



## The Evolution of Intro to Eyes-Open Class

By Michelle Valentino



Our approach to teaching introduction to eyes-open class has traced the arc of a pendulum, passing between two poles. On the one hand, at times we have wanted to have the fewest obstacles to participation possible and have made the introduction short and to the point. On the other hand, there have been periods where we wanted participants to have a thorough grounding in and commitment to the practice before engaging in the profound experience of class.

Ask anyone who's been with the ashram since the beginning about their first introduction to eyes-open class, and you're likely to hear a variety of stories. In some cases, the first time was rather informal—sometimes as simple as “Sit down and keep quiet,” or “Open your heart.”

By the time the ashram moved to Cambridge, the intro program had two parts. The first was a one-hour session to provide a general introduction to meditation, required for those attending closed eye meditation. The second part was a three-hour introduction to kundalini yoga that was required for anyone who attended class.

When I got to the ashram in 1996, things were even more involved. Before attending the Monday night public program (which then included chanting and silent closed-eye meditation), participants were required to attend an orientation to introduce them to the center and the practice. A further one-hour introduction was required for anyone who wanted to attend closed-eye meditation with Swamiji. To prepare to attend class, students were required to attend a series of six Fundamentals of Meditation and Fundamentals of Studentship classes. In addition, students were supposed to complete twelve weeks of closed eye meditation practice.

In the early 2000's, the Fundamentals Classes were replaced with an 8-week course called Introduction to Trika Yoga. That comprehensive and experientially-oriented program covered all aspects of practice,

including preparation for eyes-open class. Feedback on this course was very positive, but overall it seemed too cumbersome to be a prerequisite for class.

After several rounds of Introduction to Trika Yoga classes, the pendulum swung back again to the more open model. We began holding a separate introduction to meditation on eyes-open class nights. For a time, the intro was delivered in two parts. Part two was intended to review, address questions and reinforce aspects of practice. There were a series of four-week classes that went into more depth on various aspects of practice for those that wanted more.

A few years ago we landed on the current format for intro: a one-time, one-hour session to introduce our community and lineage and go over the essential aspects of the practice. The content has been updated several times over the last couple of years as Swamiji has refined the basic technique, the tension release and the double breath exercises. We have encouraged long time as well as newer students to attend the intro to review those changes.



The refinements Swamiji has made to our practice in recent years are subtle yet very important. There may be more in the future. Whether you had an abbreviated introduction or went through one of the more elaborate programs, we are now most concerned to give everyone the opportunity to stay on the same page about the key elements of the practice.

So the latest enhancement to the intro program is the addition of an [online version](#). It will be available as part of the [eTMC Academy](#) and include a slide show, videos, guided exercises and more. For a small one-time fee, you will be able to take the course, be advised of any changes that occur, and review the

basic practice as often as needed regardless of where you live. Look for the new online Introduction to Meditation course to roll out very soon.



Namaste

