

Loving Your Way to Awakening Meditation & Contemplation Homework Week 3

This week we are adding the mantra to our core practice:

*Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.*

Meditation Practice

Please begin with ten minutes of Hatha Yoga postures or light stretching to wake up your body. Then do 5 minutes of Nadi Shodhana breathing.

Offer your meditation, asking that it be of benefit to all beings or to a particular person (or animal or place).

Chant the opening mantras that we provided or the mantras of your choosing

Preparatory Grounding

For a minute or two, *practice whole-body attention with the following four steps*. This will both ground you and expand your awareness of yourself as a unified physical entity.

1. Inhale and exhale, feeling the air flowing in and out of your nostrils.
2. Expand your awareness to include the movements that the chest and abdomen make when you breathe.
3. Allow yourself to be aware of your heartbeat or pulse in your body.
4. Include in your awareness the sense of your muscles holding your body in a balanced posture.

Core Practice

Begin by asking, “Let me feel the presence of love, in whatever form she appears now.”

With your attention on the breath, become aware of the presence around you of a benign, loving energy, the energy of grace and love.

Have the feeling of welcoming or allowing the energy to breathe you, even to hold you.

Feel or sense that your breath is arising and subsiding on its own, drawn by the power of love, which is breathing you.

Have the sense that your heart center opens like the shutter of a camera. Have the sense that love (tenderness, acceptance) is flowing in and out through the heart.

Now, add the mantra:

*Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.*

You can break it up with the breath, inhaling with the first eight words of the mantra, exhaling with the second eight words. Have the feeling that the resonance of the mantra expands your heart. Or feel that the syllables are being dropped into the heart like flower petals or drops of water.

Feel that the Beloved is saying the mantra to you.

Imagine that the mantra surrounds you like a cloud, and that you are breathing it.

Feel that the mantra is filled with the energy of the Beloved in these forms.

To understand the real power of this mantra (or any other deity mantra), try adopting this attitude: Feel that, as a poet saint sings, “When you say these words, you touch God with your tongue. When you think them, your mind and heart become filled with God.” Notice whether taking this attitude creates a more sacred feeling.

As thoughts arise, notice the thought with the feeling that the thought is actually made of particles of love. Love in the form of thought. And let it flow out with the breath.

Meditation Using a Photo or Image as a Focal Point

We’ve included on the Course Student Page a few photos/paintings, one of Ramakrishna, one of Ananda Mayi Ma, and two paintings of Krishna. Obviously, you can also use a photo or painting of a different deity or teacher whom you feel connected to.

To do this, place the photo in front of you, and gaze at the face or into the eyes, inhaling the energy of the being into your heart. If you’re drawn to ask for grace, to dialogue in any way, or to repeat a mantra, do that. Otherwise, simply gaze at the picture for two or three minutes, or as long as you like.

We’ve also included two of the meditations from the last two weeks, which you may want to continue to practice with a few times during the week. Each of them can be quite revelatory, as many of you have found.

Meditation on the Expanded Heart

(This is a practice that can help open you to a more expansive experience of your own heart, and that also allows you to move past energetic blocks that may be contracting your heart. The true heart center actually extends three feet or more behind the body, as well as in front of the body. As you start to feel into the expanded heart, you are also opening past the various egoic blocks that can contract the heart space.)

Inhaling, feel the breath flowing through the heart center, just beneath the breastbone, and out the back of the heart.

You might want to use words—"I am love" or "I am loved" or "May I be held in love" to help kindle the feeling. You can also use a Sanskrit mantra that you are deeply connected to, or the word "Beloved." It's important to find the words that have resonance for you. This is part of our creativity in meditation practice!

If thoughts come up, if emotions come up, notice them, and let them go. If the thoughts contain a story about how or why you don't feel love or about your incapacity to love, remember that these are just thoughts (meaning that they aren't true!) and let them go.

Begin to sense the energy of the space behind your body. Sensing energy is a kind of subtle proprioception: we "feel" into it, and by feeling its qualities, we can also help the energy to soften and open. As you do, become conscious that even if the energy feels tight and small, if you notice its "edges," it will begin to soften and expand.

With the exhalation, draw the energy from behind the heart into the inner body. Sense it spreading through your heart and torso. Gently let the energy from behind the heart expand through the center of the torso.

As you connect the energy inside the physical body to the energy behind, there is eventually a natural sense of expansion that will eventually help you experience how much bigger and more spacious your energetic body really is. And this connection to the back of the heart helps you open to the love that is always supporting you; that is a natural expression of the heart.

(The space behind the heart is a portal to the Great Heart, the loving energy that is your connection to the experience of universal love. Letting your attention move to the back heart will begin to make you more able to feel into this space.)

Meditation: Seeing Another Person as the Beloved

Think of someone close to you. Try this with someone with whom your relationship is easy and/or with someone where there is difficulty or disruption in the relationship.

Imagine them sitting in front of you.

Realize that they are whispering to you, "Beloved, Beloved, Beloved."

Let yourself receive love from them.

Contemplation and Writing Practice

These questions can also be the basis of a partner discussion. If you are not working with a partner, do this as a journaling practice.

Set aside at least half an hour this week to sit with a notebook or journal and contemplate the types of devotion that we discussed in class. Which types of bhakti do you feel resonant with? Is one or the other your "natural" style of holding loving contact with Spirit?

Bhava Bhakti

A generalized loving attitude that you bring to practice—consciously softening, cultivating a feeling of welcome towards yourself, attending to the state of your heart and feeling into the energy. You can do anything with an attitude of Bhava Bhakti—cultivating kind thoughts, looking for the beauty in another person—any practice that increases the general feeling of affection in your being and in your actions. In a sense, Bhava Bhakti describes what it is like to feel loving towards others and the world. The important thing is that it can be cultivated.

Question: How do you practice Bhava Bhakti? What do you do to get back to this state when you can't feel it?

Daasya Bhakti

The attitude of being a servant of the divine. This attitude will be expressed differently by different people, but it is contained in Krishna's statement to Arjuna: "Think of yourself as my servant and all other beings as the ones to be served."

Question: How does holding this attitude change the way you do daily tasks? How about challenging ones?

Question: Krishna teaches Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 12, verse 7-8) that the practice of keeping one's mind steadily on the divine is the most powerful path across delusion, and towards the full experience of Spirit as yourself. What he is describing is one of the core practices of Bhakti, which is focused on a particular form of the divine: in this tradition, Krishna. "Those whose minds are set on me, O Arjuna, truly I liberate them from the ocean of delusion. Fix your mind on Me only, your intellect in Me, (and then) you will with no doubt live in Me alone thereafter."

He also says in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 12, Verse 10) that "Even if you are unable to do the practice of keeping your mind steadily on me, be intent on doing actions for my sake; even by doing actions for my sake you will attain perfection."

This is a big claim that is at the heart of the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita. It is the heart of the practice of Karma Yoga as well as Bhakti Yoga. Why do you think he says this? What is it about offering your actions to Spirit that frees you to act without entanglement?

Krishna and Arjuna are having this conversation on a battlefield, in the context of a war that Arjuna is having doubts about fighting. Krishna is telling him that if he fights for Krishna's sake, he will not be doing anything wrong. In other words, he won't accrue negative karmic results. It is important to realize that in the context of the Bhagavad Gita, which is embedded in the epic story of the Mahabharata, the war is a just one, intended to destroy evil kings and restore dharma to the land. So, Krishna is talking always about doing actions that are justifiable.

That said, as you consider this, of course, you might also want to consider that there are some actions you wouldn't do even if they are done as an offering!

Practices for Cultivating Daasya Bhakti

Whenever you remember, offer what you are doing to Spirit. Get into the habit of offering your day as soon as you wake up. Offer your practice. Offer your food. Offer any task you are doing.

Spend time every day this week offering your actions to Spirit (or to a form of the divine that you love). Begin to cultivate the feeling that you are serving the Divine while working, washing dishes, driving, cooking, and interacting with other people, especially if you are doing caregiving tasks. Notice the effect.

Maadhurya Bhakti

“Sweet devotion,” in which you relate to Spirit as a romantic lover, as in the relationship of Radha and Krishna, or in the life of the poet saint Mirabai, who felt she was married to Krishna? In the West, Mary Magdalene is the archetype of romantic devotion. Can you think of other examples?

Question: Have you ever had a romantic experience with some form of the divine? Also, implied in this form of Bhakti is that your devotion could contain sensual or sexual feelings. Has this ever been true for you?

Question: Are there certain romantic feelings that trigger devotion in you, or that you have in the past used to soften your heart? These might include admiration, longing, missing the Beloved, desiring the Beloved’s presence.

Question: If you have had a romantic relationship with a person that aroused those feelings, could you imagine directing these feelings to a form of Spirit?

Question: What are your favorite romantic films or novels? How does the quality of romance in these stories indicate a path for you to have romantic feelings about a form of Spirit (i.e., a deity like Krishna or Goddess, or a great teacher (including Jesus or Ramakrishna, whom their devotees consider avatars of the Absolute) you feel connected to)?

Question: Are you drawn to romantic devotion? Do you feel that it can deepen your connection to the inner Beloved?

A Practice for Cultivating Maadhurya Bhakti:

Not everyone will be comfortable doing this, but for some of you it will be powerful:

Imagine that Krishna is making love to you. For Krishna, you might substitute a different form, one that you connect to more easily. Journal about it.

Consider a romantic relationship you are having now or in the past. What happens if you consider that this person is a human avatar of the Divine for you? How does this attitude shift or illuminate your attitude towards this relationship?

Saakya Bhakti

The feeling that God is your friend.

Question: What does it mean to you to make friends with God? How do you express that kind of intimacy? (i.e., by having conversations, asking for blessings or help, getting angry at God for not being present (as the poet saints often did). Teresa of Avila used to complain to God when her life was hard: “If this is the way you treat your friends, it’s a wonder you still have any!”

Question: Notice that Saakya Bhakti carries a feeling of easy intimacy—no awe. Can you allow yourself to approach the divine without awe, like a friend? How do you feel about yourself and God when you take this attitude?

Practice for Saakya Bhakti:

Sitting quietly, or walking, have a conversation with God. Complain, praise, share a dilemma, ask for advice. This is a powerful practice that you can do throughout your life, talking to Spirit as an intimate friend.

Vatsalya Bhakti

The devotion of a mother for a child.

The model for this is Krishna’s foster mom, Yashoda, who is considered to have been liberated through her devotion to the baby Krishna. Mother Mary is the great archetype in the West of motherly devotion. This attitude is not only available to women; men can feel it too.)

Question: If you are a parent or grandparent, or have been in a parental role, has your love for your child (or a child) ever felt tinged with the power of Spirit? How does this impact your relationship with the child?

Question: Have you found that protective feelings towards others help open your heart?

Question: Have you ever experienced feeling protective towards a form of a divine?

Practice for Vatsalya Bhakti

If you tend to approach certain people with a motherly (or fatherly) feeling, try infusing that feeling with the understanding that in mothering or protecting that person, you are actually being motherly towards God. Notice and journal about how this impacts you and how it seems to impact the other person.

The Devotion of a Child to a Parent:

Seeing yourself as the child of the divine.

This is not an “official category of bhakti in the Vaishnava Bhakti tradition, but it is definitely a powerful form of devotion, especially in Goddess-centered traditions (or in the Catholic attitude of devotion to Mary). It is also a major path in Judaism, Christianity, and

Islam, where the child of God attitude is of course centered on the father. For instance, there's a big metaphor in Sufism about considering yourself to be the child of a king—as the king's child, you are protected, and you are also an heir to the king's wealth in all its forms. Ramakrishna, for instance, always saw himself as the child of the divine Mother. This type of bhakti can also be centered on a saint or Guru—as one poet saint sings, “With a protector like my Guru behind me, what could I possibly lack? Must a king's wife go begging for crumbs?”

We'll discuss this in detail next week.

Sutras for Week 3

Here are the first four sutras, with commentary and questions. Spend a few minutes reading them, and if you are working with one of the commentaries, such as *Narada's Way of Divine Love* by Swami Prabhavananda, or *The Yoga of Spiritual Devotion* by Prem Prakash read through the commentary on each sutra from that book and include its insights in your contemplation.

As you read through these, repeat the Sanskrit three times out loud. (This helps you feel the energy in the sutras, which is considerable.) You can also sing it, draw it, or take it into a Hatha Yoga asana.

Here is a contemplation process to use:

- Say the English to yourself (or sing it!)
- Close your eyes, breathe into the heart, and hold the sutra in awareness for a minute or two.
- Open your eyes and write down any insights, experiences, questions, or conclusions about the meaning of the sutra and your relationship to it.

You can also do this process a partner discussion.

This set of sutras gives several definitions of Bhakti, some being more intense than others. As you read through them, consider how they apply to you. Notice that there are different translations in the books we are using, each of which has a different emphasis...

Sutra 15

तल्लक्षणानि वाच्यन्ते नानामतभेदात् ॥

tal-lakṣaṇāni vācyante nānāmatabhedāt

tal: that (devotion)

lakṣaṇāni: characteristics

vācyante : described

nānā: variously

mata

bhedāt: differences

There are various descriptions of the characteristics of spiritual devotion due to differences in point of view.

Sally's Commentary: These definitions are not so much “rival” definitions, as they are references to the different ways people express devotion through their thoughts, words and actions

Sutra 16

पूजादिष्वनुराग इति पाराशर्यः ॥

pūjādiṣvanurāga iti pārāśaryaḥ

pūjādiṣv: performance of ritual worship

anurāga: intense longing

iti: thus

pārāśaryaḥ: Son of Parashara—sage Vyasa

According to Sage Vyaasa, spiritual devotion is expressed through intense longing to perform ritual worship.

Sutra 17

कथादिष्विति गर्गः ॥

kathādiṣviti gargaḥ

kathādiṣv: in discussions

iti: thus

gargaḥ: sage Gargah

According to Sage Gargah, spiritual devotion is expressed through discussions on spiritual themes.

The word “katha” means discussion, talk, and also tales, or stories. So, bhakti is often described as being expressed through telling stories about divine incarnations, like Krishna, or about primary divine forms like Vishnu or Durga or Shiva.

Sutra 18

आत्मरत्यविरोधेनेति शाण्डिल्यः ॥

ātmaratyavirodheneti śāṇḍilyaḥ

ātma: the Self

raty: delight

avirodhene: perpetual

iti—thus

śāṇḍilyaḥ: Sage Shandilya

According to sage Shandilya, Bhakti is expressed by perpetual delight in the Self.

In other words, this approach to bhakti describes a state where one is immersed in the joy of inward focus on loving awareness as you own Self. This is similar to the teachings of Patanjali and Raja Yoga.

Sutra 19

नारदस्तु तदर्पिताखिलाचारता तद्विस्मरणे परमव्याकुलतेति ॥

nāradastu tadarpitākhilācāratā tadvismaraṇe paramavyākulateti

nāradastu: sage Narada

tadarpitākhilācāratā: that (bhakti) is sanctifying all activities

tadvismaraṇe: forgetting that (the Beloved

paramavyākulateti: supreme anguish

According to sage Narada, however, spiritual devotion is expressed by sanctifying all activities, and by supreme anguish upon forgetting the Beloved.

Verses 16-18 describe bhakti expressed through ritual, through conversation (which would include chanting) and through focus on the inner experience.

Sally's Commentary: In verse 19, Narada is describing a non-dual type of devotion, where everything you do, eat, say, etc. is considered felt to be worship, and in which any lapse in remembering God is felt as painful.