

THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: YOGA BASICS WEEK 4

I. WHAT IS MEDITATION? WHAT IS MANTRA?

"Yoga is the cessation of the waves of activity arising in the mind." Yoga Sutras 1.2

A. **MEDITATION:** The word "meditation" comes from the Latin word *mederi* which means "to remedy", pointing to its many powerful benefits. One simple definition is "to focus one's thoughts". The two related Sanskrit terms are *dharana* and *dhyana*. *Dharana* means concentration, the ability to focus our attention on a single point. Extended periods of such focus naturally lead to *dhyana* or meditation, the uninterrupted flow of concentration. Where *dharana* practices one-pointed attention, *dhyana* is ultimately a state of being keenly aware without focus. *Dharana* and *dhyana* are the sixth and seventh limb of the eight limbs of yoga immediately preceding *Samadhi*, or the state of ecstasy that results from union with the divine where the self is transcended. One can focus one's attention on anything.

Some of the most common are:

- the breath
 - Notice the qualities of the air or the breath
 - Count up or down
 - Think "in" and "out".
 - Focus on the sound of Ujjayi \breath.
 - Or?
- a candle
- a mandala
- a mantra
- a task
- the body while practicing asana

The goal is to develop our inner observer, our witness consciousness, to detach from our thoughts and relate to them as an impartial observer. We are not our thoughts! It does not matter, therefore, if your mind wanders; it only matters that you notice it wandering. (You might even think, "Ah! Thinking!" before returning your attention to your focus.)

The original goal of asana was to prepare the body for meditation. One objective of meditation is a greater sense of general well-being and inner peace. Specifically, meditation

- trains and stabilizes the mind (i.e. It calms monkey brain.)
- deconditions belief patterns and the thought and emotional patterns that accompany them (i.e. You recognize your buttons!)
- allows for an experience of the true self beyond everyday appearances. (i.e. I am, experiencing sadness. Vs. I am sad.)

Among its many practical benefits, meditation can:

- calm and stabilize the nervous system
- decrease the heart rate
- normalize blood pressure
- reduce muscle tension
- increase alpha waves: smooth, regular electrical oscillations in the brain that occur when a person is awake and relaxed.

B. MANTRA: A mantra is a sacred word, syllable, or phrase that changes the internal energy of the meditator and the energy of the environment. Mantras can be chanted silently or aloud. Common mantras invoke the qualities or grace of a particular deity to effect changes in one's life (e.g. Om Nanah Shivaya to invoke Shiva). You can use, however, any word that summons what you need at the moment, for example "peace".

OM:  Om is a seed mantra, a one syllable sound that has no exact meaning but instead invokes an experience of unity with the universe. Om is considered the universal sound, the primal sound from which the universe emanates. It is made up of three Sanskrit letters, aa, au and ma which make the sound Aum or Om. Some traditions consider the silence following to be the fourth sound.

II. MIND AWARENESS

Exercise: Watch the mind for three minutes without judgment.

III. UJJAYI PRANAYAMA: OCEAN SOUNDING BREATH

instructions: Whisper the word *home* holding the *mmm...* sound for a few seconds. Now whisper *home* on the inhalation and the exhalation. Don't make the sound too loud and keep it smooth and even. When you are able to whisper the sound through the mouth evenly in and out, close the mouth and continue the sound through the nostrils on the inhalation and exhalation. Continue with long deep breaths.

general benefits: Ujjayi Pranayama is deeply relaxing and soothing. The breath is lengthened and the air is drawn to the bottom of the lungs. The mind becomes absorbed and focused by the sound which induces meditation. It heightens awareness and enhances creativity.

IV. JNANA MUDRA; WISDOM

instructions: Join the thumb to the index finger and extend the other three fingers. Sense the circuit of energy within the circle formed by the thumb and index finger. Allow the palm of the hand to become a pool of this energy.

benefits: This is a mudra for active meditation. It stimulates concentration and the flow of prana throughout the body. It helps eliminate circular thought patterns. It balances and centers.

V. BENEFITS OF BALANCES

DRISHTI: When balancing it is helpful to find a drishti, a focal point where you can fix the gaze to help you to balance

Like all standing poses, balances help to develop concentration, build strength, increase coordination, balance and poise, and focus attention in the body.

VI. ASANA

1. Pigeon
2. Revolved Chair
3. Dancer
4. Reverse Warrior 2 (Dancing Warrior)
5. Seated Wide Legged Forward Fold
6. Seated Boat
7. Bridge

VII. HOMEWORK

1. Check your posture when standing, for example, while waiting to check out at the supermarket.
2. Check your breath. Find one or two things that happen regularly during the day that will remind you to check your breath. Remember to fill your lungs completely with 3 part yogic breathing!
3. Take a meditation break. (Yoga Journal, August 2011)
 - a. **Stillness:** Stand more firmly on your feet or sit and settle into your buttocks and hips. Breathe deeply.
 - b. **Relaxation:** Soften your facial muscles: forehead, eyes, mouth, lips, and tongue. Breathe deeply.
 - c. **Equipose:** Free your hands and rest them by your sides or place them gently on your lap. Breathe deeply.

- d. **Informal meditation:** Notice how it feels to be present with yourself, slowing down and observing. You are engaging with the first steps of meditation, which you can enjoy anywhere, anytime.

4. Stretch every day. Then, practice a pose ,,, or two!

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|  | THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: YOGA BASICS week 4 practice |
| DEMO & REVIEW | <p>3 ways to align:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the cues and remember the alignment cues for the base postures. • Align visually • Find the lines of energy <p>Increase energy w/ inhale. Release strain, unnecessary effort and tension w/ exhale. Relax deeper into the pose. (Find lines of energy with extended arms and at wall)</p> |
| WARM UPS | <p>Focus on Ujjayi breath</p> <p>Seated →</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> neck release, neck release w/ twist shoulder shrugs barrel rolls Rock the Baby (seated forward fold: center, right and left. <p>Supine →</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> leg circles supine triangle supine rotated triangle Reclined Pigeon (tip! Do this pose if you don't like Pigeon.) <p>Table Top →</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tiger Lunges Pigeon |
| ASANA | <p>Cobra (2 levels)</p> <p>Child's Pose</p> <p>Downward-Facing Dog → With a Twist</p> <p>Mountain</p> <p>Dancer (tip! Use a drishti. Check the alignment of the hips. Press down the ball of the big toe.)</p> <p>Half-Moon Series</p> <p>Chair → Revolved Chair</p> <p>Mountain</p> <p>Warrior 2 → Dancing Warrior → Side-Angle Pose (tip! Change arm position to change lines of energy.) → Triangle (tip! Stretch from the hip crease.)</p> <p>Goddess</p> <p>5 Pointed Star → (back release)</p> <p>Seated Wide Legged Forward Fold (tip! Fold from the hip crease.)</p> <p>Seated Boat (tip! Keep your back straight.)</p> <p>Bridge warm-ups → Bridge</p> |
| COOLDOWN | <p>Knees to Chest</p> <p>Sacrum Release</p> <p>Reclined Twist</p> |
| RELAXATION | <p>Yoga Nidra: rotation of consciousness</p> <p>Return to Ujjayi breath</p> |

| week 4 practice | | | | | |
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|  Sukhasana Easy | |  Supta Padangusthasana Reclining Big Toe Pose | |  Bhagerasana Tiger |  Eka Pada Rajakapotasana One-Legged King Pigeon |
|  Bhujangasana Cobra |  Balasana Child's Pose |  Adho Mukha Svanasana Downward Facing Dog |  Parivrtta Adho Mukha Svanasana Downward Dog with a Twist |  Tadasana Mountain |  Natarajasana Dancer |
|  Standing Side Bend |  Utkatasana Chair |  Utkatasana with Anjali Mudra Twist Chair with Prayer Twist | | | |
|  Tadasana Mountain |  Virabhadrasana II Warrior II |  Reverse Virabhadrasana II Reverse Warrior II |  Utthita Parsvakonasana Extended Side Angle |  Utthita Trikonasana Extended Triangle |  Goddess |
|  5-Pointed Star |  Prasarita Padottanasana Wide-Legged Forward Bend | with Twist |  Upavistha Konasana Wide Angle Seated Forward Bend |  Navasana Boat |  Setu Bandhasana Bridge |
| |  Apanasana Knees to Chest |  Jathara Parivartanasana Reclining Twist | | | |

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