

Ajapa Japa: So–Hum Meditation

Week 3 · Yoga Wise Meditation Course

Introduction

Ajapa Japa is a classical yogic meditation practice in which awareness rests on the natural rhythm of the breath together with a subtle mantra. The mantra used in this practice is **So–Hum**, often called the universal mantra because it is naturally present in the sound of the breath itself.

As we inhale, the subtle sound *So* arises. As we exhale, the subtle sound *Hum* arises. This repetition happens effortlessly, without any deliberate effort or control.

Ajapa means “spontaneous” or “effortless”, and Japa refers to repetition. Ajapa Japa is therefore the natural, effortless repetition of a mantra that is already happening within us.

This practice builds directly on mindfulness of breathing. Where Week 2 established awareness of the breath, Ajapa Japa gently refines that awareness and gives the mind a simple, rhythmic focus.

The Nature of the Mantra

So–Hum is not chanted aloud in this practice. It is remembered silently in the mind, almost as if you are listening rather than repeating.

There is no need to force the mantra. If it fades or disappears, simply return to awareness of the breath and allow the mantra to re-emerge naturally.

While So–Hum is often translated as “I am that”, the meaning is less important than the quality of attention and ease with which the mantra is held.

How to Practise Ajapa Japa

Begin by settling into a comfortable seated position with the spine upright and the body at ease.

Bring awareness to the natural flow of the breath, just as you have practised in mindfulness of breathing.

As you inhale, gently notice the sound *So* arising in the mind.
As you exhale, gently notice the sound *Hum*.

Allow the breath to remain natural and unforced. The mantra follows the breath, not the other way around. If thoughts arise, simply notice them and return to the breath and mantra. There is no need to push thoughts away.

Points of Awareness

You may explore Ajapa Japa at different points of awareness, depending on what feels most natural for you.

You might notice the mantra:

- With the gentle movement of the breath in the abdomen
- With the sensation of the breath flowing in and out of the nostrils
- With the natural rhythm of inhalation and exhalation as a whole

Allow yourself to settle where attention feels steady and easeful.

Effortless Attention

Ajapa Japa is not a concentration practice that requires effort or strain. The quality of attention is relaxed, continuous, and receptive.

At times the mantra may feel very clear. At other times it may fade into the background. Both are part of the practice.

Each time you notice that attention has drifted, gently return to the breath and the mantra, without judgement.

Benefits of the Practice

With regular practice, Ajapa Japa can:

- Calm mental restlessness
- Support emotional balance
- Deepen concentration naturally
- Create a sense of inner rhythm and steadiness
- Prepare the mind for deeper meditation

Because the mantra is linked to the breath, it can also be quietly remembered during daily activities, offering moments of grounding throughout the day.

Integrating Ajapa Japa

You may practise Ajapa Japa for short or longer periods, depending on your time and experience. Even a few minutes can be deeply settling.

This practice forms a bridge between simple breath awareness and more subtle meditative techniques. It prepares the mind for observing thought patterns more clearly in the practices that follow.