

MEDITATION AT THE MOVEMENT CENTER: THE BASIC TECHNIQUE

The basic meditation technique taught at The Movement Center begins to dissolve patterns of tension and restriction and release the flow of energy within. Swami Chetanananda describes the method as simply, "releasing tensions and allowing creative energy to flow." Our inner work does not change our essence, it simply allows us to be ourselves. It is like removing rocks - the tensions - so the water can again rise up and express its true nature. And this nature, in us, is infinite and universal.

"Return to the Self within, know our own secret,
the universe is inside you, you are inside the universe.
The inner Self is the One who dances in all,
The One who is here and the One who is there."

Bhagavan Nityananda
Sutra 65
from *The Sky of the Heart*, Rudra Press, 1996

We contact the Self in meditation, that quiet, pulsating center of our existence, which is nothing other than the universal Self. The most intimate part of us is universal and infinite - and as close as our breath.

1. Breathe and Relax

Sitting comfortably is very important. Although in the beginning you may not be able to, it's best if you sit on the floor, in full lotus, half lotus, or a simple crossed-leg position. If you prefer to sit on a chair, sit on a straight-backed chair with your feet on the floor in front of you. Your spinal column should be straight. Your shoulders should be slightly pulled back, so that your chest cavity is open. Your chin should be at least parallel to the floor or tilted slightly upwards so that your throat is open and relaxed. Put your thumb and forefinger together, and place your hands on your thighs, palms up. Close your eyes.

At first, simply relax. Relax your body, relax your breath, relax your mind. Begin by taking your attention to your breathing. Relax and feel its natural pulsation. Breathe regularly and naturally from your abdomen, drawing the diaphragm down. With each out-breath, remember: Relax. Release. Let go. Gradually become attuned to the simple rhythm of your breath.

As you focus on your breath, you will begin to see the relationship between your breathing and the state of your mind. When you are upset, angry, or agitated, your breathing is erratic. While it is difficult to directly confront your mind and gain control over thoughts and feelings, you do have voluntary

control over your breathing. You will discover that when you consciously focus on the breath, your mind naturally begins to quiet.

As you meditate, continue to focus on your breath, relaxing your body deeply. Feel the energy of the breath. Feel its flow and rhythm.

2. Become Aware of the Chakras

This flow of vital energy we contact through the breath (called kundalini in the tradition of Trika Yoga) is most powerfully felt at certain subtle energy centers, called chakras.

Chakras are subtle centers you experience when your system is highly energized. Sometimes the terms "subtle body" or the "energetic mechanism" are used to describe the entire complex of feelings, energies, and movements that are not exactly physical - you can't locate them in the physical body - but that are nonetheless powerful aspects of our being.

We experience the energy of the subtle chakras in decidedly tangible ways. For instance, when you've had a powerful emotional experience, your throat may feel blocked - you have a "lump in your throat." In moments of extreme anger, the point two fingers below your navel may become completely constricted - you feel a tightening in "the pit of the stomach." If your heart is closed to something, you may feel unbearable anguish - a broken heart - while at other times, your heart suddenly opens, and you feel total joy and well-being. Our experience of the energy of the chakras is reflected in our state of mind. These energy centers are profound affectors of our thoughts, our emotions, and our behavior.

Everything that we feel and think and do is in some way manifested first through these centers, or chakras. So for the sake of the exploration of our inner Self, we need to take our attention into these centers and begin to look through those windows to our souls.

There are three primary channels in the subtle body related to the chakras. The first is called the *sushumna*, and it corresponds to the physical spinal cord. On either side of the *sushumna* are two other subtle channels, called the *ida* and the *pingala*. These crisscross back and forth. The primary chakras are located at the points where the three channels cross each other. There are many chakras (the texts of Kashmir Shaivism detail some 72,000 of them), but in this practice we focus on seven primary chakras.

These are located at the base of your spine, at the base of your sex, in your abdomen (about two fingers below your navel), at heart-level in the center of your chest, in your throat, between your eyebrows, and at the top of your head.

3. Become Aware of the Flow

Breath is the vehicle for experiencing the flow, or communication, between the chakras. Our inner work really begins to deepen when we can experience the circulation of energy through the chakras. First we focus our attention on the breath, then we expand our awareness to include the chakras. We then follow the flow between them, feeling the energy pierce the center of each chakra, rise up the spinal column from the base of the spine to the top of the head, and flow down again.

Feeling the flow between chakras is subtle; it sometimes takes a while to feel anything at all. Don't let this discourage you. Think of it as a thawing-out process, beginning little by little and expanding over time. Imagine it as whispers, rather than bugle calls. Visualize it; hear it; feel it; put all your senses to work as you tune in to this subtle feeling. Your effort is simply to become aware of it, to become quiet enough to hear it.

No matter how long it takes to develop sensitivity to the inner flow, remember that this flow goes on all the time - even though you may not be fully aware of it. Your experience will change over time, then change again, and then again. Finally, even the sense of flow disappears into the unity of the Self, and you will experience a sense of complete fullness and well-being.

4. The Experience of Total Well-Being

Ultimately, through our practice in feeling the chakras and the flow, we come to a perfect understanding of this: that we are really everything that is. There is nothing we have to change, nothing we have to do. There is no place to go. There is only knowing yourself - knowing the Self.

5. Review

By following the movement of our breath, we gradually withdraw our attention from the physical world. As we take our attention inside, we become attuned to the energy which is the support of the physical world. Chakras are the gateways between our inner and outer experiences. Slowly our whole awareness of ourselves changes. We begin to understand ourselves and all other people as nothing but flowing energy. We come to understand all of life and all experience as nothing but an expression of conscious energy - an expression of the Self. This awareness changes how we feel about ourselves and completely rearranges our priorities.

In the state of meditation, something special happens. You have a direct experience of the Self. A simple deep nourishment flows from this contact that dissolves all boundaries and all distinctions. The feeling is one of the fullness and ease, quiet and deliciousness - a sense of total well-being. You experience

the Self directly as it is; the boundaries between inner and outer dissolve and the underlying unity of the universe is apparent.

What is really important about this understanding of the Self is our capacity to connect to it and live from it every day. And from this unfolding understanding, we can experience a state of total well-being: complete, deep, permanent, ever-present well-being. This experience of well-being allows us to move through every kind of unknown territory with equanimity. We have enough control of our mind and emotions that we can respond from harmony within us to any situation. Again and again, if we just make an effort, we can find the balance.