

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

Meditation & Contemplation Homework

Week 2: November 24-December 1, 2015

*“All that exists is one infinite divine consciousness, free and blissful,
which projects within its own field of awareness a multiplicity of
apparently different subjects and objects.”*

—Abhinavagupta—Tantraa loka

Please meditate for at least 15 minutes each day, using the same sequence as last week. (I’ve included it here, below, as a reminder!)

You’ll also find some additional meditation and Walking Around practices below for you to try, based on what we did in class.

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?”**

(Tune into the commentary on this verse that was in the homework last week to remind yourself of some of the ramifications of this recognition!)

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.

I recommend that you also practice the awareness of the light of Bhairava/Shakti flowing down from the topmost center, moving through the sushumna or, alternatively, filling your entire body.

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.

New 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!’)

Verse 49: “If one merges one’s senses in the space of the heart with an undistracted mind, then, O Blessed One, one attains supreme blessedness.”

1. Focus your attention in the heart center throughout the day. The center is behind the sternum, to the right of the physical heart. You can imagine the ‘two bowls’ of the heart lotus as two lotus flowers facing each other, and place your attention on the space between them. Let yourself center there, and sense the heart-energy as your point of self-focus while you’re going about your life. Let the mantra SO Ham flow with the breath into the heart.
2. Practice holding a sacred thought in your awareness. Perhaps the question, “Is my awareness inside this room or is this room inside my awareness?” or the thought “My body is filled with pure awareness, or pure bliss.” Or the statement we spoke of in class, Verse 109: “The supreme reality is omniscient, omnipotent and all pervading: I myself am That.” Feel your own consciousness, the awareness that knows that you are practicing that knows you are thinking, that knows you are alive, that knows you are standing, sitting etc. Sense that consciousness, your individual awareness, and have the thought that your individual awareness is one with the Great Awareness, Shiva/Shakti.

3. Notice what happens as you hold these thoughts. Just hold them and let them pickle your consciousness in Truth! Say it over to yourself a few times. Notice the felt sense that arises when you hold it in your awareness. Notice what in you resists it, and note how holding this thought.
4. Take a moment to hold your tongue in the center of the mouth. Open your mouth internally, but close your lips, keeping them relaxed. Focus on the center of the tongue and think 'ha', placing the sound on the center of the tongue. Notice the feeling that arises as you sense the sound arising and dissolving in your mouth!

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!

Verse 111: *"If one moves around and around with the body and suddenly stops, then, where the energy of agitation arises, the supreme state arises."*

I'd suggest doing this a couple of times this week. Exercise intensely—dancing, running, walking fast, twirling—then stop suddenly, lie down in corpse pose, and feel the rising of the expanded state that arises as the prana settles. Some people call this state 'runner's high' or 'yoga bliss.' Bhairava points out that the quiet you allow to arise after intense exertion is a doorway into the Vastness!

Verse 96: *"If one observes a desire as it arises spontaneously, one should put an end to it immediately. It will merge at that point from which it has sprung up."*

When you feel an intense desire—whatever it is—immediately put a stop to it and meditate on the space inside where the desire came from. Very good when you're working with a strong craving for sweets or coffee. This isn't meant to force you into not satisfying the desire eventually (assuming it is a fundamentally healthy one!), but rather to work with the intense energy within desire to recognize the shakti-space from which desire comes. Let that intense energy take you back to the underlying pulsation in your own awareness. That pulsation is Shakti herself!

You can also work with one or all of the Walking Around Practices from last week.

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

Set aside half-an-hour to practice this.

Taking and Sending Breath:

With each inhalation, you breathe in feelings of contraction and suffering, offer them into the Great Consciousness, and breathe out feeling that you are receiving the blessings from the Great Consciousness that heal and open you.

This is a version of Tonglen; the Tibetan ‘taking and sending’ practice in which we work with our own suffering through the grace of Consciousness. I talked about it on the call this week, during a Question session.

1. First establish a connection with the compassionate holding energy of Shakti (or Shiva). Imagine Her as the great heart energy, the energy of Consciousness itself, embracing and holding you from behind. I like to invoke Shakti in the Goddess form of Bhuvaneshwari, one of the forms of the Great Mother energy. Imagine Her behind you. Become aware that this embracing, loving energy is limitless, and filled with blessing.
2. Now, tune into any feelings of suffering and discomfort that you are experiencing, and any thoughts about these feelings. Let yourself become present to the energy of a negative feeling in your body.

Inhale, feeling that you breathe in the feelings of dis-ease or discomfort, offering them into the great Heart, the Consciousness at your back. Exhale feeling that the breath carries the blessing of Shakti into your body, dissolving the contractions of the feelings. You can do this as a visualization, imagining the contracted feelings as black or grey smoke, and imagining the blessing as golden or rose-pink energy emanating from the sacred Presence that embraces you from behind and flows through you.

Do this for at least 5 minutes. Notice the effect.

3. Follow this by imagining the suffering of someone you know. This process is most effective when you are working with this person’s experience of the particular suffering or emotion that you practiced with yourself. So if you’re working with your own

resentment, you work with another person's resentment. Breathing in their emotion through your heart and INTO the Great Heart behind you, you breathe the blessings of the great Conscious Heart back through your heart and into this person, feeling that the blessing fills them with love.

Do this for 3-5 minutes.

4. Finally, imagine a region of the world, or a group of people who are suffering these same feelings. Breathe this group suffering in through your own heart, and let it dissolve into the great Consciousness, into Goddess, into the great Heart behind you. Then breathe blessings from the Great Heart, through your body and into the people or region that you wish to bless.

This process will give you the experience of your own suffering as the universal suffering. It will let you experience interconnectedness. And it will, above all, dissolve the imprints of suffering and painful emotions not just for you, but also for others in the world.

It's a very powerful and transformative way of tuning into the energy within and behind contracted emotions, and letting that contracted energy dissolve into and expand into Consciousness itself.

Consciousness—Shiva/Shakti in their fully expanded subtle form—can hold, transmute and contain everything, including all personal and collective pain. By offering pain into That, you experience 1) how pure consciousness is always present within every emotion if you only know how to draw it out; and 2) how that Awareness that is your real Self can serve as a fire that dissolves contraction into its own loving field of truth. 3) The freedom and love that Consciousness is always offering you, at every moment you

Set aside half an hour this week to practice this.)

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