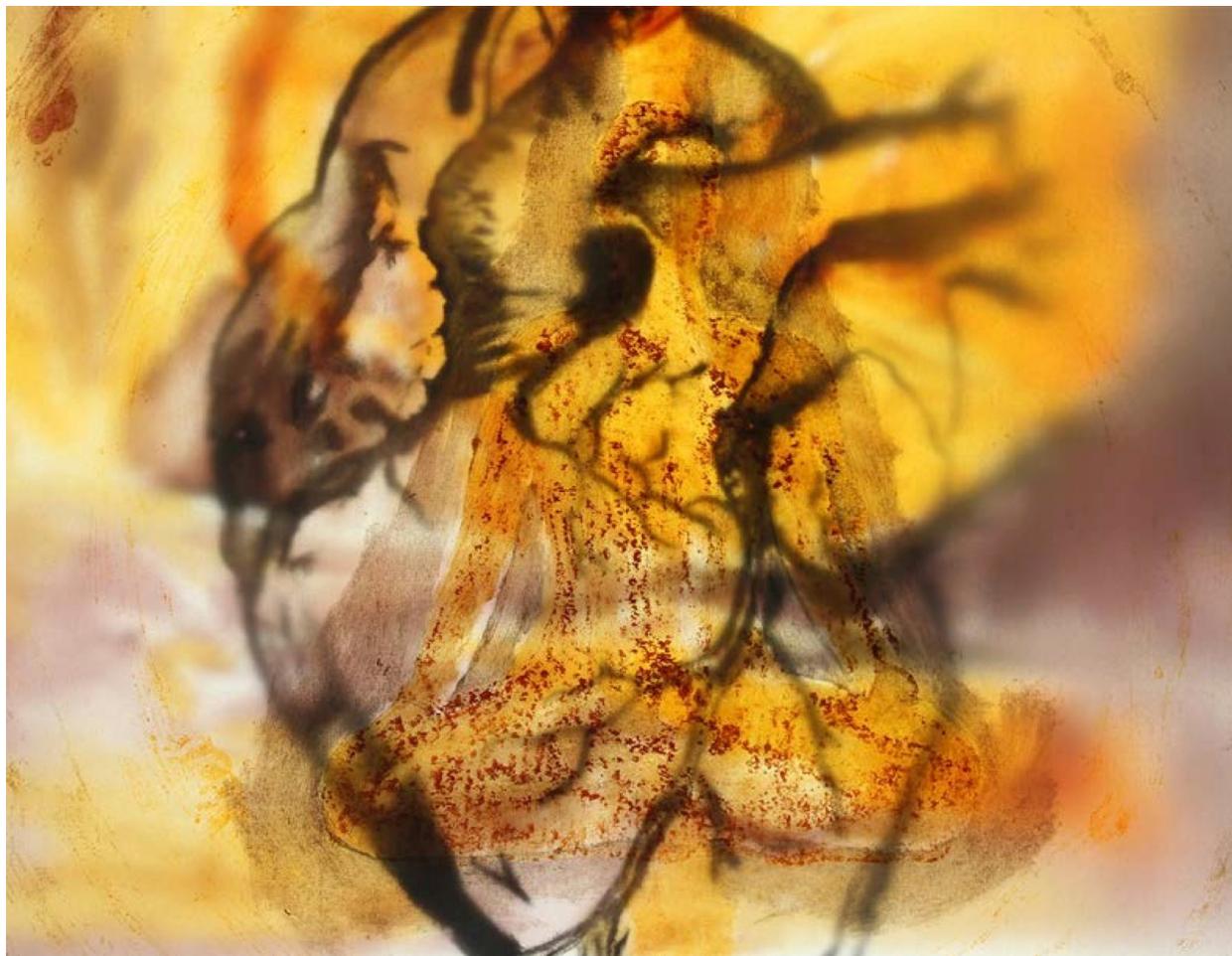


YOGA FOR TRANSFORMATION | MODULE TEN PACKET  
TEACHINGS: ANANDAMAYA KOSHA & ISHVARA  
PRACTICES: PRAYER & RITUAL



# The five aspects of anandamaya

the relational heart within us.

## PRIYA -

Longing & yearning for deep connection. Understanding, feeling, & connecting with the core organizing principle that sets our life.

## MODA -

Delight & Connection.

## PRAMODA -

Desire to experience that delight & connection again.

## ANANDA -

The joy within us. Inner fulfillment. Peace.

## BRAHMA -

Source. God. That eternal source from which we have come and to which we long to return.

# What is Ritual?

Ritual is the systematic coming together of a people around something meaningful to them. It's bringing consciousness into action. Ritual is where the ordinary (or profane) is elevated to the sacred (such as bread and wine elevated to body and blood). And where the sacred is brought into the realm of daily activity (such as a meal becoming communion).

## One way to create a meaningful, transformative ritual—

Choose a story that matters to you. A story that fosters the aspects of life that bring you joy, nourish your heart, call you to goodness, and connect you with your deepest Self. Choose a story that you want to be shaped by. Choose a story that connects you to your community, to the natural world, to your God. Write this story down and identify the essential points. Find the heart of the story. And then choose symbolic objects that can represent—Re Present—the important aspects of the story for you and to you. From the story you wrote down, identify a sentence or two that can be said over the objects you've chosen. Take time to refine these words. And then decide how the story, using the objects and the words, can be embodied. What actions does the body take? Walking, kneeling, bowing, standing, reaching, eating, hugging? How are the people performing the ritual brought into consciousness? Are there sounds, sights, smells, touch, and taste that can be experienced? What self-reflection are participants asked to do? How are they brought into relationship with the story and each other? After you've identified all these elements, how do you put them together? What are the order of things? How do you begin? What's the heart of the action? How do you close? Finally, when is this ritual to be performed? Daily? Weekly? Monthly? Seasonally? Yearly? Is there a certain time of day?

You can build personal rituals—something you do alone as part of your personal practice. And you can build communal rituals—something you share with others in order to strengthen the community and the shared stories of being alive. And, or course, you can remodel rituals that you were given. You can adapt the traditions of your religion, family, and society so that they become authentic, useful, and transformative for you.

And then, you must be brave and enact these rituals. Because our culture so deeply lacks the practice of ritual, it can feel embarrassing. It can feel odd to imbue an ordinary object with sacred, symbolic meaning. It can feel cheesy to use our bodies to enact our stories. We might find ourselves giggling or feeling really shy. So again I say, be brave. Move through the nervous newness of ritual practice and allow yourself to connect to the story the ritual is telling you. Remember that symbols, stories, and ritual acts are an essential part of our nature as human beings—an important part of our well-being. Make a commitment to the ritual. Practice it. And practice it again. Allow it to become a rhythm for you. A rhythm that reminds you of who you are and who you are becoming.

# What is Prayer?

The official definition of prayer is: “a solemn request or thanksgiving to God or an object of worship.” I like to think of prayer as the whispered words we send up into the universe—the words that change us as the pray-er. Prayer is the deep cry within our hearts for love and justice and connection. Prayer can be casual or formal. Freeform or memorized. There is no right way to pray. What matters is the intention behind the action.

## Stages to consider when designing a formal practice of prayer & ritual:

- **PREPARATION.** We prepare both the outer environment & our own inner space. Asana and pranayama can be useful in this stage. As well as working with altar objects such as candles, bells, incense, water bowls, flowers...
- **INTENTION (bhavana).** Through our preparation we become ready to focus our attention toward the object of our choice. For example: Who are you praying to? What are you meditating on? What story are you enacting / remembering? You can focus on meaningful symbols or recite mantras to help direct your attention and focus your intention.
- **MEDITATIVE ABSORPTION.** This is the time where you rest in silence. In communion. Where you allow your attention to rest in the spirit of your reflection and the object of your devotion.
- **PETITION.** You might use a traditional prayer at this point. The Lord’s Prayer, or the Buddhist prayer for loving kindness. Or you can simply speak the desires of your heart—your hopes for your community and the world. You can give voice to your deepest yearning (the 1st aspect of anandamaya kosha).
- **PROCLAMATION (sankalpa).** This is where you make a statement of commitment to your spiritual path. Where you commit to remembering your highest values as you move through the everyday actions of life.
- **GESTURE (nyasa).** As your practice draws to a close you can use physical movements to anchor your intention, effort, prayers, and commitment more deeply into your body and heart. One example is reaching your arms up toward the sky and then placing your hands over your crown, then mouth, then heart as a way of remembering your intention to keep your thoughts, speech, and attitude rooted in your highest Self.
- **DEDICATION.** This last stage is a way of expressing gratitude for your practice and asking that the efforts of your practice be of benefit to the world. OM Shanti, Shanti, Shanti is a wonderful example. In this context it could be translated as: May I experience peace. May all beings experience peace. May the whole world be filled with peace.

# And Who is God?

All this talk about prayer and ritual might have you wondering about God... Unfortunately, this isn't a question I can answer for you.

Maybe you already have an answer. Maybe you're a devout believer. Maybe you think "there's no such thing." Maybe you're somewhere in the middle. Or maybe you're struggling with the question. Maybe you have no idea how to begin trying to find an answer.

Yoga Sutra 2.44

**"From study of self through inspired texts, a connection with one's deity of choice is established."**

This sutra—found in the list of the niyama's—defines svadhyaya or self-study. An important part of kriya yoga, svadhyaya means "moving toward the self." This entire course has been built to help you practice svadhyaya—to help you move toward your truest, highest Self. There's an understanding in spiritual traditions that as we move toward the Self we move toward God. And as we move toward God, we move toward the Self. You don't need to have an answer to the question of 'who, or what, is God?' But that doesn't mean you shouldn't look... We must search after truth and mystery. We must search after meaning and purpose. We must search for Self understanding. And sutra 2.44 assures us that through our search we will find a connection to the deity of our own heart.

## Iṣṭa-devatā

In the context of the niyamas (our five daily rituals), we are given this lovely idea: ista-devata, which means cherished or chosen divinity. As we deepen our self-understanding (svadhyaya), especially through the study of scriptures that are meaningful to us, we will form a connection to the deity of our own heart. We will find our ista-devata—our cherished divinity. We all need practices that help us deepen our self-understanding and offer us a sense of refuge and support. So don't struggle with the question of God. Put effort toward stilling your body, breath, and mind. And then rest in the cave of your heart and listen. Can you hear the divine within you? Can you connect with your ista-devata?