



## Eyes Open Class as Puja

By Michelle Valentino

“Puja is about reminding yourself that the elements of your ordinary life are infused with divine potential and if you engage them consciously from a deep place within yourself, you are engaging the possibility that a profound transformation and ultimate realization will take place.”

--Swami Chetanananda

Many students at The Movement Center do one or more pujas as part of their regular practice. These are structured forms of worship, and each has a focus on a different central deity and yantra or mandala, and a unique set of prayers, offerings, mantras, and mudras. In essence, however, they are all the same: they are about experiencing communion and recognition of our oneness with the divine. The purpose of class is to come to this same understanding. We can approach eyes open meditation class as a puja, and having this intention can support us in having a more profound experience.



Before beginning a puja, it is customary to undergo some purification by bathing or sprinkling or drinking water. Before class, we can do the tension release exercise to clear our systems of energetic debris and promote a greater flow.

When we enter the meditation hall, we bow as we sit down. We bow to pay our respects to and honor our teachers, the energy field that exists in the room, and to recognize that the highest aspect of our existence is completely connected to the lowest part. By bowing, we express our unity with all of existence. Bowing is also an expression of our devotion to our practice.



Class begins with chanting and ārti, an offering of light, made on behalf of everyone in the room, reminding us that we are in the presence of the light of consciousness. The chanting that accompanies ārti is an offering of sound, and a chance to connect with and expand ourselves into the space of that sound and connect with the vibration of the deity to whom the chant is dedicated.

Once chanting is completed, we take our attention inside and deeply open our mechanism by making contact with our breath and body; aligning our body, breath, heart and mind, using our wish to grow; and using our awareness to create a flow within ourselves. We prepare ourselves to make a deeper offering.

When we are prepared to begin our work with the teacher, we open our eyes and extend our awareness to that energy field and feel our interconnectedness. We keep circulating energy within us. We practice a mantra to help us maintain the flow in our chakras and establish a finer vibration within ourselves. Mantra also helps to quiet our mind so our thoughts demand less of our attention.



Flowers are one of the offerings typically made in a puja. In class, the flowers are the chakras, the inner flowers, and the sweetness at the center of each. We make the offering by connecting to the sweetness within ourselves in each chakra and allowing that awareness to extend itself to the teacher. We open and allow ourselves to be immersed in that experience as fully as possible.

We end class by taking the time to feel our gratitude for the experience, as well as beginning to absorb and fully digest it.

Class closes with the ringing of the gong, a final offering of sound, as we prepare to re-engage in our daily lives.

Namaste



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