

Basic Daily Practice

I want to offer this simple, accessible, yet effective practice, into the world. I think it is especially relevant in these strange times. It is a grounding, stabilising, empowering, strengthening, building practice – affecting your body fabric, your breathing, your head-space. Try it once, you’ll feel good. Try it for a week and you’ll start to feel your body change. Try it for a month and you’ll change your life. Hopefully it can improve not just your own life, but also the world around you.

Antifragility Yoga has always been a pragmatic, common-sense approach to getting stronger, fitter, more flexible, more resilient and inherently happier, healthier, more content, less stressed, (and hopefully) wiser and more fulfilled, a push to learn, to grow, to get better, to improve yourself and the world around you.

Remember:

- Start where you are, and progress from there
- “Listen” to your body, and only ever go “as far as is right”
- Aim to move with openness and ease
- The results will be in proportion to the effort you put into it
- The body fabric will take time to change (just like an acorn takes time to grow into an oak tree)
- Never just hammer away at it, never work into strain or struggle
- Ideally, avoid practice within two hours of eating a meal
- Always, always, the three key principles of practice – personal responsibility, common-sense and kindness

Bear in mind that no practice or technique is without some level of contraindication, or some level of risk. For pretty much any practice at all, you can think of some circumstances in which it should definitely not be done. Yet if you take Health and Safety too far you would simply not do anything – which carries its own consequences. Only engage with this if you are reasonably fit and well. Only engage with this if it is right for you. Not all practices are right for everyone. If you have any pre-existing medical conditions at all, please check with your doctor, therapist or health practitioner first. In engaging with this you take responsibility for your own actions and the consequences - and for your own well-being.

These are explanatory notes on the various techniques. Following that is an example practice using these techniques. There are also explanations in the accompanying videos.

The Five Tibetans

(for more details here, see the videos that accompany this and on the website)

Breathing (pranayama):

sama vritta	[1:1]	breathe-in + breathe-out, same count eg: 4:4, 6:6, 8:8 (hence 4 seconds in and 4 seconds out,...)
savitri	[2:1:2:1]	breathe-in + hold-in + breathe-out + hold out eg: in for 6, hold-in for 3, out for 6, hold-out for 3 that is 4:2:4:2, 6:3:6:3, or 8:4:8:4
square	[1:1:1:1]	breathe-in + hold-in + breathe-out + hold out all to the same count, eg: 2:2:2:2 or 4:4:4:4, ...
nadi shodana		alternate nostril breath both nostrils, breath-in and breath-out block-R, breathe-in L, block-L, breathe-out R then breath-in R, block-R, breathe-out L then breath-in L, block-L, breathe-out R then breath-in R ... <and continue> end with breathe-out L 1 round = in-L + out-R + in-R + out-L

Ishana Meditation

Ishana means consciousness. So this meditation practice is aimed at refining our consciousness – for the benefit of ourselves and for everyone. The *Ishana* practice is usually done with a string of 48 beads, with the beads being used for counting. Alternatively (and traditionally) you can use your fingers. We work in combinations of 9. You use the index finger, middle finger and ring finger of each hand. Each finger has three bones (phalanges). Using the thumb you can physically count ‘3’ on each finger, hence 3 fingers give a count of 9. Traditionally you use your right hand to track the count within each round, making up 9 counts in a round. You use your left hand to count the number of rounds. (This is explained in more detail in the accompanying video). Inevitably in this practice you will lose track of where you are, what count you are on. But your fingers are tracking it. Note that you have become aware again, and just continue from where you were. If the counts are not exact, it doesn’t matter. The count is not the point, doing the practice is the point.

Below is a simple version of the *Ishana* Meditation practice:

We use a mantra, which is a meditation technique common to many traditions. A mantra is simply a word or phrase that is repeated. Meditation with a mantra is simply this repetition of the mantra. You can use any mantra that suits you. I would suggest using one that is uplifting, and lifts you out of your normal, every-day thinking. A good one is:

Hari Om tat sat jai guru datta - (loose translation) “let us rejoice and honour God (or Consciousness or Life or whatever concept you are comfortable with) that is everything.” A well known and widely used mantra. Choose whatever words fit with you, or what you are comfortable with. It is your practice.

Start with may 3 rounds (with each round being a count of 9). Repeat your chosen mantra for each count.

The mind won’t hold a vacuum. To say, “don’t think about anything” is a non-starter. That is not in the nature of mind. Rather, give it something to chew on. The principle of mantra is to provide this something, preferably something uplifting and outside of your normal day-to-day head-space. This work is specifically philosophy-neutral, not tied to any one philosophy or religion. Breathing is just breathing. Thinking is just thinking – we all do it, and we can be controlled by it, or we can learn to control it.

No doubt, thoughts will wander, and inevitably you lose track of where you are and what you are doing. When that happens, note it, be easy with it and move onto the next count. Aim at a daily practice of maybe ten minutes. Or whatever you can. Maybe progress to half an hour daily. This *Ishana* practice is a stepping-stone on a journey.

We are aiming at 9 rounds, making up 81 repetitions. Alternatively, leave off all counting and just repeat the mantra for a period of time. Maybe 10 minutes, maybe half an hour.

Bodhicitta – Buddhist 'loving kindness' meditation

This practice is aimed at establishing a vibration of kindness and compassion, to yourself, those around you and for the whole world. If you like, make it a part of your settling-in routine or ritual to prepare for your meditation practice. There are different words, meanings and phrases used here, by different traditions and teachers. The key point here is the spirit of compassion and kindness.

Settle into your meditation posture, and ready yourself for practice. Settle your attention onto a feeling of kindness and compassion, and say,

'May I be well, may I be happy, may I be cared for, may I be loved.'

Think about someone you love, and in a spirit of compassion, say,

'May you be well, may you be happy, may you be cared for, may you be loved.'

Think about someone who annoys you, and in a spirit of compassion, say,

'May you be well, may you be happy, may you be cared for, may you be loved.'

Think about someone you are neutral about, and in a spirit of compassion, say,

'May you be well, may you be happy, may you be cared for, may you be loved.'

Think about all living beings, and with all living beings in mind, and in a spirit of compassion, say,

'May we be well, may we be happy, may we be cared for, may we be loved.'

Then once again for yourself, in a spirit of compassion, say,

'May I be well, may I be happy, may I be cared for, may I be loved.'

A Morning Practice:

This is a practice. I think it is a good practice. It is certainly a good place to start. In doing this practice, we are looking to start to make a positive change. Try it, see how it works for you, feel how it works for you. Adapt it as you need to, grow it as you need to and are ready to. Maybe print off these last two pages (back to back if you can) and you can use that sheet every day. Try to build a regular practice. Real progress happens with a practice of steady, calm, stable, regular steps – pretty much the same way a tree grows.

1. (Work towards) a full 21 repetitions of the Five Tibetans

We are aiming at 21 repetitions of each of the five Tibetans. Maybe you are reasonably fit and strong, and you can do a full set of 21 with no problem. If so excellent. If not, let's work towards a full set of 21. Start with what you can do. Maybe start with having a go at a set of 5 of each. Find a count that you can do of all of the Five Tibetans, work with that. As you practice, your body fabric and strength will change, and you will be able to do more. Progress at a rate that works for you.

2. Bodhicitta

3. Pranayama practice, breathing, all at your chosen count. Maybe start at 4 seconds and aim at 8 seconds. Remember your count, and gradually, as the time is right, you can work to progress it. It is really important not to push beyond what is right for you. You can use your fingers (as described above), or use the beads.

As a rule-of-thumb, in terms of safe practice, don't progress beyond a count of 8, or one or two rounds of this, on your own. If you want to progress contact me or find competent instruction. As an additional piece of safety advice, especially if you have any pressure related issues (blood pressure, hernia, glaucoma), ear infection, heart problems, pregnancy, epilepsy, recent surgery or trauma – really take care. Speak with your doctor first.

Also, never work into strain and struggle, the practice should remain easy and calm at all times. When in doubt, reduce the count. If any of the breath-holds are causing a problem, just leave them out. There are no have-to's here. We are looking at starting at the place we are, and progressing from there. Progress will look different for each of us. Not doing anything at all will not result in progress. Doing too much is not good either. Find a place in the middle that suits you.

9 x sama vritta

9 x savitri

9 x square

9 x nadi shodana

4. Ishana meditation

Remember your own worth. Remember the value of simplicity and of quiet. When thoughts get tangled and jangled, remember the value of mantra. When negative thoughts start to churn, remember the stability of your own breathing – just breathe and observe your breathing. Whatever else is going on in the world around you, you remain in charge of your own head-space. Don't let anyone dictate the state of your own head-space, nor your own sense of your own value.

Breathe – still – centre – focus – mantra
There lies a deep, deep lesson

*Remember the three key principles of this approach to practice –
personal responsibility, common sense and kindness.*

And always – keep it easy, stable, balanced, kind.

If you want to learn more, or to deepen your practice see website for progression pathways, or be in touch. Any questions or comments, please be in touch.