-sense to its greater reality.

Walking Around Practices

I particularly recommend spending some time with the first practice on the list, which you can do with your eyes open, while walking around. (That’s why I call it a ‘walking around practice!’)

Open-Eyed Practice for Helping You Recognize That There Is Consciousness In Everything

Verse 107 “One should experience the consciousness in the body of others as one’s own...then, one becomes all-pervading in days.”

Begin by becoming aware of your own awareness--the awareness that lets you know you are awake, alive, sitting where you are sitting, thinking and feeling. Rather than lingering in the sensory experience of this moment, be present to the consciousness, the aware presence that is within and behind it. You might ask yourself “What is it that knows I am thinking (or feeling, or walking or talking) and then focus your attention on the emerging presence that ‘responds’ or comes forward in answer to the question.

Once you have a felt sense of your own consciousness or awareness, begin to look at the person or people you are with the recognition that their body/mind is filled with the same pure, thought-free consciousness as yours. Recognize the pure awareness that is never changing, and that inhabits all living beings. Bring this awareness into every encounter, if you can.

Look at everyone you see with the thought, “The same awareness that is in me is also in that person.” The idea here is to look **THROUGH** the personality and physical appearance to recognize the pure awareness that exists in every person. Sense how the awareness that is your deepest Notice the shift in your attitude. Notice what occurs in your experience when you are looking in this way.

Take it a step further, and consider that your whole field of experience is being held in one awareness. One way to hold this practice is to recognize that every thought, every perception, every image, every physical sensation in your experience is happening through the power of knowing, the power of cognition.

Your consciousness—that is, your ability to be conscious—is the underlying power that allows all experience to occur. So, whatever is happening right now is happening inside your consciousness. And that consciousness is God’s consciousness, Shiva’s consciousness. Shakti’s consciousness. Just hold that understanding, and notice what the effect is on your inner experience.

Practice it in the office, with your children, with your pets, with people you meet on the street. If its appropriate, you might look into people’s eyes, and connect to the consciousness behind their eyes—a consciousness that is always present, no matter what emotions, likes or dislikes occur.

More Walking-Around Practices

(These are practices to work with as you relate to the physical world. They use your normal senses to let you experience reality in a subtler—and often much more pleasurable! —way!)

1. *Verse 76:* Direct your gaze on space filled with sunlight or lamplight. Without focusing on the objects, be aware of the play of light flowing between and illuminating objects. Feel that the whole atmosphere is filled with that light. Just be present for a few moments with the experience of light in the space.

Normally we take light for granted. We see the objects illuminated by the light, yet often ignore the light itself. Yet, focusing on the space in a room, or in the outside as it is, light-filled, awareness expands into stillness, and we can experience the pure state of Bhairava.

2. *Verse 72:* At the time of the savor of eating and drinking, focus on the sensation of satisfaction, and let it expand.

This is harder than you might think. It’s all about total attention **NOT** to the taste itself, but to the **FEELING** that arises as you savor the taste. Or, you can start with the pleasure of taste, and draw your attention inward to feel the inner taste of the taste.

3. *Verse 80:* Fix your gaze without blinking on something beautiful, and for a moment, let thoughts about it dissolve.

This can be a candle flame, a flower, a tree, or someone's face. Just look, without trying to define or characterize what you are looking at. Focus fully on the object. Then become aware of the process of seeing it. Finally, with your eyes open and fixed on the object, be aware of what it is that sees. Let yourself move between focus on the object, focus on the seeing, and focus on that in you that is the seer. Be present to the layers of this experience as you segue between object, seeing, and seer.

Finally reverse the focus. Feel that the object sees you. You are seen by the tree, the flower, the person. Let yourself relax into the experience of being seen.

Journaling

Please record your experience of each of these meditations in your journal.

Questions to answer in journaling:

- What did you practice?
- What did you experience?
- What insights or questions arose?
- How do you feel now?

Contemplation Practice

This is a practice we will do throughout these classes. Every time we do it, the practice can take you deeper. Set aside half an hour this week to practice this.

Asking a question to your own inner Bhairava.

One of the fundamental truths of consciousness is that the Guide, the Guru, Bhairava, is within our own consciousness as radical intuition of truth. The trick is to find that intuitive voice beyond the mind. And the method is the same as Bhairavi's: ask, and wait for the answer.

One way to do this is to ask a question as you come out of meditation, directly addressing it to the Sacred Awareness, the guide or guru within you. Just as Bhairavi asks this fundamental question "How can I know the Truth of the Divine?" and receives this teaching in answer, you can receive an answer to your great questions.

Find a deep question to which you really want an answer. A question like "What is the purpose of my life?" "What do I need to know about my path?" "How can I experience divine Love?" It can also be a personal question about a situation in your life, i.e., "What should I be doing about this particular personal situation or person?" Or even Bhairavi's question: "How can I, right now, realize the truth about reality?"

Take some time to formulate the question you want answered. Write it down, and then sit to meditate.

As you come out of meditation, turn your attention inward to the heart, and ask you're your inner Guru be present. Then, repeat this question silently to yourself. Pick up your journal and begin to write whatever comes up. Write until nothing more comes. Read what you've written. If appropriate, ask, "What is a first step I can take now?" Write down the answer. Then, find time to take that step as an action.

The answer may not come immediately. You may get it through a friend, or through a sentence in a book, or the insight might just pop into your head.

Or, even better, you may get the answer as a shift in your attitude or understanding about the issue. In fact, my experience is that when you ask the right question and really open to the answer, it will often come as the experience of a subtle or palpable shift in your experience in the situation, or as a deeper insight relating to it. The true answers to deep questions are often not verbal or visual, but manifest as inner shifts in the mind and heart. And it's these shifts that are the truest gift of Bhairava!

Partner Practice

If you decide to work with a partner, check out the partner practices handout for a sequence that we've found helpful in partner work.

You can begin by meditating together, discussing your experience of the practices and what is coming up for you this week.

Then let yourself feel that the same consciousness is in your partner as in yourself, and have a conversation about your experience of this bhavana.

You can also do the question-asking practice and discuss what occurs as a result.

Much love to you all,

Sally