

## What's In this Document

This week, we've combined the Meditation and Contemplation Homework with the Study Questions in a single document. Scroll down to Section II to find the Study Guide.

## Section I: Meditation Homework

Please continue with the meditation protocol from Weeks I and II.

You may want to practice the Body Scan Breathing, called *Aharana Pranayama* (which we practiced in class and for which you can find the audio instructions on the Student Page) at the beginning of meditation instead of the pranayama we have been doing in earlier weeks. The written instructions for this are below in Section IA.

Instructions for the Navel Chakra and Crown Chakra meditations we practiced in the January 27<sup>th</sup> class are in Section IC below, along with questions and contemplations about them.

### A. Written Instructions for the Full-Body Scan Pranayama (*Aharana Pranayama*)

Begin by bringing your attention to the center of the forehead. You can focus on the forehead itself, on the surface of the skin.

Take three deep, smooth breaths into this center.

Now bring your awareness down to the space between the eyebrows and take one full breath.

Bring your attention to the eyes and take one full breath.

Take one full breath at your nostrils. Breathe and soften. Breathe one full breath in and out of the throat. Now focus softly on the shoulders and breathe one full breath in and out. Now the upper arms. The elbows. The wrists. The palms. Now bring attention to all five fingertips on first the right hand and then the left, taking two deep breaths with your attention there.

Now take one full breath in and out of your heart. One breath in and out of the solar plexus.

Take one full breath in and out of the navel. Bring attention to the middle of the pelvis on the outside of the body and take one full breath there.

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Now bring your attention to the perineum and take two breaths, feeling that the breath activates the perineum.

Now, breathe back up the body. First, into the pelvis, then the navel. The bottom of the sternum, the heart. The throat. The nostrils. The eyes. The space between the eyebrows. The center of the forehead. Now, let the attention come up to the area just under the top of the skull, the crown center. Take three full breaths with your attention here. And continue with the rest of your meditation.

You can also do this practice anytime during the day when you want to destress, ground yourself, or embody more fully.

#### **B. Open-Eyed Practices (Meditation “snacking” during the day)**

Every few hours, take a couple of minutes to activate the heart center, either through the soft palate-Ajna-heart practice above or by breathing into the heart and feeling the heart energy activated by the caress of the breath. When you feel centered in the heart, hold this affirmation: “My heart is the divine heart” or “I am love” or simply inhale “ham” into the heart, and exhale “sa.” Notice the effect of these practices, and journal about them.

One day this week, make a commitment to center your attention in the heart center, bringing attention back when you get distracted or forget. What effect does this have on your mood? What happens when you remain centered in the heart during conversations or while working? Notice the emotional experience you have in this center. There may be several—you could feel emotions arising, in which case consider that the buried emotional samskaras are being activated, and gently witness them, or (gently) coach yourself, “Let go” or “let it be.”

#### **C. Samyama Practices from Class**

These instructions include the centering structure for the Nabhi Chakra and the Crown Chakra Meditation. You can practice them as meditations (perhaps in a second session during the day) or the basis for gaining insight through the questions that are included after the instructions.

Asking the questions is a skillful way to activate the insight and experience that is the ultimate result of practicing this samyama over time.

The commentary on these sutras is included in Section II of this document. There are audio instructions for this and the Crown Chakra meditation on the Student Page.

## Navel Chakra Samyama

### Sutra III.29

नाभिचक्रे कायव्यूहज्ञानम् ॥ २९ ॥

nābhicakre kāyavyūha-jñānam ॥ 29 ॥

**(By samyama on) the navel chakra comes knowledge of the arrangement (balance, structure) of the body.**

Begin by placing your hand over your belly button to become familiar with the area. Note that the Navel Chakra region extends from the bottom of the diaphragm to the place of the Hara, two inches below the navel. Move your attention through the area until you feel centered there. Your attention might be centered at the navel or farther down.

Begin to bring the breath down into the belly so that you feel that you're breathing through the navel into the area in the middle of the belly.

You might like to use the mantra Ham Sa to help activate the center.

Imagine the presence of a glowing ball of light and warmth, about one inch in diameter, colored golden, red, or orange. Feel its warmth and energy. As you breathe into this area, you might feel the radiance expanding. (It isn't necessary to have an exact visualization—it's fine to simply feel that the ball of light is present.)

It might take a little while to feel the subtlety and power of this center, but you should immediately feel the grounding effect.

Move your attention around the area, letting attention move up, down, to the side, as though you are exploring the region. Keep feeling the breath flowing into that area. As thoughts come up, let them go.

Now, you can simply take a rest here, centering your attention more and more within the circle of the Nabhi Chakra, letting the breath deepen.

When you feel fully in touch with the center here, ask a question of the innate wisdom held in the navel chakra. Ask, "What does my body most need now?" or "What can you tell me about my health (or about a particular health issue)" or another question related to your health—especially the health of the digestive region and its effect on the rest of your body.

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As you get into the habit of feeling into this area and asking questions about it, you might use this practice before eating. Here, the question would be something like “What would my body like to eat now?” or “What would nourish my body now?”

Pay careful attention to your state after this practice. What bodily shifts do you notice? Do you feel more grounded? Also, notice any physical or emotional upheavals that you may have felt during the practice. If you have digestive issues, you may feel some churning in the gut when you focus there—this means that the focus is helping you become more aware of this part of your body. Through the meditation and the breath, this practice will eventually help digestion. You might also receive insights about what is needed to help your gut to better health—whether through diet, herbs, or specific treatments.

### Samyama on the Brahmarandhra—The Inner Gateway to the Higher Centers

#### Sutra III.32

मूर्धज्योतिषि सिद्धदर्शनम् ॥३२॥

mūrdha-jyotiṣi siddha-darśanam ॥32॥

**(By samyama) on the light in the skull, a vision of the perfected beings (Siddhas) is obtained.**

*For the commentary on this sutra, as well as questions to ask yourself about it, see Section II.*

Find yourself in a comfortable upright posture, softening your attention and awareness, breathing so that the lower body grounds with the inhalation and the upper body rises with the exhalation.

Allow the breath to flow through the nostrils up to the soft palate with the inhalation and continue the inhalation until it reaches the area just under the top of the skull. Station your attention there.

Imagine a full moon in that spot, luminous and silvery, and allow your attention to focus on that inner moon. If you are not that visual, focus on the energetic sensations there, having the sense that you are in touch with a luminous silvery cooling energy that extends upward above the crown.

Let the inhalation flow up to the crown and let the exhalation flow upwards so that it feels as if the top of your head is softening and opening.

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Keep your awareness soft and expansive and if you start to feel pressure here, consciously expand your sense of the headspace so that it feels wider than the skull.

(This space of the Brahmarandhra, like so many of the centers we touch in these meditations, is both inside and outside the body. Sometimes, we try to focus in these spaces while keeping our sense of self inside the body, we experience pressure and anxiety. So, keep softening and allowing.)

Now, imagine that the energy near the crown guides your attention backward about two inches. Feel that there is a kind of channel, or tube, extending from the space just above the crown, about 8 inches above the head and about two inches behind it.

Now, focusing on this area, ask that your teachers and guides be present. Feel that you are energetically surrounded by beings of light—whether they are bodhisattvas, siddhas or angels may not be apparent, but see if you can sense into the energy of their presence without necessarily expecting specifics. For some of you, these presences may be visually apparent. For most of you, it will be an experience of energy.

Feel that loving, energetic beings hover around your head. Inhale with the sense that the breath force carries your awareness upwards into this region of presence. Exhale, feeling that these beings shower grace on you.

Stay with this practice for as long as you can, up to 15 minutes. If the body moves to open more fully to the presence (perhaps, bending backward to open the chest, or even opening the mouth), let that happen.

As you sense the presence of these loving beings around you, speak to them in your mind. Ask, “May I experience your presence and grace. May your presence illuminate my mind and heart.” Or use whatever words of prayer you find resonant.

When you are ready to come out of meditation, inhale the energy down into your heart, and imagine the “doorway” in the skull closing gently. Focus for a few moments in the heart and journal about the practice before getting up. Especially if you have received insights, make sure you write all this down.

This is a strong practice and may at first leave you spaced out. So, take your time coming out!

## Section II: Commentaries and Exercises for Study. Suggestions for Partner Practice

### Sutra III.29

नाभिचक्रे कायव्यूहज्ञानम् ॥ २९ ॥

nābhicakre kāyavyūha-jñānam ॥ 29 ॥

**Nābhi (navel) kāya (body) vyūha (arrangement or structure)  
jñānam (knowledge)**

**(By samyama on) the navel chakra comes knowledge of the arrangement  
(balance, structure) of the body**

Begin by saying the sutra a few times to yourself out loud.

Then read the commentary and note the insights or questions that arise for you.

Essentially, the commentaries state that a yogi can get knowledge of the imbalances in the body as described in Ayurvedic medicine, through this meditation. It also becomes possible to intuit the energies operating in the body. The ayurvedic system holds that health and disease are dependent on the balance of the three doshas, or energetic tendencies, of the subtle body. These are vata, which is related to the element of air, kapha, which is related to the element of moisture, and pitta, which is firey. Everyone has a natural tendency towards one or another of these doshas, which are discussed at length in Ayurvedic literature, for instance, in the work of Dr. Vasant Lad, Robert Svaboda (*Your Ayurvedic Constitution*), and others.

The navel chakra is said to be the root of all the pranic channels in the body (the nadis), and thus when we get deeply in touch with it, we are able to get to the root of our health issues. When you focus on this center with the intention to receive insight into your body's health, you can receive deeper knowledge of what is needed by the body.

As most of you know, your health is dependent on the state of the gut. Meditation on the navel chakra begins to create a balance of the energy channels in the body.

It's also the region of the body connected to the element of fire—remember that book *Fire in the Belly*? This means that navel-focused samyama is an extremely powerful way of bringing up your physical energy. This meditation also activates the hara, which in Taoist meditation is believed to be the source of our chi, our energy. If you've studied Chinese medicine or martial arts, you know that focus in the Hara or Lower Dan'tien is gold-standard practice for grounding, health, and well-being.

### Exercises and Questions for Journaling and Partner Practice:

**Exercise:** Do this samyama practice for 10 minutes and when you are centered there, ask, “What do I need to know about my imbalances?” or “What do I need to know about (a particular health issue you may be facing” or “What would be the most healing way to nourish my body now?”

Discuss with your partner the effects of this practice— whether on your energy, your breathing, or in terms of gut checks or insight that arises.

### Sutra III.32

मूर्धज्योतिषि सिद्धदर्शनम् ॥३२॥

mūrdha-jyotiṣi siddha-darśanam ॥32॥

**Mūrdha (Brahmarandhra, under the skull) jyotisi (light) siddha (perfected being) darśanam (vision or experience)**

**(By samyama) on the light in the skull, a vision of the perfected beings (Siddhas) is obtained.**

*Siddhas:* Enlightened beings from many traditions who are said to exist in subtle forms for the purpose of giving help and support to the rest of us. My guru, in his autobiography, *Play of Consciousness*, described his experience of traveling to a subtle world made of blue light, where he recognized great realized beings from his own tradition and others. The darshan you experience here could also be the darshan of angelic beings or of deities.

The fontanelle, the topmost portion of the skull, is called the Brahmarandhra, or door to the Absolute. When you bring your attention here and consistently practice samyama on this spot with a particular intention to call forth the presence of higher beings, it opens a channel to the higher worlds. Once this channel is open, you can actually call on higher presences to be with you, and they will flow their energy into your body through the crown. It's very important when we perform this samyama that we are especially soft and relaxed because the crown is a portal to some very powerful energies. If we try too hard to reach it or open it actually creates a barrier to experiencing these energies.

This area of the body is considered to be the seat of the primordial guru, and in the Shakta tantric traditions, the Goddess is said to live here in union with her divine consort. In the beginning, the spot may feel intense, and if this happens, bring your awareness down to the heart for a while.



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This sutra points to a meditation that is a really big deal for several reasons. First, it trains you to find the pathway for moving out of the body at death in a way that will ensure that you rise to the highest regions. Second, it has the potential to draw huge downloads of grace and love down on you. Third, it is the seat that lets us channel the wisdom of higher worlds. In other words, when you focus here and move your attention slightly above and to the back, your personal wisdom and inner experience can be infused with this higher wisdom, the wisdom of the Siddhas.

**Exercise:** What has been your experience, over your lifetime, of sensing higher beings, angels, deities in your field? How have you understood these experiences? Journal about this and discuss it with your partner.

**Question:** How does information or guidance from subtle realms come to you? Practice opening up the channel over and behind the head and asking for wisdom to flow into you. Good questions to ask in this center would be

- How does grace impact my life?
- What is the real purpose of this life?
- Who are the guides and higher beings of my life?

You can also ask that these higher beings show you what the expanded mind feels like.

Or any question pertaining to higher consciousness that feels essential to you. (Not a frivolous question, but one that matters to you!)

When you do this practice, make sure you bring the energy down into the heart at the end.

#### Sutra III.34

हृदये चित्तसंविद् ॥ ३४ ॥

hr̥ḍāye citta-saṁvit ॥ 34 ॥

**(By samyama on the) heart, illuminated knowledge of the chitta occurs.**

In the western mystical traditions, including mystical Christianity and Sufism, the heart is considered an organ of perception. In western mysticism, they talk about the eye of the body, the eye of the mind, and the eye of the heart. Each of these faculties is able to see from a different perspective. The eye of the body sees objects of the physical world. The eye of the mind analyses and looks for the patterns beneath the surface. The eye of the heart is able to see the fundamental oneness between all things, which essentially means seeing with the eye of love.



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In Christian mysticism, the heart is considered the doorway to the Christ energy, which is seen as a non-dual energy that permeates the entire physical world, but which is entered through the heart. In Hindu devotional mysticism, the heart is seen as having several different levels, but mainly it is seen as the abode of the Atman, the divine spark that is God within the human being. According to the Chandogya Upanishad, “Within the heart is a lotus, and within the lotus a thumb-sized flame, which is the light of the Atman, the inner Self.”

In the language of the Yoga Sutra, then, the heart is a gateway into the experience of essence, your innate sense of being, the wordless feeling of existence. In the language of the Indian philosophy, the heart is the home base of the jivatman, the individual soul. It's also the seat of the Paramatman, the divine soul or supreme being which is present in the heart. The Yoga Sutra, in Book I-36, describes the heart as the abode of Ishwara, the personal “form” of the divine that many traditions understand to be present within every heart, and acting as your inner guide.) (Those of you who have Pandit Rajmani's *The Secret of the Yoga Sutra* might want to read the commentary on Sutra I:36 for a discussion of Ishwara).

The Upanishads describe the Self in the heart as having a form like a tiny flame. Some people see that in meditation, but it's not necessary. More often, the “light” that we experience in the heart is more like the faint luminosity of dawn, which can brighten as our meditation deepens. It's not that the Self in the heart is some kind of mini-me or homunculus hidden in our heart, watched over by a mini-deity. It's more than the two aspects of our consciousness, the purely human and the purely divine, are both present in the heart, and depending on our level of awareness, we can experience either or both at the same time. As we meditate in the heart, fearlessly allowing samskaras to reveal themselves and breathing with them, the divine intelligence expands and heals the burden of our accumulated samskaras, serving both as a mirror to the patterning that is buried there and as the healer who dissolves them.

The lotus of the heart is not an actual flower (though some people see visions of a lotus in the heart). The phrase refers to the energetic space that opens up for us as we meditate in this center, and which we can feel at times as a very pure and tender feeling-space that we can settle into. It's also considered the seat where devotees contemplate their chosen deity, the personal form of the divine. If you practice meditation on the form of a deity, or a teacher, you might imagine the deity occupying the space in the heart.

There are several “layers” in the heart. The emotional heart is where many of our wounds, feelings of vulnerability or sadness, relational samskaras, and other accumulated emotions are stored. So, when we first begin to meditate there, or at times in our life

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when we feel highly emotional, we may experience an uprush of emotion, not always pleasant. Or we may experience the numbness that comes from having armored the heart or tried to protect this tender part of us. When emotions are coming up, this actually means that the meditation energy is purifying the heart center, and it's important to breathe with it, identifying not with the emotions but with the witness/watcher who is aware of them. This can be hard, but it's incredibly fruitful. Breathing mantra into the heart is a very effective way of purifying this region.

As emotional residue is dispelled, you begin to be aware of the tender sweetness and contentment of this part of the body, and spiritual feelings like gratitude, devotion, forgiveness arise.

Remember that the heart center is not just within the inner space of the body but extends at least 12 inches in front of the body (to the zone of compassion we worked with last week) and behind the body, which is often where we can most easily experience the presence of a loving personal guide-presence. Some of you have done meditation with me where we take our attention behind the heart and tune into the presence of a loving being there, who "knows" us and essentially has our back. This is an opening into the experience of Ishwara, the divine presence in the heart.

When through sustained attention to the heart center, your chitta relaxes into meditation, and as the fizzing of thoughts settles, it reveals itself as an energetic space, which many people call a field. Over time, you become aware that this field has an innate luminosity about it, which at moments reveals itself as blazing radiance, but which for most of us is more like the diffused light of early dawn. As you allow attention to settle here, the chitta expands and reveals that it is actually the field of expanded consciousness and that the entire universe, for an adept meditator, can actually be experienced within the heart. One of the great Christian contemplatives described his experience of seeing the earth contained within his own heart. This is one example of the kind of illuminating knowledge that the sutra speaks of arises is the intuitive wisdom that arises as the heart-field expands.

My experience of the heart is that it is an energetic space, which expands and contracts according to the thoughts I'm holding, my degree of relaxation, and also the people I'm spending time with. The energy of the heart space also has an innate intelligence, which I believe is one reason why this sutra associates samyama on the heart with understanding and wisdom about the mind. In daily life, when you learn to keep your attention in the heart, you begin to get natural prompts or intuitive movements that can guide your actions. Much of the wisdom that comes up from the heart space has to do with intimacy and relationality because when you are connected to the heart, it is much easier to connect with other people. In the self-help movement called Heart Math, the

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emphasis is on this type of samyama. Their research has shown them that when you begin to breathe into the heart and get used to resting there, your decisions get better. Your access to useful insight gets better. In Heart Math, they have created an entire set of protocols based on this form of samyama, which can help you resolve anxiety, anger, and other negative emotions, just by breathing into the heart and letting the heart energy resolve your state.

So Chitta samvit mentioned in this sutra refers to knowledge not only of the state of your own chitta, which also determines your state as a human being, but also knowledge of how to cure your own obstructive emotions, knowledge of how the mind works, and what you can do to awaken and change it.

The main practice for cracking the heart's code is mantra. The resonance of an awakened mantra—which the HamSa mantra we're working with definitely is for all of you—can dispel the blocks around the heart and take you through the different layers of schmutz around the heart so that you are more and more in touch with the hearts' subtle field.

Over time, heart-based samyama will heal your painful emotions and negative self-talk.

This has been my experience. In my teens and twenties, I suffered from a more or less constant mood of low-grade unhappiness, interspersed with self-critical thoughts.

After I started meditating in the heart center, all this gradually lifted. Over the course of several years, the negative mood dissolved, and I found that my overarching feeling was of subtle happiness that remained even when I felt agitated. Moreover, the tenderness of the soft heart space gave me a basis from which I could observe the contents, including painful feelings and thoughts when they arose, without looking away and without rejecting myself. This is part of the healing that occurs when the heart center opens, and it's the way the chitta heals itself through meditation and samyama.

As you deepen your contact with the heart center, you deepen your contact both with your essence, your atman, which is a pure sense of being, and also with the feeling of higher presence in the heart. To see with the eye of the heart is to see with God's eyes, which is an unconditionally tender way of seeing ourselves. It's our buried samskaras that obscure this vision, which is why it's such a powerful healing practice to stay present in the heart and return to it over and over again. For most people, there will be times when your limiting and painful samskaras and self-descriptions come up and can be seen and let go of. Meditation on the heart creates a kind of churning of these buried samskaras, which can then be melted and dissolved in the space of the heart.

The more this happens, the more the loving wisdom of the heart center—chitta-samvit—becomes available.

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**Exercise:** Spend a day centering your attention in the heart. Feel that you are seated in the heart, literally as if your sense of self takes a seat there. Whenever your attention leaves the heart, bring it back. Let the breath flow into the heart as if it is flowing through the breastbone. From time to time, extend the sense of the heart energy by bringing your attention 10 to 12 inches in front of your heart and ten to twelve inches behind the heart. Notice how you meet your life when you are centered in the heart. How does it affect your conversations? How does it affect the way you do your work? From time to time, remind yourself: “My heart is one with the divine heart” or “The true nature of my heart is loving.”

**Question:** Consider, journal about, and discuss with your partner your experience of centering in the heart, both in meditation and while in the waking state.

**Question:** Have you experienced a sense of light, higher presence, or great happiness in the heart center? What was that like? Journal and/or discuss.

**Question:** Contemplate and journal about how you experience the inner Self in the heart. How do you know at such moments that you are in touch with your essence? Is it characterized by happiness? Tenderness or love? Peace? Stillness? Clarity? Does it ever take a form, or is it mostly energetic?

**Question:** Why do you think so many religious traditions talk about the inner Self as being seated in the heart? What is your experience of connecting to your innate deep self through the heart?

**Question:** How do you handle intense, repetitive emotions when they arise through heart meditation?

Next time you experience the kind of emotional upheaval connected with anger, jealousy, or hurt feelings, as you recognize that these are obstructive and repetitive samskarically-based emotions, write the feelings on a sheet of paper by hand. Don't hold back. Read what you've written, then tear up the paper. This is a very helpful ritual for clearing obstructive emotions, but you don't want to save the paper in your journal! Toss it, feeling that as you do, you are clearing out the repetitive feelings.