

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

**Meditation & Contemplation Homework
Week 3: December 2-8, 2015**

Each sense is a current of divinity,
Sparkling with mystery
Light, motion, space, vision, awareness—
All are composed of omnipresence.
The senses connecting you to the outer world
Are paths of communion with the inner world.
Every sight, sound, smell, taste, touch—
A greeting from the Beloved.

— Verse 94, rendered by Lorin Roche from *The Radiance Sutras*

Please meditate for at least 15 minutes each day, using the sequence we practiced in class last week. (Instructions below.)

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: New! AUM Breath into Central Channel and Upper Chakras

Based on Verse 39 of the Vijnana Bhairava: *“Oh Bhairavi, by uttering the pranava (AUM) and by meditating on the void at the end of the protracted sound, one attains the state of the Void by means of the Supreme Energy (Para Shakti, or Supreme Kundalini) of the Void.”*

See my commentary on this verse below the instructions.

1. First, establish your connection to the Sahasrara, or upper Dvadashanta (the space of 12 fingers or 3 fists,) 8 finger-widths above the top of the head. Let your attention center there until you have a felt-sense of the energy there.

Establish your sense 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 the upper space about 8 fingers above the crown of your head. For a few moments, allow the breath to flow up and down this channel, from the base through the crown. 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 through the Sahasrara with the sound 'A' and flows down through the palate and throat where it merges into 'U', then down to the space of the heart, in the center of the chest where it merges into a long MMM' sound. Feel the space where 'MMM' comes to an end along with the inhalation. Let the exhalation ARISE naturally in the heart with the thought 'A'. It rises through the throat where it merges into 'U', and rises through the center of the head and up into the Sahasrara with a prolonged 'MMM'. Find the rhythm of the flow. If it feels right, you can imagine a flow of white-gold light moving with the sound and flowing into the heart along with the mantra.

2. Experiment with the Kumbhaka (breath holding) practice that we did in class. Here's how: Once you have established the rhythm of the practice, softly hold the breath after the inhalation, then feel the rise of A U MMMM from the heart to the space of the Sahasrara. Let the sound and your focus move swiftly upwards, but see if you can sense the vibration of A U M in the inner channel. Feel the energy of Sahasrara for as long as is comfortable before you take the next breath. It should be an exhalation, but often we unconsciously let the breath out a little during the holding, so see what naturally arises. Practice a couple of rounds inhaling and exhaling with A U M as in Part I, then again try the hold.

The holding should feel easeful, not like a strain. A few rounds of practice are often required to get the ease of it. However, if you continue to feel uncomfortable in the holding, stay with the original inhale of A U M down to the heart, and exhaling A U M to the Sahasrara. In that case, you can allow a very slight hold when awareness is in the heart, and a very slight hold when awareness is in the Sahasrara, so that you can get a sense of Shakti expanding in these centers. These two spaces, the Heart and the Sahasrara are both powerful doorways into the expanded Kundalini, and the Space 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.

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—which is where we begin—you are aware of what you are focused on, in this case the Sahasrara and the Heart. When the center '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 Sahasrara above the head. Let what happens happen.

Have the recognition that the space within the central channel, the heart, and the upper center 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.

End by centering yourself in the heart, and become aware once again of the cord of energy connecting your root to the earth. Breathe into your belly for a minute or two before coming out of meditation.

Commentary on Verse 39:

In classical tantra, Kundalini is often aroused from the Heart Center rather than from the Root. That is what this practice is about. In this understanding, Kundalini is said to flow DOWN from the topmost center, the Sahasrara, and to ignite the Heart. Then the energy from the Heart rises and opens us to the expansive spaciousness above the crown, which is variously called the seat of the Higher Self, the abode of Shiva in union with Shakti, and the seat of the inner Guru (who is a form of Shiva-Shakti). In this understanding, the Shakti flowing down from the crown is the flow of grace from the highest level of reality—here called Para Shakti, or Para Kundalini, the supreme Energy.

This meditation begins by mirroring the flow of awakening energy from above, and as we practice it, opens us to the actual experience of Kundalini flowing between the heart and the Sahasrara.

Commentary on Jeremy's Question about Imagination:

Jeremy asked on the listserve whether the experience he has of expansion, or light are actually spontaneously arising, or whether when he feels himself in open awareness, or expansion, it is actually a subtle form of imagination.

I'd like to answer it on a couple of levels. First, we really have to understand the power of imagination, and the connection between human and divine imagination.

On the level of practice, one of the well-known New Age or New Thought teachings is that our mind creates reality, and that your intentions and desires can actually bring forth new realities in the physical world. Some of you here have probably experimented with imagining desired realities, with varying degrees of success in actually manifesting them. Some of you may have come to see this as a kind of magical thinking. Others just feel doubtful as to whether there is a real connection between what we deliberately manifest in our mind and what effect it has on the outer world.

But most of us would agree that what we feed into our mind has a powerful effect not only on what we think and feel, but also on how we process our experience. The tantric sages—(c.f. **Pratyabhijna Hridayam** verse 5) say that every imaginative act we perform is a micro version of the acts of imagination performed by the great Consciousness that is constantly creating realities inside herself.

And many tantric yogic texts point out that our senses are not simply physical, but that we have subtle inner senses that hear, see, and especially feel what is going on in the inner realm. So every act of conscious visual or auditory or spatial imagination is actually

opening up pathways through which the great Divine Imagination can penetrate your personal consciousness.

In other words, when you imagine your body as space, or consider even provisionally that you are breathing in divine love, you are doing several important things. First, you are feeding higher wisdom and more spacious awareness to your consciousness. Second, you are inviting the greater reality to flow down those pathways and reveal its underlying presence to you.

Sometimes this manifests as an obvious shift of consciousness or a numinous vision or insight that doesn't seem to be coming from your own normal consciousness. Sometimes, the conscious infusion of the practice into your inner space simply creates a softening of your boundaries, or a post-meditation transformation in your life experience (like feeling more open, or feeling more resources with which to navigate a situation.) And by continually letting yourself hold different bhavanas, or by imagining opening your body to higher energies whether visually or through pulsation or through sound, you pickle your consciousness in higher energies and over time this creates all the positive transformations that mystics and long-term meditators describe. So even if you feel doubtful about the provenance of an experience, recognize that the practice itself is setting up new capacities and new neural pathways that tend to connect us over time to our own innate joy, peace, and intuitive capacity.

New Walking Around Practices

I particularly recommend spending some time with the practice we did at the beginning of class this week. It follows here:

Verse 65: Contemplate simultaneously that the whole world or your own body is filled with the bliss of the Self. Then by your own blissful nectar you become united with the supreme bliss.

Pay attention to the breath, feeling that each breath draws particles of tender energy, softness, kindness, or rosy pink light into the body. Exhale feeling that this tender softness—the felt sense of enjoyment or kindness—fills your body. Pay attention to the gentle feeling of easefulness that you may feel as the breath fills your body. Experiment with the bhavana, Feel the energy as blissfulness, or as love, or as kindness, or as tenderness, or as warmth, and notice which words create more resonance for you. (It can be different at different times!) All these words are flavors of bliss.

Verse 102: Contemplate the universe as a magic show, or a movie, or as a painting. Contemplating everything in this way, one experiences bliss.

This was commented on in the class. It's a great thought to hold as you come out of meditation, when your consciousness is less fixated than it normally is. I suggest also that you take moments during the day when you just hold the thought, "All this is a movie and 'I' am a character in it." In other words, this solid seeming reality is actually a creation of Shakti, appearing as the world. Have the thought, "This is just happening, as a dream or mental creation of Shakti." Then become aware of the consciousness that is present to the movie, but not engaged. Notice what the effect is of this practice, especially on a street in the city, or in nature, or in the midst of an intense interpersonal situation.

Let your attention flow from the Sahasrara to the Heart throughout the day. As in the core meditation—use this as a means of centering.

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 “I am everywhere” 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.

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.

When you feel discomfort in the body or emotional intensity, focus intensely on that feeling, exploring it with kind attention. Then, bring a feeling of relaxation into the feeling of discomfort. Hold the two together. Notice what happens—normally there is a kind of merging or melting of the discomfort. This is related to verse 103: “Your mind should neither be engrossed in suffering or in pleasure. O Bhairavi, you should know the middle state (between both)—then the Reality alone remains.

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 124: *The reality of Bhairava is present everywhere, even in ordinary (that is, non-spiritual) people. One who knows that nothing exists apart from Him, attains that non-dual state.*

This is a core bhavana, another version of “The same consciousness is in all bodies as in my own.” It is one of the most powerful liberating contemplations you can hold. Try it when you’re angry with someone, or when someone is angry with you. Or try looking into someone’s eyes with that thought that the same consciousness is in him or her as in me. Behind their individual personality, imagine that Consciousness itself peeks out from their eyes.

Verse 84: *Looking at the clear sky, fix your gaze without blinking and make your body motionless. Feel that sky inside your own body and let yourself fully expand.*

Verse 74: *Wherever the mind finds satisfaction, let it be fixed there, for there itself the nature of supreme bliss will become manifest.*

When your mind feels calm, quiet or concentrated, notice its state and see if you can remain present there. This can happen in the midst of activity—walking, cooking, doing yoga, dancing. It can come as the feeling of pleasure in taste, or enjoyment of music. It can come while you’re looking at a tree or a painting or your child. Or it can just be a moment of open-eyed gazing into space, that state often called ‘spacing out.’ When you notice yourself AT ANY MOMENT feeling calm satisfaction or contentment or peace, pause and tune

directly into the feeling. You can stop what you are doing and fall into the satisfaction for a moment or two. These moments are golden experiences of natural Samadhi—blissfulness.

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.

Center yourself in the feeling that the same consciousness is in you as in the person, and have a conversation about your overall experience of the class AS IF you are pure Consciousness talking to pure Consciousness in the other person. If you notice yourself getting lost from that felt sense of being consciousness, speak it out and return to the connection of Consciousness that supports both of you and surrounds you. 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