



*Asia Voight*  
Professional Animal Communicator  
& Intuitive Life Guide  
and Business Strategist

## **Meditation: Your Pathway to Connection**

### **Guest Speaker: Deb Bachmann**

**Asia:** Welcome everyone to our meditation series, Meditation: Your Pathway to Connection. This is Asia Voight. I'm so excited to be here on our fourth and final class of our four part series. We have an incredible guest on tonight to assist us with this journey of transformation, inspiration and connection that we are using to open our intuition and our higher selves and to connect with our animals, to the earth, to our higher selves, to the divine. It has been an absolutely beautiful practice.

Tonight we have our special guest. Her name is Deb Bachmann and she is an instructor in Madison, Wisconsin where I live. She practices musical Buddhist chanting. She began studying in 1992 in Japan and opened her own clinic in Madison in 1996. Through the center, she offers Shiatsu treatment, training, educational and charitable activities.

So, Deb I want to welcome you to the call and to tell us more about what you are going to be teaching us tonight. First of all, because some of these beautiful words here, I'm not even going to attempt to say. I'm going to let you go ahead and tell us how to pronounce them. Then after we chat for a little bit, we are going to be ready for the meditation that you are going to be leading us in. I'm so excited. Welcome to the call. Tell us about what you do and what you want to teach us tonight.

**Deb:** Thank you so much Asia for having me on. I've been looking forward to sharing this with people. I have to say from the beginning, it's a little unusual because mostly the way that I share this is one on one, or a group at a time, in person. No one's on mute. Everybody is able to share and talk and discuss. I didn't get to ask you this, but I'm actually hoping at the point where we do the meditation together, if it is possible to take everybody off of mute and we can all hear each other chant together after an initial instruction. Maybe that will be possible.

**Asia:** Yes, it absolutely is.

**Deb:** Oh good. That will be fun.

**Asia:** Yes. Maybe those who have wild dogs and toddlers crying, we can give them a heads up and let them know that, maybe have your partner take them for 20 minutes. Yes, so absolutely.

**Deb:** Well, good. I guess the place I could start briefly is that I had the great opportunity to go to Japan in 1992 to study Shiatsu. My Shiatsu teacher is a Buddhist priest. He also, as people wished, would share with us not a lot of instruction, but share with us the experience of chanting. The chanting is very simple in that we are chanting the name of the Buddha. The reason for chanting the name of the Buddha is to awaken our own Buddha nature. By Buddha nature, it means your own humble, high self, dynamic and humble spirit that wants to experience the oneness with everyone and experience, if you will, heaven on earth, or in Buddhist terms on earth. This experience is peaceful and it is a very relaxing feeling. It is also moment by moment. In this way it takes moment to moment effort to concentrate and moment to moment effort to let go of anything that is in the way of being present and being in this case attentive to and mindful of the Buddha.

There are a couple components. I'm kind of getting into the practical aspect of it first and then glad if there are questions to talk about the origin or the history or the meaning of it. Simply we hold an image of the Buddha. In particular, Amida Buddha. Amida Buddha is a symbol. It is not the historical Buddha who sat under the bodhi tree and reached enlightenment. It is the symbol of the essence and the spirit of the Buddha. Amida Buddha came about during a time that Buddhism was becoming very rigid and strict and seemed to be limited to certain people. People who had money, people who had access to education, men and people who were not disabled, people who could walk. And so, during this time, there were a number of teachers that said the spirit of the Buddha is that everybody, no matter what, can experience their own Buddha nature, their own higher self, their own heart reaching this peaceful, happy state, this awakened state, this enlightened state where there are here moments, a moment there, as we are living here, our earthly life and/or after we pass away. Because of that, the practice is very simple. It's not based on scholarly pursuit, although people are welcome to read and discuss. This is always an interesting part of any kind of study. It's very much holding the image of the Buddha to awaken this kind of ideal state that we all hold and we all have in our hearts, and chanting the name of the Buddha. Those two, plus a third, which is the action of the heart, the action of the heart that wishes the best for all beings, that wants happiness and health and success and good fortune for not only yourself but for everyone.

This is the line of Buddhism called Mahayana Buddhism, which is not just for your own peace and happiness and enlightenment. It is seeing that since we are all one, which is a Buddhist concept, and reality. When you wish the best for others and you do your best for others, develop your giving heart, your compassion, your gratitude, this is raising us all up together. In wishing the very best for others, as we are chanting, as we are holding the image of the Buddha, it brings us into a deeper state of meditation.

I'm going to pause there because I talked a good amount and see, let that sink in, and see, Asia, if you have any questions to help clarify it for people.

**Asia:** Yes, those of you in the class were sent this morning an email that talks part about what Deb is sharing. Those of you who did not get a chance to look at that, I wanted to spell out for you the main

word, Amida Buddha, so you can help visualize and make sure you are pronouncing it right. I guess it makes me think of when I very first met you was at the Willy Street Coop in Madison, probably 20 years ago.

**Deb:** Right, it's been a while.

**Asia:** Yeah, it was a long time ago but I remember the moment that I saw you, I'm like, I want to know her. I just wanted to say hi to her. I wanted to have some kind of connection with her. You carry that energy and essence around you. It's beautiful. It's magnetizing. That is the state that when, in our class here and our teachings we have been talking about clearing out blocks. When that happens and you bring in this energy, whether you call it from the Buddha, enlightenment, the divine, tree energy, when you have that through and through in your body and your cells, your bones, you are magnetizing the animals. Your animals can't wait to talk to you just like people you meet in your life or good fortunes. It is just a beautiful circle of love that is created. I know you are living that. You walk that path.

I'd love to hear a little bit more about the state of non-duality.

**Deb:** Sure, I guess if I can take off from what you were saying about Amida. There's many, often Asian words as well as our Latin based English words, there are many meanings. It's not just one meaning. So, Amida Buddha is a symbol of a Buddha that represents our true self. But, also Ami means no time. And da, Amida, means no space. This is no time and no space so this is infinite. This is the infinite Buddha. It's known as the infinite light and infinite life. Kuu, this is a Japanese word that means beyond duality or non-duality or infinite, . So this state of non-duality, I guess if there is a goal, a personal goal in the meditation, it's to reach this state. Also, as I was speaking before, for everybody to be able to experience this state. Because, you are walking around peaceful and happy but you maybe meet other people who aren't. So, if they can also be, all the better for your life and everyone else's.

So, the state of non-duality is beyond comparisons. Often the human condition and the human mind, we are always comparing. There's nothing wrong with that. It's part of what it is to be human, hot and cold, wrong and right, tall and short, have money, don't have money, this comparison that is very much part of our material life on earth. If you can imagine a state of heart where you aren't comparing, you aren't judging anything about yourself or anybody. It isn't even about time, like, today, tomorrow, young and old, meditating right, meditating wrong, meditating short enough or long enough, being connected to my animals or not so connected to my animals. There always can be these judgments that we are doing. We don't want to criticize that, because again, we are duality. I'm duality. I'm not duality. It's a state that is very peaceful. It's a oneness state. It's a state where there doesn't feel like there is a difference between one person and another person. When you are in this state, you can imagine just the depth, the richness and the wealth of compassion that comes, and understanding and tuning into others and to yourself. This state of non-duality is the state that I believe our eastern meditators were all students of, one way or another, are teaching and wanting us to experience. The practice that we do here, the way in which we enter into it, is both a combination of what I will call self-power and other power.

Self-power is your own effort, getting yourself to the meditation cushion, your discipline to do it and your continual shifting – I will call it shifting – from distractions or thoughts or duality to just being, just being and wishing the best for others. Zen meditation is certainly known for this. What people strive for is basically emptiness, nothingness, where the mind is just completely quiet. In order to do that, you need to field and shift away from all the distractions, inside and out, judgments, comparisons. What I

have found from the beginning when I started chanting with my teacher, Ryokyo Endo, in Japan is that by putting my concentration and not my mind but my heart's attention to how much I want people to be happy, how much I want all beings, human, animal, plant, ancestors that have passed away – when we say all beings, we mean all beings – people to be free and be happy. By putting my attention to that while I'm meditating, it has a focus for how to leave behind the distractions, what to return to.

In Zen meditation, the emptiness – if you ever talk to Zen meditators that have done it a very long time and you ask them- what is this emptiness? What is this nothingness? If you understand anything about Buddhism, often they talk about emptiness, everything is empty, to not attach yourself to anything because everything is impermanent. We are going to lose everything when we pass away. To not attach to anything, instead attach to nothingness. If you talk to anyone who has done this for a long time and is very sincere and authentic about it, they will say, actually when I feel the nothingness there is a presence. There is something. There is the feeling of something. People describe it in different ways and they call it different names. We call it Amida Buddha or the universal Buddha or the oneness of all things or the universal heart, many words for the same feeling. In chanting, in meditative chanting, putting your intention to wishing the best for everyone connects you to the oneness of everything. This is your self-power.

The other power, by other, it is just a word that is a translation of a Japanese word. It means what is out of your control. You could call that the mystery of life or Amida Buddha or universe. But in this way, you recognize and accept that it is not going to be up to your own power, your own control, your own concentration to meditate or to do anything. Sometimes life just delivers you grace, a moment of peace, a moment of inspiration or insight, a feeling of happiness or connection or something working out. By recognizing and being grateful to both our self-power and other power in this practice, the meditative process can be much more relaxing. You need to do your part but you don't do it all. Amida meets us part way.

**Asia:** Beautiful. There are two things I want to touch on briefly as you are speaking. Twenty-five years ago, I had a near death experience and had an opportunity to vividly and completely, twice, experience unity and oneness, at a very profound level. I'm kind of smirking right now in my face because even on the other side in this profound opportunity of bliss, which I did experience, I still found my mind going back to earthly fear. I still found my mind questioning this expansive oneness. So when you even say, yes, our ancestors who have passed over, that we are wishing them the best because it is not like you just become an angel when you die. It does continue on, the challenges of that, that unity when we are here, or on the other side. I even remember when I came back from my near death experience and still retaining the strong part of that blissful, empty sensation and thinking I have no desire for anything. I had been fed by a tube for three months and I had no desire for food, none. I mean it was like they could have handed me a piece of cardboard or something. I had no desire for that. I had no desire. I felt that for maybe many weeks, but then I remember I was in this fire but they wouldn't give me any water. I felt like I was parched constantly. I was on IVs but they wouldn't let me drink anything because I had a trac and so on. All the time I knew I couldn't talk but I would mouth to them, water. That's when it started for me that I desired water. Then I thought in my mind, okay, I'm going to desire one thing. I'm just going to desire water. I won't ever desire anything else. Everything else is just quiet and that's okay. I'm just going to stay in this place of no desire, this peaceful place. That lasted a while but then I desired to walk. You know, it did, it does continue. It is finding those moments and then another moment of going from that desire, that craving, that angst back to that place of, I'm okay, that peace, that divine connection.

**Deb:** I love hearing this, Asia. I know a little bit about your story but I didn't – I love hearing this. It's amazing what you have been through, so much. When you are talking about the desire that arises and what to do with that. It occurs to me, I don't know all of your story, what the feeling is of the desire is. Is the feeling of the desire for more when you were in that state, was it a feeling of discomfort, a feeling of yearning?

**Asia:** Yes, I guess there was discomfort with it, just that body sensation that went on for months. Like, water, I'm begging you for water and you won't give it to me. Finally, actually, my father, who I had a very challenging childhood with him, he was there at the intensive care and he went and got a washrag and dipped it in cold water and put that in my mouth. I thought, I will never desire anything again. I am in utter peace and contentment once more. It was the Holy Grail. I have this wet washcloth in my mouth. I am in divine bliss. Here I am. But you have to keep revisiting that place.

**Deb:** The other thing that has me wanting to share is what can often be this misunderstanding about desire or about the ego or about negativity. You can put all these things in the same camp because you could say desire or your ego – ego being your thought process or your comparing, judging self – or negativity. The self is being against the positive, forward moving growth of life. All of these take you out of that space of non-duality or oneness. But, how do we view them. Are we going to view them negatively? Are we going to say I don't like desire? I don't like ego. I don't like negativity. Anybody who has desire, negativity or ego are bad or off, or get a life. How do I do this?

What I appreciate about the Buddhist view, or in particular Tao Sangha, the tradition I follow, is that they are absolutely necessary in order to grow spiritually. We have to have the ego in order to grow spiritually. It is what we do with it. Without it, if everything was bliss land, human nature, we know, right, we all know, we get lazy. Ah, this is nice. I like the comfort. This is so good. Part of our human nature is to grow spiritually and to help others do the same. So when we can recognize our negativity - and there are a lot of practices we do in Tao Sangha to recognize it without judgment, without fear, without hiding, to see the undeveloped parts of ourselves, the weak parts of ourselves, when we are stingy, when we are greedy, when we are unkind, when we are not honest –and to see them when we desire more than what we are having right now, we are already in the future. To see it and accept it and then shift from it because shifting from something, you accept to something else, is much easier than saying oh, I don't want to feel that. That's not right. I'm bad. This is not good. Trying to shift to something more positive or kind or universal is more difficult if we are negative to what we are shifting from than if we are positive.

**Asia:** Yes, beautifully said. Part of the group's homework they have been having with the animal communication class they are participating in is noticing their emotions. Really, what are you feeling? And to accept all of them. So, something I want to understand is Nembutsu.

**Deb:** Right, Nembutsu, which means the name of the Buddha. Nem is name and Butsu is Buddha. The English way of saying it is Buddhist chanting but literally it means name of the Buddha.

**Asia:** Then the second half is Samadhi?

**Deb:** Samadhi, this is, Samadhi means deep meditation. Basically what we were talking about that oneness state, state of non-duality. This is a spiritual practice of the Japanese pure land style of Buddhism. The purpose of which is to allow yourself and all beings, all spirits, to go to a peaceful and happy state in this world, calling it pure land, calling it enlightenment and to recognize it is right here

and it is right now. Also, another purpose of Nembutsu Samadhi, the practice of the Buddhist chanting, is for everyone to receive the goodness, the merit, the wisdom, the compassion, the majestic power and great love of the universal heart, the spirit of Amida Buddha. This is the purpose. It is for everyone to receive this and everyone to live in this peaceful, happy state. When you first start chanting it can be a matter of patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time. There is wanting to hold the image of the Buddha, chanting the name of the Buddha which may seem very foreign to people, and also wishing from your heart that everyone be happy and healthy and peaceful. And so, in addition, if people come to the center to practice or practice on their own, there is a drum that you keep the beat every repetition of the Buddha's name. I don't know if you can hear the drum a little bit in the background.

**Asia:** Yes, I can. That's nice.

**Deb:** I have a harp and I have a drum here. I thought in the practice I can add these in so everybody can hear them. It's like the beat of the heart, every moment, noticing every moment of your heart you are alive and every moment to shift to these very simple things of connecting to the universal heart and wishing everyone to do this. In the chanting practice there's a lot going on but after a while, people can experience many different and interesting things in the practice. They can experience like they left the room and they don't know where they went or what happened, but they "lost some moments." They were in this state of non-comparison. Comparison is also I have a body and my body is on this floor, on this mat, drumming this drum. You know, you can be very aware of yourself and your surroundings as you are doing it and this is also in this state of comparison, myself, the floor, this moment, next moment the drum. You can lose that state and your body can feel like you are losing your borders, the borders of your body. Or, you can feel an embraced, warm feeling. People feel many different things and there isn't anything you are supposed to feel or have to feel.

Part of the practice we do here is very much to allow people to experience what they experience and also to have a time afterwards to share what they experienced. Not what they thought about what they experienced, but what did you experience? People say all different kinds of things, including, it was kind of hard. I didn't know how to keep up the rhythm or whatever. Other people will say other things like they felt very peaceful and warm. They couldn't explain it. There is the Nembutsu Samadhi practice of actually chanting and then there is in between the practice which is interesting to feel how the practice affects your life, your day to day life. How you can feel more relaxed in your life, more trusting, more giving, you know, more your true self.

**Asia:** Beautiful. Are there particular words or can you tell us a bit more about that?

**Deb:** What the chant is?

**Deb:** So, maybe it is a good time to move into what is the chant we will be doing and what is the meaning and start moving into instructing how to do it so we can have a good amount of time to just do it. The thing we will chant over and over again – in fact, why don't I just chant a little bit? Then I will tell you what I'm chanting and everybody can write it down and then chant with me. We will do a little bit of start and stop here and then maybe we will have a good five or ten minute where everybody together can do it.

So, I'm going to be saying the words Nembu Amida bu. Nembu means to bow, to give respect, to follow. Amida is Amida, no time, no space. And bu is Buddha, so Nembu Amida bu. I will be chanting this over

and over again so I would suggest first if you have a pen and paper, write this down. As you are chanting, instead of mixing up the syllables, you have a place to go to correct yourself with what is being chanted. Feel free to join in and chant with me on your own. I'm going to give us some tones to start.

(Deb chanting)

**Asia:** Beautiful. My head is just buzzing from that. Beautiful.

**Deb:** During this I'm also continuing to be mindful, as if they be mindful of the Buddha. The translation actually, the literal original translation is imagine, image, holding an image of the Buddha. As you know, images are very powerful. We know that in our own personal life and if you look at business with logos and images, the media, we know. We are very much influenced by images because it goes into our subconscious. The deal is, and our subconscious is a whole bunch of everything including our negative stuff, our karma. Karma means habits of the heart. If we hold the image of the Buddha, it goes to our subconscious and it helps to awaken our true self, our Buddhahood, our Buddha nature. I'm not sure if everyone can picture an image of the Buddha. I imagine everybody is...

**Asia:** I actually found an image of Amida Buddha statue that I sent to everyone. Maybe they can use that. It was sent in their email this morning so they could use that if they like.

**Deb:** Oh, good. Just imagine that image. Imagine it in your heart as you are chanting. You can also imagine on the phone call, like a big circle around all of us. Then from there, a big circle around all of our relatives and friends and a big circle, Amida image of the Buddha, completely surrounding the earth. Then from there, completely surrounding the whole universe. It is the universe. You can in your chanting and imaging, hold it in your heart and then expand out from there. If there is someone in particular, a human, animal, anybody or place on the planet you feel you want to send best wishes, you can hold an image of the Buddha in that area, around that person or that pet. At this point, we leave it to everybody to enjoy the image where and how you want and wish the best for that being and for all beings as we practice.

Shall we begin? Maybe we can all do it together for about ten minutes. Then we will have another five minutes at the end, something like that?

**Asia:** That sounds great. We will follow your lead Deb. We will end when you end.

**Deb:** One other thing I can say is feel free to harmonize. Feel free to choose the harmony. This is part of the musical chanting, the music as we all know, unifies everyone. Music does that all over the world. Feel free to harmonize wherever you like. I'm going to do an introduction, which is part of the regular introduction for this part of the chanting.

(Deb does introduction)

(Group chanting)

(Bell ringing)

**Deb:** Thank you everybody.

**Asia:** Wonderful. Just feel that energy moving in and around you.

(pause)

**Deb:** The bell is also used in the practice throughout the chanting. Its purpose is to ring through all the time periods, the past and present and future. Any of our prayerful wishes for others and for ourselves penetrates when we are doing it with the other force, the other power of the Buddha, of Amida Buddha. It penetrates into the past, through the present and into the future. This way, if we are wishing for something from the past to be cleared up or something for the future to open up, not only the chanting and the faith and the bowing to our true self, Amida Buddha, but also the bell continues to ring it through infinity.

Everything I am sharing with you is by the grace of someone else sharing it with me and their teachers sharing it with them. It is a part of a tradition and a line. Anything I am sharing with you it is not my personal idea, my personal practice. This is something that is such a gift, I feel, that I get to share and pass on to others. So, thank you so much everybody.

**Asia:** Thank you so much. We do have a few minutes left if there is anyone who would like to share their experience.

Joanne wrote in French Ami means friend. I found keeping this in mind helped me feel my heart opening to others.

**Deb:** Nice.

**Asia:** Beautiful, wonderful. I kept finding that during it, sometimes I wasn't even sure what I was saying anymore. It just kind of started to be a slur of energy. Then I would open my eyes and think, oh yeah, nembu. Then I would go back into the words of it and then I would start expanding again. I had shared with the group that last week during our meditation, when I was four years old a cat severely scratched my face. Both of its front paws and claws scratched right down each side of my face. Just bloody and I had forgotten about that and I had never communicated with that cat. It came to me last week and tonight that cat also came. This time was just standing in front of me just swaying and moving and – I don't know. I'm just going to cry, just how traumatized I was. My family at that point was so into beauty and always the outside looking good. Here my face is just deep, you know, eight deep grooves of scratches running from my forehead all the way down my face like some crazy native looking. This cat was just saying, I'm here. I love you. We need to keep connecting and talking about this. There is so much more healing for you. So, thank you for that gift.

We have a few more comments coming in from the computer listeners. It says, does the harp have significance like the bell?

**Deb:** I believe it is unifying, . I don't have a traditional meaning of it like I was told about the bell. Music is unifying and so it's a harmony. All parts of the chanting that we do are more and more developing as we go in Tao Sangha with Nembutsu. It's more and more the harmony. It's a way of harmony. Everybody is unique and individual and contributing and you put it all together and it's one and beautiful.

In Japan, they use the koto, the instrument of the koto. It's also a string instrument.



**Asia:** Thank you. We have three more short comments coming in from our computer listeners. Renee says, I'm speechless and very peaceful. I got lost in the energy of myself and others. Thank you for sharing your gift. Thank you, Renee.

Eva says, amazing practice. I can totally feel the energy moving around me. Chills all over my body when we finished. Thank you so much. That is a feeling of peace and love.

I had to put my sweatshirt on too after I got finished. I have the same thing. I suddenly got very cold from all that releasing. The energy was releasing.

Debbie said, when we finished my entire face felt like it was pulsing and even pulsing in my chest. It's interesting because I didn't feel as though I went deep during the actual chanting. I just kind of wanted to stop and listen and absorb but I did keep on chanting. Wonderful, Debbie. Thank you.

**Deb:** This is also interesting. I was teaching some kids the style of yoga we do here this morning. Kids from the shelter come over every now and then. They were very much into the competition of she can go farther, I can't go that far. I kept trying to help them understand it's you go to your limit and just a little more. Then you experience the real benefit of the stretch, not to go farther. I think this is true in the comment we just heard. She wanted to stop but she kept going. So she did put a little more effort in, beyond what she thought she could. This sort of starts awakening this limitless feeling when we go a little bit more, we give a little bit more than we feel we can. This invites the universal Buddha, Amida Buddha, the true self, deep into our hearts. You experience all kinds of things in your body, in your energy and in your life when you do that. It was very nice to hear.

**Asia:** How beautiful to end on that. Deb, I wanted to thank you so much for joining us tonight. What an absolute gift you have given us, this expansion and another opportunity for us to connect with ourselves and with our animals. Now we have Amida Buddha to think about and the energy of the expanding around of the world, around the universe and giving heart. Thank you so much.

All of our callers, my students, love and blessings to all of you this evening and continue to practice what we have learned here. To all of you, a blessed evening and all my love to you. Bye now.