

MEDITATION

THE **LOVE** ISSUE

93

PAGES OF
PEACE, LOVE &
MEDITATION

7

MEDITATIONS
TO GENERATE
EMPATHY,
COMPASSION,
KINDNESS & LOVE

WHAT IS LOVE?

CONTEMPLATIONS
WITH KRISHNA DAS,
DEEPAK, GANGAJI,
+ SATPAL SINGH

ZURI ADELE

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LABELS & FLOW

THE DALAI LAMA

"MY RELIGION
IS KINDNESS."

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**WITH GABBY
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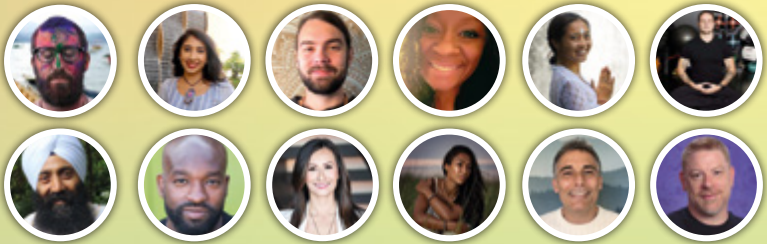
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Editor's Letter



As I sat down for my nightly meditation a few minutes ago, memories from this afternoon flashed before my eyes.

Sky was standing on the Japanese zen table in my office (don't worry, it's

only a foot off the ground), with her arms outstretched. Her sweet little voice played like music in my ears. "Up up up!"

I looked up from the text editor on my laptop. Sky's excited little face was beaming at me with pure love and joy, waiting for me to reach out so she could jump into my arms. I felt it in my gut as the words left my mouth: "Not now, baby. Another time." Her smile barely dimmed as she tried to understand. "I wonder what that means. He always catches me when I say 'up up up.' We're still playing together, right?"

Still at work a few hours later, I missed a call from my mom. She texted to say she'd call back tomorrow. For a moment, a feeling of gratitude arose in my heart. It wordlessly said: "How lucky am I in this moment? Years from now I'll dream that I got a text message from my mom. That day, I'll wake up with teary eyes and an aching heart. But today, right now, these text messages are really here."

These two memories came rushing back in that moment of meditation, just a few minutes ago, mingling together to give rise to a new feeling: "Years from now, when Grownup Sky is off living her life, I'll hear echoes of her tiny voice singing 'up up up!' But now, today, those sweet sounds are really here."

My Letter From The Editor is a sacred space for me. I don't start writing it until the issue is nearly

done, and I don't even think about writing it until I am feeling intensely inspired by some powerful emotion.

Well, it's after 1 am now. I need to wake up in a few hours. But these feelings, for my mother and my daughter, were just so damn heartwarming that I had to get out of bed and write this Letter

From The Editor.

Such is the power of Love: to move our hearts, to warm our souls, to inspire us to do crazy things. It pushes us to sacrifice our time, our sleep, and oftentimes a whole lot more.

This issue of Meditation Magazine is a 100 page meditation on the most powerful force —and perhaps the most important thing — in the Universe: Love.

It's not only about the love we have for our families, our romantic partners and our friends. It's also about tapping into the love in our hearts for all our fellow humans, animals, and conscious beings – in all times, in all Universes. It's about cultivating empathy, love, compassion, and kindness, for all kinds of people – even the ones we've become accustomed to hate or despise. It's about our love for The Universe, the Love in the Universe, and much, much more.

I believe this may be the most important issue we ever publish.

If I had a magic loudspeaker and I could say one thing to all of humanity, it would be this:

"Be kind to each other, and treat one another with love."

Kevin Ellerton, Editor

MEDITATIONS

Guided tutorials to improve your health



Meditations On Love & Kindness

Use these beautiful meditations to practice generating empathy, compassion, kindness & love in your heart!

A Love Meditation

with Kevin Ellerton

After practicing loving-kindness meditations from all around the world, Kevin distills the process of generating love into six straightforward steps.

As we'll discover later in this issue, Love may be something that goes beyond our human nervous systems. In fact, Love may be woven into the fabric of the Universe itself.

But for our purposes, in this meditation, we'll be focusing on generating love within our own hearts, in our own nervous systems.

When I talk to meditation students and clients about loving everyone, many say, "Well, I can love my mother and my daughter, but I can't love this person who wronged me, or people who hold specific political views. I hate those people."

The truth is, your ability to generate love within your own heart doesn't depend on anything or anyone outside of yourself.

It may not be easy at first. In fact, you may try and fail many times. But the very act of trying is what makes you stronger.

Your body and mind grow when you try to do things that are a little bit beyond their capacity. When you go to the gym and try to lift a heavy weight, your muscle fibers tear, and then repair themselves in a stronger configuration, in order to adapt to your needs over time.

The same type of process happens to the neurons in your nervous system when you meditate on generating Love in your heart. When you push your heart, mind, and nervous system beyond their capacity to generate Love, new neural connections form. This ability for your neurons to adapt and grow is called "neuroplasticity." Your nervous system is literally adapting to the increased demand for empathy, compassion, kindness and love.

In this way, the meditations in this Love Issue will increase your body-mind's capacity to generate and experience Love. Every time we try to generate Love, every

time we practice, we strengthen the neural pathways of love in our bodies, and increase our capacity for love in our hearts and our minds.

So how exactly do we practice generating (and experiencing) Love?

Through thousands of years of trial and error, spiritual practitioners around the world have developed methods that help increase our capacity to love.

I've practiced love-generating meditations from many different spiritual traditions, and found that there are four fundamental phases that are important in generating love... and that they tend to work best in the following order:

1. Generate happiness within yourself by bringing your attention into the present moment. This gives you a "full cup" of happiness, which you can share with others.

2. Generate empathy by observing suffering in yourself or in someone else. "Pulling your heart strings" leads naturally into the next phase:

3. Generate compassion by wishing for the suffering to be relieved, and to be replaced by peace & happiness.

4. Generate loving-kindness by taking action to relieve suffering and promote peace & happiness.

In this meditation, we will be practicing these fundamental processes in a simple and straightforward manner:

6-Step Love Meditation

Step 1: Generate happiness in your own nervous system by resting your attention in the present moment. Let go of worries of past and future. Let go of judgment and expectation. Just experience what it feels like to be alive, here and now.

Step 2: Visualize a loved one sitting in front of you. A child, a parent, a sibling, a friend, or even a pet.

Step 3: Generate empathy for this person, by imagining some suffering (pain or struggle) that this person may be experiencing in her life. See it on the person's face. Sit with this suffering for a few minutes, and really try to imagine what it may feel like for this person.

Step 4: Generate compassion for this person, by wishing for the suffering to be replaced by peace and happiness. Sit with this for a few minutes as well, really wishing for this person to be happy and at peace.

Step 5: Generate love for this person, by sending love from your heart to hers. Close your eyes and visualize a beam of love and light flowing from your heart to hers (or his, or theirs), bringing peace, love & happiness from your heart to hers.

Step 6: If possible, practice kindness toward this person, by taking action to alleviate her suffering, and to bring some joy and happiness into her life. In some cases this may be as simple as calling the person on the phone and saying "I love you," or "I'm here for you." In other cases, it may require more intensive action. In some cases, the best you can do is continue sending love from your heart to hers.

It is easiest to generate love when we hold in mind someone we consider to be a "loved one." But we can practice generating love for other types of people as well. To really increase your capacity for love, try this meditation with the following types of people (in order of difficulty):

1. A loved one
2. Yourself
3. A random acquaintance that you see every so often and don't know very well
4. Someone who annoys you, angers you, or has harmed you in some minor way
5. Someone you seriously hate
6. All conscious beings in the Universe

Good luck, and enjoy the love. ●

Author profile



Kevin Ellerton
Kevin is the founder and Editor In Chief of Meditation Magazine. Kevin's passions in life include his family, meditation, spreading love, light & happiness, and being One with The Universe.



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The Heart Meditation

with Lex Smith

Explore the inner experience of your heart center.

Empathy, gratitude, compassion, and joy: these sensations live in and around the chamber of your heart. Much like the brain, the heart knows how to make decisions. But, while the mind is wrapped in Ego, the heart is not, so it is able to make decisions that are easier, softer, and lighter. Decisions, choices, and desires that are led from the heart make life more meaningful. Try the following meditation to tap into your heart:

Find a comfortable spot, either sitting or lying down. Take a few moments to settle into your space. Make sure your body is comfortable, so your mind can focus. Close your eyes, and begin to find your breath. The breath acts as an entry point into your meditation experience. Follow it as you breathe in through your nose, allowing oxygen to land at the bottom of your belly. Continue following your breath as if it is an ocean wave flowing in and out with the tide.

Author profile



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Come into the present moment by releasing any attachments to the past or worries about the future. Allow your senses to ground you further into your experience starting with your sense of sound. Open your ear drums and focus on a sound in your room. What is the furthest thing you can hear? Now focus on your senses of smell and taste. Opening yourself up to your aliveness. What would life be like without these senses? Have gratitude for them now. Tap into your sense of touch by feeling fabrics and air on your skin. Scan the entirety of your skin from the tips of your toes all the way to your scalp. Finally, your sense of sight. With your two eyes closed, turn your vision inward by opening your third eye. Located at the center of your forehead, visualize your third eye turning inward, becoming aware of your brain.

Notice electricity and energy in your mind. Maybe you see colors or shapes. Take a moment to watch this energy come and go as thoughts and consciousness swimming around in abstract form. Give your thoughts gratitude by honoring them. Gently allow the thoughts to release and soften, moving deeper and deeper into your experience. Let go of any attachments to your thoughts and any expectations you have of what you should be feeling. Let the meditation take you on a journey as you bring your awareness down to your heart space. Feel your heart beating. Notice the weight of your heart. Is it heavy or light? Is there tension, tightness

PHOTO: CHRISTIAN FLOREZ @FLOREZMEDIA

or numbness around your heart? What emotions come up while focusing here? We put up walls and barriers around our hearts in order to keep them safe and pure. Repeat to yourself “I am safe and worthy of love” as you breathe into your heart chamber. On the exhalation, release any walls or barriers placed around the heart. Notice that your heart is already lighter as you let go of feelings of guilt, unworthiness, and resentment. Search the depths of your heart for any sensations of bliss, joy, or euphoria by visualizing your heart as a garden of pink flowers and green ivy blooming in all directions. What other sensations do you feel as you focus on your heart? Warmth, tingling, vibrating, sparkling, shining... You are now ready to manifest empathy, compassion, gratitude, and love for yourself and others. Imagine the front of your heart with energy flowing out and away from your body. Sending empathy, compassion, and gratitude out to the people, circumstances, and situations that you love and appreciate. Imagine it being received.

Now imagine this same energy flowing into the back of your heart. This is the empathy, compassion, love and gratitude coming back to you tenfold. This is the love you believe you are worthy of. Imagine this energy continuously flowing into the back of your heart as an endless thread connected to the whole of the Universe, infinitely binding you to divine love and a higher frequency. Stay centered on your heart until the meditation feels complete, knowing that this practice is always available to you. Finding your breath again, gently reactivate your nervous system by opening your eyes and taking your time to move in ways that feel organic. Notice how you feel and write down anything that came up. Do this meditation every day, and watch how your perception of yourself and others shifts. You will feel more grace, dignity, and alignment as you allow your heart to light your way. ●



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A Metta Meditation

with Bob Tenbargo

Generate empathy, compassion & love with Bob’s take on the classic Metta (Loving-Kindness) meditation!

Everywhere around the world, we see divides among people, socially, economically and racially. We hear of religious and ethnic groups at risk of being eliminated. Poor countries can’t afford vaccines and are in danger of starving. We see books being banned, even in our own country, the land of free speech. Our news and social media instill fear, panic and beliefs in us (whether they are true or not). You would be led to believe that all this division is something new, but unfortunately, this is not a new issue. This has been happening for thousands of years. Growing up in a small midwestern town, I witnessed racial riots in the 1960s. I was told that the other people were wrong. I found out that the African American population in our town was banned from our Central Library until 1968, the same year our city council was forced by the U.S. Government to pass the open housing law. Before that, African Americans could only live on the south side of Division Street (that’s literally the street’s name). I went to an all white school; when I graduated in the ‘70s, there was only 1 African American out of 680 students. This divide was accepted and ingrained in us for our whole lives. It has been going on forever, not just now. Metta meditation is a great way to share love and compassion with ourselves and others, with the hope that we can accept others for who they are, no matter what we may have thought or felt about them in the past. When we open our hearts with equanimity, we are able to see others without judgment or reaction, and thereby respond to them in a healthier way. Instead of pitying or “feeling sorry” for

people who are suffering, we approach them with real love, empathy, compassion, and loving-kindness. Buddha described a mind filled with equanimity as “abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill-will.” Below you will find my take on the traditional Buddhist Metta (Loving-Kindness) Meditation. Metta Meditation is designed to help open your heart to empathy, compassion, and loving-kindness, toward yourself and others. We will start by sending love to ourselves. Then we will send love to a “loved one.” Then we will move into some more difficult practices: sending love to a random acquaintance, and sending love to a person with whom you are in conflict, annoyance, or hate. Finally, we will send out love to everyone in the world. I recommend choosing your loved one, random acquaintance, and your person of conflict, before you start the meditation. Send love to yourself May I be safe here. May I be happy. May I be able to share in the joy and happiness of others. May I be healthy, free from disease and injury. May I find ease and well-being in life. Send love to your loved one May (name) be safe, wherever they are. May (name) be happy. May (name) be able to share in the joy and happiness of others. May (name) be healthy, free from disease and injury. May (name) find ease and well-being in life.

Send love to your random acquaintance May (name) be safe, wherever they are. May (name) be happy. May (name) be able to share in the joy and happiness of others. May (name) be healthy, free from disease and injury. May (name) find ease and well-being in life.

Send love to your person of conflict May (name) be safe, wherever they are. May (name) be happy. May (name) be able to share in the joy and happiness of others. May (name) be healthy, free from disease and injury. May (name) find ease and well-being in life.

Send love to everyone in the world May everyone be safe from prejudice. May everyone be safe from hunger. May everyone be safe from the elements. May everyone be happy. May everyone share in the joy and happiness of others. May everyone receive what they need to stay healthy and disease free. May everyone find ease and well-being in life.

Depending on the time you have to meditate, you can repeat each phrase, or each person, several times. Repeating a phrase three times can bring truth to your words. I hope you enjoyed this Metta Meditation practice. ●

Author profile



Bob Tenbargo Bob is a recent grad of Meditation Magazine’s Meditation Teacher Training program (MTT-200)! Bob enjoys bringing people together through Yoga and meditation, traveling, meeting new people, and learning new ideas. You can find him on Instagram @bobsyinyoga and on his studio website yinyangyoga4you.com



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Mark Van Buren
Mental fitness trainer, author & Buddhist teacher Mark Van Buren leads meditation workshops, lectures & retreats in a practical yet accessible way. He offers simple tools and practices that can reduce stress, help with anxiety & depression, manage pain, and transform the difficult aspects of life. Mark is one of the meditation teacher trainers in MedMag's MTT-200 program.



Warning: Tonglen is an advanced technique that should only be engaged by those who already have an established meditation practice.



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Tonglen: Giving & Receiving

By Mark Van Buren

Practice taking in the pain of others and sending out comfort in return, in this powerful & counter-intuitive technique. (Advanced)

Tonglen is an ancient Tibetan meditation, meant to cultivate a kind & loving heart.

The Tibetan word “tong” means “sending” and “len” means “receiving.” “Tonglen,” or “sending and receiving,” refers to the sending of comfort & happiness to others, while receiving their pain & suffering in return.

Yes, you read that right: we are giving away our own comfort and happiness, in exchange for other peoples’ pain and suffering.

Why in the world would anybody want to do this? Well, in this very counterintuitive idea lies the beauty and genius of tonglen.

As meditators, we are able to handle pain and suffering in a way that most people can’t. When we experience pain, we greet it with mindfulness & equanimity (non-judgmental awareness), in the pure, vast “blue sky” of consciousness. We welcome all experiences that arise – the painful, the pleasurable, and everything in between. Through this non-judgmental awareness, we transmute pain into peace, and suffering into serenity.

By “receiving” the pain and suffering of others, we are feeling the pain so that others don’t have to. We then use our power of equanimity to transmute the pain into peace, which we then send out in its place.

This radical and profound method is able to transform our suffering, and the suffering of others, into fertilizer for love, compassion, courage, and wisdom.

The basic premise of tonglen is to visualize yourself breathing in suffering and breathing out relief. Each breath trains your mind to stop its habitual pattern of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, and instead allows you to expand your window of tolerance for what you would normally consider “unwelcome.” By gently receiving

suffering on every inhale and sending out relief on each exhale your mind becomes more resilient, courageous, and loving.

With practice, tonglen will help you increase your ability to welcome the unwelcome, while also deeply connecting you to the shared suffering we all experience. It will show you how to take what you normally want to run away from, and transform it into your path of awakening.

Four Steps of Tonglen

Step 1: Be The Blue Sky. Sit down for a moment, before you start the tonglen visualizations, and rest in a state of open awareness. Reconnect with the vastness and clarity of the mind – the pure, spacious consciousness in which all of your thoughts and emotions arise – that is often forgotten about in the messiness of daily life. This spacious and loving awareness is your true nature. It is vast enough to hold all the 10,000 joys and sorrows of your life. When you begin the tonglen practice by resting in this “Big Mind,” it gives you the courage and strength to actually welcome the suffering that you are about to transmute.

Step 2: Be The Air Purifier. This is the first visualization exercise in tonglen meditation. Imagine that the air around you is filled with thick, heavy, black smoke (representing the suffering in the world around you). On each inhale, breathe in this heavy darkness through every pore in your body. Gather it into the center of your chest, feeling it fully, and allowing your heart to transform it into light, clear, clean energy. On each exhale, breathe out this bright, white, light energy, allowing it to radiate from every pore of your body. Through this exercise, you are basically acting as a spiritual “air purifier,” cleaning the energy of the world around you.

Step 3: Transmute One Person’s Suffering. After you have taken a few breaths with the black smoke visualization, think of a specific painful situation that you or a loved one are currently struggling with. Begin breathing in the suffering of that situation. Let it touch your heart. Then breathe out relief. For example, if you are struggling with an illness, breathe in all the symptoms and pain associated with the illness, and breathe out health and ease. On the inhales feel the suffering, on the exhales breathe out comfort & relief.

Step 4: Transmute The Whole World’s Suffering. After a few minutes of working with this specific situation, expand your practice to include all others experiencing the same suffering. Breathe in the suffering of all beings feeling just like you (or your loved one). Free them from the suffering with each inhale, and send out its opposite on each exhale. Continue doing this for a few more minutes, and then rest one last time in open “Blue Sky” awareness before you end the meditation.

Try taking Tonglen off the cushion!

Aside from being a powerful formal meditation, tonglen can also be a transformative on-the-spot practice. Any time you see suffering as you go through your day, breathe it in and send out relief. It can be done for a moment of anxiety, a homeless person you see on the street, or even a politician who makes you enraged. Anything unpleasant or uncomfortable that you normally would want to run away from can be a place of practice. If you do this every time you experience pain or suffering, something powerful happens: each difficult emotion, person, or situation you meet becomes the training ground for love. ●

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARK VAN BUREN

The Connection Meditation

with Melanie Cerdan

Grab a partner for this meditation, to connect deeply with the heart of another human being!

Meditation is a powerful connector. It connects us to ourselves, our Universe, and the living beings around us. Meditation can be a gateway to profound unions with family, friends, and clients.

The Connection Meditation is meant for two or more people to join souls at a deep level, and may release some beautiful emotions.

Let it flow naturally, and feel free to adjust it to suit your own comfort level.

Sit face to face with a partner (this can be a romantic partner, a child, a family member, or anybody you'd like to connect deeply with). You can sit in a chair, or on the floor in meditation posture.

Hold hands with your partner, and invite them to close or lower their eyelids.

Now guide your partner with deep & slow breathing. Take a deep belly breath: inhale through the nose for a 5 count, and out through the nose or mouth for a 5 count. Continue to do this for five to ten minutes, as you synchronize your breathing and feel the energy connection.

Now invite your partner to open their eyes, and connect to each other through the eyes.

Slowly state the following to your partner, and have them repeat each sentence back to you. Make sure to pause for a few moments (or even for a few minutes) between each of these connectors, to let the energy fill your mind, body, and soul).

I am open to connect with your soul, and I am grateful for your openness to connect with me.
I am energy, you are energy, and together we connect with Divine Love.
I am present, and I honor your presence.
I am Love, and I honor your Love.
I am Light, and I honor your Light.
I am Energy, and I honor your Energy.
I see you, I feel you, and I honor the unique soul that is you.
My heart is grateful for this connection today.

Take one last breath together as you lift hands overhead to end in the prayer pose and bow to one another: "Namaste."
Enjoy the incredible connections this can present, and let the emotions flow naturally.
Modification notes: If you don't feel emotionally ready for deep eye contact, you can keep the eyes closed while speaking the connection statements to each other, or even lie flat in savasana while holding hands. The connection will not be as deep, but you can feel the connection through the hands and the energy of each other's voice. ●



Author profile



Melanie Cerdan
Melanie Cerdan is a recent graduate from Meditation Magazine's Meditation Teacher Training program (MTT-200)! She is also a Life, NLP, and Art Therapy Coach. She likes to share tips for natural healing, work with the energy of the moon, and get lost in her extensive sticker collection. You can follow her work at elev8myvibe.com.

Mantra Of The Month

with Kevin Ellerton

Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu
May All Beings Be Happy And Free

Mantras are sounds or phrases that are repeated over and over, either silently in the mind or out loud.

The ancient Sanskrit mantra "Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu" is often translated into English as: "May all beings be happy and free." If we break down the words in Sanskrit, Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu literally means:

Om is considered, in the Hindu traditions, to be the primordial sound of the Universe. Using Om as the first syllable in a mantra is a way for us to connect with the Oneness of Existence before getting into the nitty-gritty of our specific invocation.

Lokah is the root of the English word "location." In this context, "lokah" means "in all locations," or "in all Universes."

Samastah means "all beings."

Sukhino means "being happy, joyful, satisfied."

Bhav means "together as One."

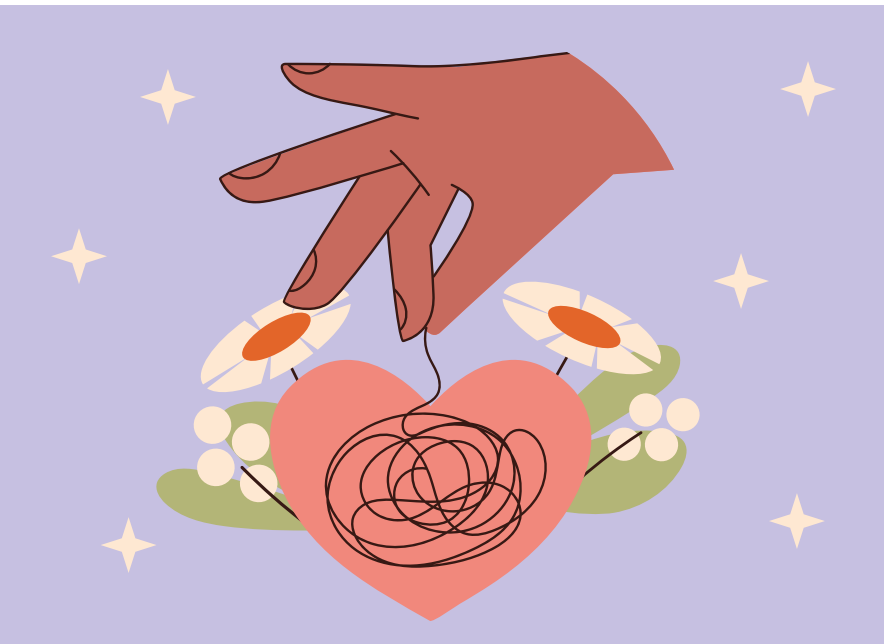
Antu means "may it be so!"

So, literally translated, Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu means: "Om. In all locations, all beings, happy, joyful & satisfied, together as one... may it be so!"

You can see why "May all beings be happy and free" has become the popular translation. It just rolls off the tongue, and sounds beautiful in songs.

You can try chanting this mantra silently in your mind, or out loud, or even with music. You can chant in Sanskrit (Om Lokah...) or in English (May all beings...). It doesn't matter.

The point is to connect with your deep, heart-felt, instinctual desire for all beings to be happy and free. This allows you to dive down deep into your heart and soul – deeper than all the fleeting & turbulent emotions of fear, anger and hate – and luxuriate in the bottomless ocean of Love that is your true nature. ●





Featured Yogi

HEART OPENING FLOW

Practice this simple sequence of asanas to open your heart center and create more space for love to flow!

With Featured Yogi Ravi Dixit

How to practice

Pranamasana (standing prayer pose)
Start standing up straight, with your feet together and hands in namaste in front of your chest.

Hasta Uttanasana (raised arms pose)
Lift your arms up with the palms together, chest open and arch back, looking up.

Padahasthasana (hand to foot pose)
Fold forward with straight legs, move your head toward the knees, put your hands on

the side of the feet, pressing the energy into the ground through your palms.

Chaturanga Dandasana (low plank)
Keep your hands on the floor and jump or step back with both feet, keeping your body in a low plank position parallel to the floor. Make sure to keep the elbows bent, the core stable and don't collapse your back.

Urdvha Mukha Svanasana (upward facing dog, pictured above)
Flatten your toes on the floor, lift your

torso up pressing through the hands, keeping the arms straight and look up. Only the hands and top of the toes are touching the floor.

Adho Mukha Shvanasana (downward facing dog)
Keep your hands in the same position, roll over your toes, press your feet and heels on the ground and your legs backwards. Keeping a straight back, move your head down between your arms, and look at your navel point. →

Author profile



Ravi Dixit
Ravi 'the smiling Yogi' is an Indian Yoga teacher living in London, passionate about making traditional Yoga understandable for everyone. He offers online Yoga classes and retreats in Europe & Asia. To learn more about Ravi check out www.ravi.yoga or follow him on [@raviyoga_goa](https://www.instagram.com/raviyoga_goa).



PHOTOS: JASON HOWE, MOSALIK STUDIOS, RICH MACIVER

Virabhadrasana (Warrior 1)

Step one foot forward between your hands so your toes are in line with your fingertips. Bend your front knee 90 degrees and keep the thigh parallel to the ground. Move the back foot slightly into 45 degrees and find your stability. Keep the back knee straight. Once your legs are in position and stable, inhale, raise your torso and reach the arms up in a straight line with the palms together, keep your back upright and chest open.

Anjaneyasana

(crescent low lunge, pictured right)

Lower the back knee down, flatten the back foot onto the floor, keep your front knee directly above your ankle. Arch your spine so it curves like a crescent moon, keeping the palms of the hands together and stretch your arms back into the full backbend.



TIPS & TRICKS

Before going into any backbends, make sure to warm up the whole body, not just the back. Focus on warming up the hips too as this will make the practice easier.

For beginners, start with Bhujangasana (Cobra pose) to get comfortable with backbends.



CAUTIONS

When doing any backbends, don't force yourself and make sure to always follow with a counter pose such as child's pose or Shashakasana.

In Urdvha Mukha Svanasana (upward facing dog) there is a tendency to lift the shoulder towards the ears. Actively draw the shoulders down from the ears, pull the shoulder blades back, and lift the sides of the chest.

In Virabhadrasana (Warrior 1) + Anjaneyasana (crescent low lunge) it's an easy mistake to bend your front knee too far forward. The front knee should be stacked over the ankle even as you deepen into the lunge.

THE BENEFITS

Backbends

The backbend element of these asanas helps to open the chest, supporting a healthy lung function. They strengthen the muscles in the back of your body while stretching the chest, shoulders and abdomen. These poses improve core stability and general strength in the body, making you feel more grounded and powerful.

Physical Benefits of Backbends

- Strengthens the muscles in your back
- Open the chest and lungs, improving breathing capacity
- Releases tension from the neck and shoulders
- Increases flexibility of the spine and stimulates the spinal cord
- Strengthens the heart

Heart Opening

Backbends are wonderful heart-opening yoga asanas. Opening the Anahata (Heart) Chakra, they offer a path to heal our emotions, to see beauty around us, to receive love and share love, to extend kindness and forgiveness to ourselves and others.

Emotional Benefits of Heart Opening Poses

- Releases blocked energy
- Reduces stress, anxiety and fatigue
- Improves a feeling of peace, freedom and self confidence
- Increases openness to give and receive love

PHOTO: SERAFIM TRAHANIS

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SOOTHING is exactly how it feels. I'm absolutely amazed how powerful this meditation is. OJAYA is the most beneficial meditation I've ever experienced. — Britt Burns, Monterey Park, California ★★★★★

I'M 65, and OJAYA is the best thing I have done for myself in my whole life. So relaxing, so deeply restful. My music now comes from such a profound inner depth. I've never felt so alive, ever. — Richard Bosworth, Bellevue, Washington ★★★★★

MANY TIMES throughout the course tears came to my eyes. WOW! — Rick Blanda, US Air Force TSgt, retired, Warner Robins, Georgia ★★★★★

MEDITATION used to be a chore. Now it's truly deeply relaxing and healing. I've tried many other practices, but nothing compares. The technique pulls you deeper than I had ever imagined. I've never experienced results like this in such a short time. — Nick Bobay, Fort Wayne, Indiana ★★★★★

THANK YOU Sukaishi ... for this wonderful experience ... and for the mastery which you teach these ancient secrets. I'm one of the many who found what they were looking for. You are truly one who works for the happiness of others. — Raia Vicolov, Tulcea, Romania ★★★★★

OJAYA holds the secret people have sought in other courses but haven't found. It's simple, effortless and powerful. All the myths that prevented me from enjoying meditation are now debunked. — Hermes Banguid, North Liberty, Iowa ★★★★★

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Love Saved My Life

How my family's love, along with some CBD, helped me break my opiate addiction

Words by Kalan Kellerhals

The apartment was empty, aside from a couple of camp chairs and some blankets on the floor.

The place felt like it had been neglected, not just physically, but spiritually. It gave me bad vibes; it felt cold and devoid of love and warmth. I felt a shiver run up my spine as I walked through the door. But what could I do? I needed more OxyContin.

My car accident had left me with chronic pain. My (legal) Norco prescription had run out, and this was the only place I knew of where I could get more opiates.

My "pharmacist," Josh, had run out of Oxy and Percocet that day. Instead, he handed me a piece of foil with a small black blob resembling auto grease, a lighter and a straw.

I never imagined I would become a heroin addict. But I was so sick from withdrawal, and in so much pain, that I just didn't care anymore.

The next few years was a blur. Strung out on heroin, jumping from city to city and couch to couch, lost in life. Half the time I was barely coherent.

Six years later, in 2014, I met my wife, Margarita.

She loved me, for real, even though I was still addicted to opiates.

Margarita didn't know the extent of my addiction. She just knew that she loved me, and I loved her.

Even though I had friends and family members who were trying to help me, I had gotten to a point

where I just didn't want to live anymore.

I had gone back to the doctors -- the ones with couches in their offices and degrees on their walls. They happily supplied me with opiates for pain, and Xanax for anxiety/PTSD. But I don't know if they could see how depressed I was in this downward spiral of addiction. I just didn't want to keep going.

It was probably the lowest point in my life.

In the end, it was love that saved my life. My wife and parents poured their love into me, and I was finally able to get sober.

I had tried for sobriety before, and always failed. But this time, I did it!

The love I received from my family warmed my heart enough to push for change. But CBD was the game-changer that allowed me to quit the hard drugs once and for all.

But CBD products were expensive. The doctors weren't prescribing them, and they weren't covered by insurance. So I bought some pure CBD isolate, and made capsules for myself, in my kitchen. CBD allowed

me to ween off of alcohol, Xanax and morphine. It offered me the warm, welcoming embrace my body desperately needed, without all the horrible side effects from other drugs.

The feeling I get from CBD is like the feeling of

love. CBD is all love, all the way around.

It's love from the people who grow it and make it. It's love from the plant itself.

The cannabis and hemp plants have been demonized by governments all around the world, but in truth, these plants are filled with love for all humanity.

Because of the profound impact

CBD had in helping me overcome my addiction, I started a CBD company called Greenthumb Naturals, to share the power of CBD with other people who are suffering in this world.

For over five years now, the hemp-derived CBD products we make have helped me maintain my sobriety, and live a much better quality of life! And we have been able to help thousands of amazing people with our products.

Our mission has always been to create high-quality products that offer powerful results for a fair price. My wife has been by my side, helping me build this business. She even quit her job to focus on Greenthumb Naturals full-time. Margarita and I run this business together, in love, sharing that love with the world through the amazing power of CBD! ●



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Turnip Vegan

Todd Anderson is known to his 600,000+ followers as Turnip Vegan. Enjoy these three healthy, hearty, delicious recipes!

**Serves 3-4****Ingredients**

- 3 cups of Forbidden Rice
- 1/4 cup of chopped green bell pepper
- 1/4 cup of chopped red bell pepper
- 1/2 cup lima beans
- 1/4 cup coconut amino
- 1 batch of Firm Tofu
- 1 tbsp + 2 tsp refined coconut oil
- 2 tsp minced garlic
- 1 tsp fresh ginger
- Salt & pepper to taste

Jerk Marinade

- 1/2 Scotch Bonnet pepper
- 3 tbsp of coconut amino
- 1 tbsp + 2 tsp of jerk seasoning
- 2 tsp of coconut oil
- 2 tsp lime
- Salt & pepper to taste

Mango Cilantro Sauce

- 1 1/2 tbsp of lime juice
- 1 chopped mango
- 1 hand full of cilantro
- Salt & pepper to taste

Method

1. Cut tofu into cubes.
2. Blend scotch bonnet pepper, coconut amino, jerk seasoning, coconut oil, salt, and pepper in a blender. Marinate tofu cubes.
3. Grill Tofu cubes.
4. Cook black rice and set to the side.
5. Sauté garlic and ginger in coconut oil.
6. Add red bell pepper, green bell pepper, and lima beans. Mix and cook. Add coconut amino and cook for 5-10 min in a wok or pan. Add tofu.
7. Blend lime juice, chopped mango, cilantro, salt, and pepper to create the sauce.
8. Enjoy!



Key lime pie drink

Serves 2**Ingredients**

- 5 cups fresh coconut water
- 1/2 cup coconut cream
- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- 1/2 cup fresh key lime juice
- 1/4 cup finely ground graham crackers

Method

1. Muddle graham crackers.
2. Lightly moisten rims of glass with water or key lime juice.
3. Dip the rim of jars into ground graham crackers.
4. Blend coconut water, coconut cream, maple syrup, and key lime juice.
5. Pour over ice and enjoy!



Serves 3-4

Ingredients

- Lion's Mane Mushroom (about the size of cauliflower)
- Vegan Butter
- Salt & Pepper
- Marjoram Powder
- Dried Minced Onion
- Smoked Paprika
- Fresh Rosemary

Tzatziki Sauce

- 2 tsp dried minced garlic
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp + 2 tsp dried dill
- 10-12 leaves of fresh mint, chopped
- 1 cup vegan mayo
- 1 cup dairy-free plain yogurt
- 1 cucumber, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 tsp lemon zest
- Salt & pepper to taste

Other Ingredients/Toppings

- Soft Pita Bread or Lavash
- Vegan Feta Cheese
- Butter Lettuce
- Red Onion
- Kalamata Olives

Method

1. Mix garlic, lemon juice, dill, mint, mayo, yogurt, cucumber, lemon zest, and salt & pepper together in a bowl. Set aside.
2. Prepare your Lion's Mane by cutting off any remaining substrate and cleaning with a soft brush or paper towel.
3. Add Lion's Mane to a cast iron skillet with vegan butter. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, marjoram, dried onions, and paprika. Place a few sprigs of fresh rosemary into the butter. Press the mushroom down with a flat surface until all liquid cooks out. Make sure to flip the mushroom in this process. I use a cast iron press for this.
4. Baste the mushroom with the hot rosemary butter and continue to press it until it is well cooked on both sides and about 1/2 inch in thickness.
5. Build your Gyro, in your preferred bread/pita, the Lion's Mane mushroom, feta cheese, butter lettuce, red onion, and kalamata olives. Top with Tzatziki Sauce.
6. Enjoy in the sun for the best vibes!



Here is a little about me

My name is Todd Anderson, and I go by Turnip Vegan. I was born in the midwest and spent time in Palm Springs. I currently live in San Diego, CA. I am a content creator, recipe creator, and vegan food lover. I was the co-owner of Spoiled Vegans Cafe in San Diego. We closed about nine months ago to rebuild a new direction. I love basketball, yoga, running, meditation, camping, filming, and creating delicious vegan food. We recently got an RV van, travel 50% of the time, and live in SD the other time. We are hoping to do the RV life full-time next year. I went vegan six years ago after watching a documentary. I was living a toxic lifestyle before going vegan. I started cooking when the pandemic started and used a lot of knowledge I learned during my videography days. I have one son, fiancé, and two beautiful granddaughters. I am currently working on mushroom products and ways to help people grow mushrooms at home.



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Compassion In Action

Trauma-Informed Meditation

Trauma is more common than you think.
Here are five tips to guide meditations
from a trauma-informed perspective.

Words by Brenda Bacich



ILLUSTRATIONS: FREEPIK.COM

Trauma is more common than you think.

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing estimates that 70% of US adults (more than 220 million people) have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lives. ~6% of US citizens are diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) every year, while many more experience symptoms of trauma throughout their lives but don't meet the criteria for a clinical diagnosis.

As a Licensed Professional Counselor specializing in trauma and grief & loss, I bear witness to, and hold space for, the pain, anger, helplessness, and fear that often permeate life after trauma.

As meditation teachers, we will inevitably work with trauma survivors in our classes and offerings – even if we don't know who they are or what they've been through. We must be prepared to gently support our students, by being aware of the number of people who carry silent scars. We can do this through adopting a trauma-informed perspective.

5 tips to make your meditation teaching practice more trauma-informed

1

Be aware of the prevalence of trauma.

Many meditation teachers think of trauma as a rare condition that they are unlikely to encounter often in their day-to-day teaching practice. Simply by being aware of the fact that the majority of the population has experienced at least one traumatic event, we can be more sensitive to the fact that we are likely working with trauma survivors in our classes, more often than we may have realized.

2

Create a safe space.

In initiating a yoga or meditation class, I ask those journeying with me to create and hold a space of safety which will be held for ourselves and the others in the room throughout our time together.

I ask that within that space, we let go of competition or judgment of ourselves and others, and begin to allow ourselves to feel a sense of safety as we connect with the energy in the room.

3

Use trauma-informed language.

Many of the traditional words and cues we use when guiding meditations can be “triggering” (or “activating”) to those who are living with trauma. In some cases, a word or phrase can take a trauma survivor into a memory of a traumatic event, and they may experience emotions that feel like the event is still occurring. This is often called a “flashback” and can result in the physiological response of fight, flight or freeze.

For example, the words “just relax” are used in many meditations, and would seem to most people to be perfectly harmless. But for many person who have experienced sexual trauma, these very words may have been used during the assault, and can trigger a flashback. We can substitute other words, like “soften” or “release” at times when we sense it may be helpful to do so.

Even the word “triggered” can be a “trigger” (or “trauma reminder”) for people who have experienced gun-related trauma. We can use words like “activated” instead.

4

Shift from directive to inclusive/inviting language.

Often, in guiding our meditation sessions, we speak in a directive manner, leading our attendees to do and feel certain things. For example, we may say

“close your eyes” or “focus on your breath.”

While this is offered in a gentle and well-intentioned manner, directive language can make a trauma survivor feel like she is being controlled, and reduce her sense of agency. Shifting to more invitational wording – like “I invite you to close your eyes, in your own time, if it feels comfortable to you” – can build trust, choice, transparency, and invite people into the space at their own pace.

5

Evolve our practice while treating ourselves with patience and kindness.

By recognizing that a vast majority of us have experienced some kind of trauma in our lives, we can show more empathy and kindness, and share understanding. This trauma-informed perspective can help us to move toward living a life of intentional compassion and loving-kindness.

At the same time, in being gentle with ourselves, we keep in mind that we, as human beings, will sometimes slip into past patterns. When we recognize that this is occurring, we can modify our language and focus, take responsibility for our actions and make micro-adjustments to our thinking – in the same way that we would gently shift if we noticed that we were not appropriately positioned in our Tree Pose in our yoga practice.

The evolution toward trauma-informed guidance is a journey in being gentle and compassionate, both with ourselves and with those we serve.

The Buddhist understanding of compassion is the wish for others to be free of suffering and causes of suffering. Guiding meditation from a trauma-informed perspective allows us to embody that compassion. ●

“A trauma-informed perspective can help us to move toward living a life of intentional compassion and loving-kindness.”



THE APA'S DEFINITION OF TRAUMA

The APA defines trauma as a “disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning. Traumatic events include those caused by human behavior (e.g., rape, war, industrial accidents) as well as by nature (e.g., earthquakes) and often challenge an individual's view of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place.”

Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness

A Conversation With Dr. David Treleaven

Dr. Treleaven literally wrote the book on Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness. We asked him about facing vs. avoiding traumatic memories.

Words by Kevin Ellerton



ILLUSTRATIONS: FREEPIK.COM, PHOTO: DARREN MILLER

In the long history of psychology & healthcare, Trauma-Informed Care is a relatively new concept.

First proposed by Maxine Harris and Roger Fallot in 2001, Trauma-Informed Care (or TIC) aims to recognize the unique needs of trauma-survivors, and adapt our healthcare systems to better serve those who are experiencing the lingering effects of trauma.

Newer still is the application of TIC to the world of mindfulness & meditation. Meditation itself dates back into prehistory – countless generations before Gautama sat under the Bodhi tree 2,500 years ago. The first mention of Trauma-Informed Mindfulness in the scientific literature dates back only to 2014 (less than ten years ago), when Amber R. Kelly proposed, in her doctoral dissertation, a new model for working with people who have survived interpersonal trauma. She called it “Trauma-Informed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.”

In 2018, Dr. David Treleaven (who has been specializing in mindfulness and trauma for over a decade) published his groundbreaking book, Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness, which demonstrates an empathic, compassionate, balanced approach for mindfulness instructors to work more sensitively and skillfully with trauma survivors.

As with any new field of study, TI-Mindfulness has met with some skepticism from traditionalists within the fields of mindfulness & meditation.

Traditional meditation practices (especially those from the Buddhist traditions) encourage us to observe, accept, and befriend our most difficult thoughts, sensations, and emotions, rather than running away from them. In many traditions, the willingness to face our deepest fears is one of the most important aspects of the practice.

We are currently living in a time when meditation & mindfulness are being touted by mainstream media & many modern McMindfulness mavens as “relaxation techniques” – emphasizing relaxation and calmness, while brushing off the (often difficult) work of sitting equanimously through the raging storms inside. Traditional meditation teachers tend to view this trend toward meditation-as-relaxation as problematic, because it provides new meditators with an incomplete, watered-down “meditation” practice, and causes them to miss out on some of meditation’s most important and powerful components.

Much of the popular guidance in the TI-Mindfulness movement centers around the avoidance of “triggering” or “activating” traumatic memories in the mind & body of the trauma survivor. There are suggestions on how to avoid trauma reminders, calm survivors down, pull them out of traumatic memories, and prevent them from going into states of fear, panic, and hyperarousal.

Meanwhile, scientific studies are consistently corroborating the ancient wisdom that avoiding traumatic memories is actually one of the worst things that survivors can do, and that mindfulness & acceptance are the path toward healing. To quote one major literature review on mindfulness & trauma:

“Mindfulness and acceptance are associated with greater psychological adjustment following exposure to trauma, while experiential avoidance, persistent dissociation, and coping strategies involving emotional disengagement are associated with greater PTSD symptom severity.”

Thompson, R. W., Arnkoff, D. B., & Glass, C. R. (2011). *Conceptualizing Mindfulness and Acceptance as Components of Psychological Resilience to Trauma. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 12*(4), 220–235.

For these reasons, some traditional meditation teachers have viewed TI-Mindfulness with skepticism, worrying that it promotes the avoidance of difficult thoughts, sensations, and emotions, in favor of short-term experiences of relaxation & calm.

But diving into Dr. Treleaven’s book, Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness, we can find a balanced and sophisticated approach to working with trauma.

Rather than taking an extreme position of “always avoid traumatic memories” or “always face fears and practice acceptance,” Dr. Treleaven takes a nuanced approach. Dr. Treleaven explains that the aim of TI-Mindfulness is not to avoid thoughts, sensations, and emotions, but rather to practice more skillfully with them, and work with survivors at a pace that is healthy and manageable for each individual meditator.

TI-Mindfulness is still an emerging field of study. Its insights will need to be fleshed out more fully, so that we can integrate them skillfully into our meditation teaching (and personal) practices.

I sent the following email to Dr. Treleaven (edited for brevity and clarity), and was grateful to receive his response. →



Hi Dr. Treleaven!

In my interviews with meditators & spiritual teachers around the world, I've observed two basic approaches to working with pain and suffering. For simplicity, let's call these two approaches "The Relief Approach" vs "The Acceptance Approach."

The Relief Approach

In "The Relief Approach," when we encounter pain and suffering, in ourselves or others, our goal is to relieve it. We aim to change, improve, transform, or get rid of something that we find to be problematic, painful, or uncomfortable, and to shift into more "positive" states, like calm, relaxation, peace, and happiness. The Relief Approach tends to be the "default" paradigm for western medicine.

The Acceptance Approach

In "The Acceptance Approach," when we encounter pain and suffering, our goal is to stop trying to relieve it. Instead of trying to get rid of pain or change our experience, we accept it, befriend it, and even love it. When we (truly, consciously and unconsciously) accept pain and suffering, and stop trying to relieve them, we let go of the idea that they are "negative" or "problematic." We realize that while pain and

suffering may still be arising, our relationship with those experiences can be peaceful, friendly, and even loving. The Acceptance Approach tends to be less intuitive to us in the west, as it goes against our evolutionary drive to "make things better." Acceptance of pain & suffering is fundamental to many of the eastern spiritual/contemplative traditions.

Balancing the two approaches

We can use different approaches in different situations. We may aim for Relief in some situations, while practicing Acceptance in others. This balancing act is encapsulated in the famous prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

But we can't apply both approaches at the same time. The Relief Approach is founded on the idea that "pain is a problem that needs to be fixed." In order to motivate ourselves to take action to relieve the pain, we must hold this "problem" idea in our minds, until it is "fixed." The Acceptance Approach, on the other hand, is founded on completely letting go of that idea — that "pain is a problem that needs to be fixed" — which is precisely the thing that prevents us from accepting pain in the first place. We cannot hold an

"The goal is to empower trauma survivors with tools to help them work skillfully with their own experience."



1. LINDAHL, J., FISHER, N., COOPER, D., ROSEN, R., AND BRITTON, W. (2017). "THE VARIETIES OF CONTEMPLATIVE EXPERIENCE: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF MEDITATION-RELATED CHALLENGES IN WESTERN BUDDHISTS." PLOS ONE 12(5). E0176239

idea in mind, and let it go at the same time. Therefore, we are unable to work toward relieving pain while at the same time (fully) accepting it... and we are unable to truly accept pain without giving up the goal of relieving it.

Where does Trauma-Informed Mindfulness fit in?

The TI-Mindfulness Movement is a child of two very different parents. The "Trauma Informed" perspective is born out of the western medical paradigm of Relief, while the "Mindfulness" is rooted in eastern spiritual traditions of Acceptance. This places TI-Mindfulness in a tricky spot: do we approach trauma with the goal of Relief — avoiding activating traumatic memories, cultivating states of calm and relaxation, staying within the window of tolerance, etc? Or do we approach trauma with the goal of Acceptance — allowing traumatic memories to arise, allowing states of calm/relaxation and anxiety/tension to come and go, allowing ourselves to flow in and out of our window of tolerance, etc?

Q&A WITH DR. TRELEAVEN

Meditation Magazine: Can The Acceptance Approach ever be appropriate for working with trauma survivors, or should we always lean toward Relief?

Dr. Treleaven: Yes, the Acceptance Approach is very appropriate for work around trauma. In fact, it's essential!

What I point to in my work is that it needs to be a blend between what you call "acceptance" and "relief." Trauma survivors can learn to "accept" traumatic sensations, for example, but there are also times to back off in the service of healing. More is not always better with Acceptance, and we need to employ a wide range of tools in practice.

MM: In your book, Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness, you mention the possibility that trauma survivors may "re-traumatize" themselves in mindfulness practice, and thereby incur lasting damage in their attempts to practice mindfulness. What would re-traumatization look like? Have you ever seen it in practice, or in scientific studies? Could re-traumatization be avoidable by approaching the practice with a goal of equanimity and Acceptance (rather than Relief), as described above?

Dr. Treleaven: Re-traumatization in practice can look like extreme dissociation, or reliving traumatic events in a dysregulating way. This has been documented

in the Varieties of Contemplative Experience study¹, which is the largest qualitative study on meditation-related difficulties ever held.

Re-traumatization can absolutely be avoided by employing a mix of "relief" and "acceptance" practices, where it's okay to back off of traumatic memories or sensations when it's overwhelming.

This isn't to say the point of meditation is to be comfortable — on the contrary, we're practicing so that we're able to stay with difficult experiences. But traumatized people need more than just basic acceptance and mindfulness-based practices to work skillfully and safely with trauma.

MM: In your book, Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness, you talk about the "Window of Tolerance" — the "safe" zone between hypo-arousal and hyper-arousal. The implication is that when we are inside our Window, we are able to self-regulate, grow, and heal... but when we are outside our Window, we are unable to grow or heal through mindfulness & equanimity. However, in some contemplative traditions, practitioners intentionally put themselves into states of hypo or hyper-arousal as a way to practice equanimity, expand their Windows of Tolerance, and bring Acceptance into every aspect of life. As an extreme example, the Aghoris of India meditate with corpses in graveyards, ingest high doses of mind-altering drugs, and generally spin dizzily, chaotically, and euphorically through the ups and downs of life. It occurs to me that this type of Radical Acceptance approach could be a possible alternative for working with dysregulating thoughts, sensations, and emotions, like those that arise in the minds and bodies of trauma survivors. What is your take on this?

Dr. Treleaven: There are absolutely times to push our edges in practice. These experiences can create life-changing breakthroughs.

With trauma, things are a bit more complicated. Trauma survivors often need to confront their trauma, but if they do so with too much intensity, they can overwhelm their nervous system.

In Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness, the work is to help people learn how to self-regulate when they're feeling overwhelmed. The goal isn't to avoid trauma, or always stay in a window of tolerance. It's to empower trauma survivors with tools to help them work skillfully with their own experience. ●



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OBSERVATIONS

Research Into The Nature of Reality

Love Thy (Partisan) Neighbor

Otto Simonsson is
conducting studies
in the US and UK,
testing "befriending
meditations" on
Democrats &
Republicans, Leavers
& Joiners.

Words by
Otto Simonsson

PHOTOS: FREERIK.COM

The degree to which partisans dislike each other – a phenomenon known as affective polarization – has become worryingly high in many parts of the world, especially in the United States, where tensions between Democrats and Republicans has become rife. A similar pattern has been observed in many other countries such as the United Kingdom, where the Brexit referendum created deep divisions between those who supported leaving the European Union and those who did not. Although there has recently been an upsurge of research into affective polarization, very few studies have tested scalable and effective interventions to reduce partisan animosity. New and bold methods are required to tackle it.

In 2013, a novel and unique initiative was introduced into the UK Parliament, where British

politicians were invited to attend an eight-week mindfulness course, taught by teachers from the University of Oxford's Mindfulness Centre. The UK initiative was not the first of its kind (mindfulness training was introduced in the Swedish Parliament shortly before), but the anecdotal reports that came out of it have been nothing short of extraordinary. In fact, many of the elected officials in Westminster have reported a range of benefits relevant to work in politics, including their ability to manage stress and approach differing views with less antagonism. The success of the initiative has even led to the launch of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Mindfulness, which is a cross-party that reviews

“With the appropriate interventions, it is possible to reduce these feelings of animosity.”

Otto's Studies

- **Bridging the (Brexit) divide: Effects of a brief befriending meditation on affective polarization**
(Read at link.springer.com)
- **Love thy (partisan) neighbor: Brief befriending meditation reduces affective polarization**
(Read at journals.sagepub.com)
- **Effects of an 8-Week Mindfulness Course on Affective Polarization**
(Read at plos.org)



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

and discusses the evidence on mindfulness and how it can be integrated into national policy.

The anecdotal reports from the UK initiative have broadly been in line with the growing body of evidence showing the benefits of mindfulness-based interventions, but no research had, until recently, investigated the effect of mindfulness meditation and other related practices on affective polarization. Because of the testimonials from the British politicians, we conducted a number of studies to better understand whether such interventions might be helpful in contexts of partisan animosity.

In one study, we recruited participants

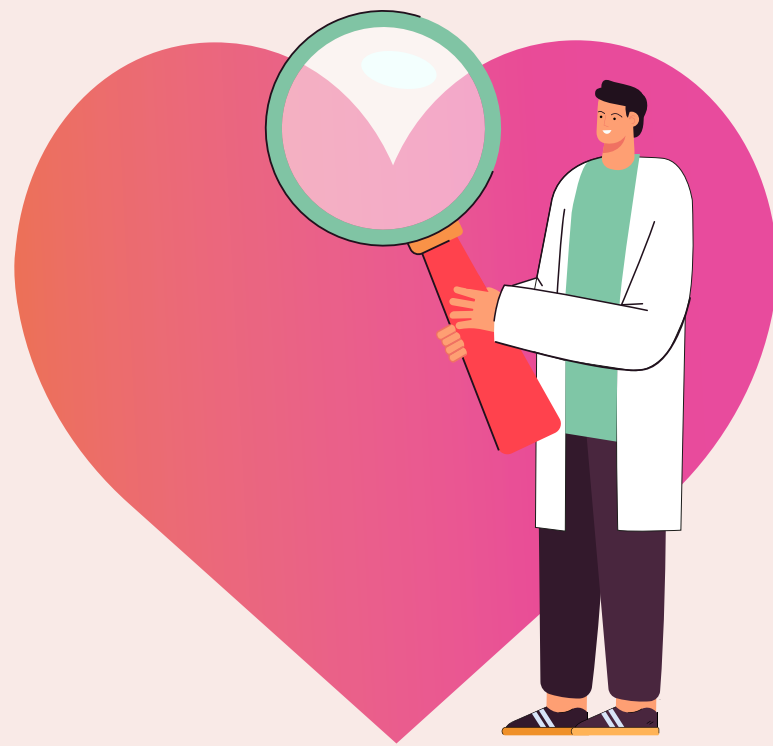
in the United Kingdom who identified as ‘Remainers’ or ‘Leavers’ in the Brexit debate and randomized them into an eight-week mindfulness program (similar to the program taught in Westminster) or a waitlist control condition. The results showed a reduction in affective polarization among participants in the mindfulness condition, compared with participants in the waitlist control condition. In another study, we recruited Democrats and Republicans in the United States who were randomized to listen to a 10-minute befriending meditation (an exercise that involves bringing a sense of kindness and friendliness toward oneself and others) or an active control condition. The results showed that the participants in the befriending meditation condition scored lower on affective polarization than the participants in the active control condition. And in yet another study, we recruited ‘Remainers’ and ‘Leavers’ in the United Kingdom and replicated the results from the previous befriending meditation study. Taken together, these are promising findings and suggest that different types of meditation may reduce partisan animosity in certain contexts.

We live in times of upheaval and many societies have become increasingly divided along different dimensions such as race, political beliefs, and vaccine attitudes. The findings from our research suggests that these problems are not intractable. With the appropriate interventions, it is possible to reduce these feelings of animosity, which can hopefully facilitate opportunities for dialogue. While much more research needs to be conducted at the intersection of the contemplative and political sciences, we hope more nations and policy makers see the potential of mindfulness training and other related practices to create a less antagonistic and more cooperative political environment. ●



Author profile

Otto Simonsson is a postdoctoral researcher at Karolinska Institute's Department of Clinical Neuroscience, where he conducts experimental and epidemiological research on meditation and psychedelics.



Love, Scientifically

To get a scientific perspective on love, Kevin interviewed Alan Cowen, one of the world's leading computational emotion scientists.

Interview by Kevin Ellerton



Dr. Cowen got his BA in Applied Math and Cognitive Science from Yale University, and PhD in Computational Psychology from UC Berkeley. He spent the better part of a decade helping to develop human-centered AI based on computational emotion science at Google. Dr. Cowen is also the founder of the research lab Hume AI, which does fascinating research into integrating AI with emotions, to understand our emotions better, and to integrate emotional intelligence into AI.

Meditation Magazine: What is Love, from your perspective as an emotion scientist?

Alan Cowen: From my perspective, “love” is a lot of things. We have relationships that we call “love.”

There are chemical foundations [of love] in our brains. But what I really view as “love” is the actual emotion of love, in the moment.

It’s kind of the best feeling in the world. That feeling of love is very important for establishing long

term relationships and commitments, and really caring for each other as humans. That feeling is also important in being able to have a society, and to cooperate in the way that humans do – the very things that make us so successful as a species.

MM: Love is a pretty broad term, encompassing things like romantic love, parental love, and even empathy/kindness/compassion. I know that your work is largely focused on analyzing and breaking down the similarities and differences between emotions. What are the similarities and differences between different kinds of love?

Alan: There are overlaps and differences in the ways that people express different kinds of love – patterns that we see even across multiple cultures around the world. For example:

PARENTAL: There are ways that parents talk to their children, around the world. We call it parentese (it

used to be called motherese, but fathers do it too!). Parentese has a really specific pattern to it, in the voice and the face. The parent-child relationship is asymmetric, with one person who is more caring, and another who’s more vulnerable.

ROMANTIC: Then there are more symmetric relationships, like romantic love. There are patterns in the expression of romantic love that are different from parental love, but there are also some similarities between the expressions of parental and romantic love, like people speaking in a higher tone, breathier, or slower.

COMPASSION: And then there’s the compassion, or even sympathy, element where we try to comfort each other if something bad happens. And that is something that also has its own signal that is widely recognized across cultures.

So, there are many different kinds of love signaling when it comes to the way we express these different emotions.

There are also corresponding similarities and differences in the ways we experience different kinds of love. There’s the feeling of being moved, being brought to tears, that happens to some extent across all of these different kinds of love... whether you’re watching a rom-com or interacting with something really adorable.

And there are individual elements to each kind of love as well. Like with romantic love, there’s an element of desire in there. There’s sexual desire, but there are also feelings of jealousy or exclusivity, that enable you to navigate these kinds of exclusive relationships. [These are elements that you would not find in empathy, loving-kindness or parental love.]

MM: Is Love a conscious or unconscious act?

Alan: It’s not so black and white; it’s more of a competing thing in your brain.

When we have emotions, it’s often because we need to choose between competing ways of thinking and behaving. Emotions guide us, and influence our conscious decisions. That’s why we have these emotions.

For example: when you have a chain of thoughts, there are different branches of thoughts that you can go down. In between thoughts, there are decisions to be made: “Do I go down this branch? Or do I go down this branch?”

And your emotions dictate: “Oh, I’m feeling more suspicious, so I’m going to go down this branch.” Or, “I’m feeling more trusting, so I’m going to go down this branch.”

We can’t really choose, consciously, which branches to go down, because all of these decisions happen in between thoughts. Our ability to choose is more of a long-term thing, by deciding what we want to focus on.

We can cultivate certain emotions in the long term. People are very good at that. It’s a matter of controlling what you attend to. What kinds of thoughts do you foster in a relationship? Do you default to trust, or do you default to distrust?

A lot of that is influenced by our upbringing, our environment, and how we are raised. And of course that indicates that there’s a huge influence of things we can cultivate. All of the things in our environment are things we can cultivate.

How do we pick relationships? Who do we surround ourselves with? Meditation and other practices can certainly influence our long-term patterns as well.

MM: Do you think that meditation can help us make more conscious choices of the emotions and thoughts that we go into?

Alan: Absolutely. Particularly introspective traditions like mindfulness meditation.

It’s like: “Oh! This is the thought that’s happening right now, and I’m aware that I have a choice between many thoughts.” That awareness helps you understand how different practices lead to cultivating different kinds of thoughts.

It makes you more conscious of what you attend to, how you live your life, and all of that, long-term and short-term, that allow you, to the limited extent you can, to control those thought patterns.

That’s certainly one way.

And loving-kindness meditation is made to cultivate certain thought patterns as well, more explicitly. It’s like, “Let’s go down THIS path.” As opposed to just being an introspective tradition.

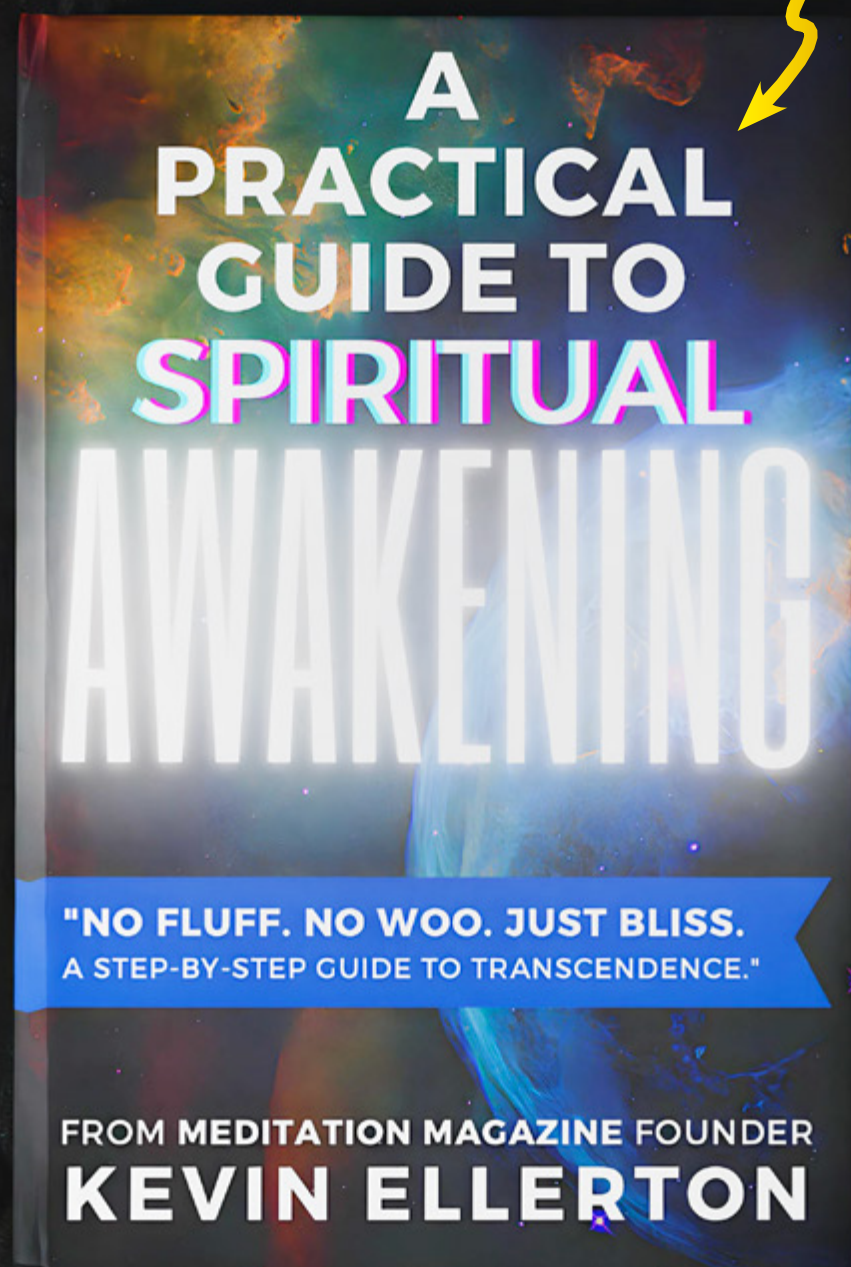
MM: Are we born with Love, or is it something that we learn over the course of our lives?”

Alan: We are definitely born with love.

Even the first relationship we have is a relationship with our mother, father or parental figure. That is a relationship that is defined by love, and by the expectation of a person expressing love toward you. And if you don’t have it, it messes you up.

How we experience love in our lives is something that is dramatically influenced by our environment, by our upbringing, and the extent to which different kinds of relationships are modeled and cultivated. ●

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CONTEMPLATIONS

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What is love?
An emotion? A state of
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Deepen the love in
relationships – with
yourself, friends, family,
lovers, and even
Life Itself!



78 EMPATHY, COMPASSION & KINDNESS FOR ALL

Let us love one
another and heal this
divided world.



LOVE IS OUR TRUE NATURE

Later in this issue of Meditation Magazine, we'll be exploring specific types of love, like empathy, compassion, kindness, romantic love, parental love, and more. But we wanted to start the conversation on a deeper note, by diving into the fundamental nature of Love itself. So we asked a few of the elders of our tribe – Gangaji, Deepak Chopra, Satpal Singh & Krishna Das – a simple yet profound question: "What is Love?"

Here are their answers.

Interviews by Kevin Ellerton

SATPAL SINGH

Sikh spiritual leader and
founder of Nanak Naam

Kevin: What is Love?

Satpal: You've gone right into one of the deepest questions, and one of the most profound concepts in all spiritual wisdom.

There is the love that most human beings know of, which is always dependent on another. You have to love your friends, your family... we have love for our pets, we love our hobbies, our interests.

And sometimes, even with that same mentality, we are told that the highest love is to love yourself, almost as though your "self" is something else, that is also worthy of love.

But then there is a far deeper version of love. In the tradition that I come from, that is the tradition of Guru Nanak, he says (in one of his opening lines in the holy verses, captured in the scripture called the Guru Granth Sahib), that "The Universe speaks in Love." That the very language of the Universe – "Infinite One speaks the language of Love." And that kind of love isn't dependent on anything else.

True love is like a fountain that's flowing within you. It's always flowing, it never stops, and it's not dependent on someone else.

The sun is always radiating its light. It doesn't choose who to radiate to. And in the same way, if we become a fountain of love, then whoever comes to cross our paths, they will receive that love. Not because we have chosen to provide love to that person, but because love is that innate nature within us.

An easier way to understand a concept like that is that the Universe is always giving.

I am very fortunate that in my back garden I have some apple trees. And I'm always, so wonder-struck by how abundant the Universe is. We do nothing for that tree. We don't even water it. The rain naturally waters it. And every year, it gives thousands upon thousands of fruit! And we're always so amazed that we can't consume that much which it is giving.

So, its nature is to just continually give. The sun is always shining. The seasons are always providing for

us in different ways. The air is always giving us the perfect oxygen that we need.

The Universe is giving us an example of what love is really like. We need to be able to listen to that love, and then see if that is something that is true of us. Because we are part of The Universe, so, at our core level, we are that love as well. ●

"True love is like a fountain that's flowing within you. It's always flowing, it never stops, and it's not dependent on someone else."





PHOTO: DAN BAUMBACH

GANGAJI

American spiritual teacher, devotee of Papaji

Gangaji: We often think of “love” as a separate emotion; the emotion we want most.

But a great discovery is that love is at the bottom of all emotions, even the worst emotions.

Let’s take a moment to be willing to experiment here, in this self-discovery meditation.

Let’s start with what we would call a “negative” emotion: fear.

In meditation, we can experience these “negative” emotions, and we can experience them purely.

I’m inviting you to drop deeply, into your body, into your belly – maybe into your solar plexus – and remember a time when you were afraid.

You can be aware of what you are telling yourself about this fear; what the language of fear was in this particular incident. You can push this narrative, or story, aside, as you let your attention fall deeper within your body, and give yourself permission to directly experience the feelings of fear.

In this moment of inquiry and direct experience, can you be aware of an emotion or feeling that’s deeper than fear? Or perhaps you experience it as “closer” than fear?

Maybe it’s another emotion. Maybe it’s sadness, or grief, or even perplexity that you would be doing a meditation in this way.

But for the purpose of this meditation, at this moment, just surrender any narrative about what you are experiencing, so that you can directly, fully, intimately experience whatever emotion is present.

In this direct experience, you can recognize what is underneath all these so-called “negative” emotions. There may be fear, sadness, or even despair. But underneath that, closer than that, is the spaciousness of your own being.

In your willingness to stop telling a story about an emotion, you can open to directly experiencing that emotion.

If you recognize another story or narrative being generated, you can let that story go.

You can meet what’s here, at the bottom of fear, in this spaciousness. You can discover the quality of the spaciousness. The freedom and love that is present in the spaciousness.

The spaciousness doesn’t exclude any emotion – it is recognized to be at the core, at the bottom, of every emotion, however big or small.

That love is home.

That home can be experienced wherever you are, whatever situation, fear or anger, grief or despair you have experienced. In your willingness to directly experience it, this great discovery of love, that is always fresh, is a recognition of your true face.

Home.

Om.

Love.

Even after this meditation, at any moment, you can check, and you can see: “Is home here? Is love here?”

And if you’re having difficulty finding it, you can just stop, and meet whatever is here. Because whatever is here is only here because of love, in the core, at the bottom, of your own self.

MM: What is love? Is it an emotion? Is it some quality of the Universe? Is it tied to spaciousness? Is it some aspect of reality that transcends everything?

Gangaji: What is love? Indefinable, unspeakable. And yet, we are compelled to define it and speak it. Whatever I say, or anyone says, or whatever we understand, is bound to be limited.

There is something so big [about love], that we certainly don’t understand it. And we can’t define it. But we have the capacity to experience it.

Sat-chit-ananda (the ancient idea that the nature of reality is One convalescence of existence-consciousness-bliss) is the central form of our spiritual seeking and spiritual recognition. Consciousness, aware of itself, as being, and then overflowing in love. Not separate.

Sat-chit-ananda, the way I’m using it, is one word. It’s not love over here, and being over here, and consciousness over here. That’s the beauty of Sanskrit. It actually can reflect reality more accurately than most of our Western languages.

One thing. Consciousness, aware of itself, as being. And in that, overflowing in love.

We are never absent from love.

There is an emotion that reflects love... but maybe that’s not even an emotion. Maybe that is – for a moment, we aren’t distracted by our emotional states. Our emotions – the anger, fear, despair, sadness – when we meet those, when we aren’t worried by those, there is just this warm presence of love, →

what today I'm calling "home."

For me, love is the substance of life itself.

MM: Would you say that love goes beyond life?

Meaning: even if no conscious beings existed, would love still be embedded in the fabric of the Universe in some way? Or does love depend on us, as conscious beings, to experience it?

Gangaji: It seems to me that physics, and quantum physics, have shown that we can't pin down "life" as a thing. But "life," as somebody said long ago, "as a verb, as living, as the subject rather than the object," we have our own direct experience of that. And it's only a certain kind of arrogance that would make us assume that that's only located in this person, in that person – that it's not located everywhere, in all form.

MM: Would you say that all the emotions emerge from love in a certain way?

Gangaji: Yes. Love is not separate from anything, and love is the reason we have other emotions.

It's because we love our life and our body, that we have fear when that life and body are threatened. And so fear, in that positive sense, is serving what we love.

Of course, given the complexity of our brains, our emotions, and our situations, fear can become just a habit in itself, of the brain just firing [electrical and chemical impulses of fear]. And in that sense, it may be hard to imagine that fear is not separate from love. But fear can be directly discovered as inseparable from love, in the willingness to open to [the experience of] fear. The idea is not to open to

the narrative of fear, because that could be endless – you're going down a road in that one. The idea is to stop going down the road, and be willing to open [to the subjective experience of the feelings of fear].

[When we open to] fear... under that [we may find] despair, which is also common. Because we know we are being, and we love our being. We love our form, and we are afraid if it's threatened. But also, we know that we will die. There's an existential knowledge that influences us emotionally. Really, a deeper emotion under the fear can be profound grief at the future loss of our lives, or at the loss of other lives in present time, and even despair at the fact that there's nothing we can do about that... that this body will die! We know that intellectually. But we also know that in a deeper way. And it's threatening. What it threatens is that we will lose love. We will lose ourselves.

So we put up these barriers. Anger is a barrier. Really, under anger is fear. You're angry, and you're protecting, because you're afraid something you love is threatened.

It can be examined at all levels – superficial levels, and the most profound – and found to be true.

MM: Wow. While you were talking about tracing anger to fear to love, I was thinking about the fights I have with my wife. When I open to the feelings of anger, I can feel the fear underneath. And if I open to the fear, I can feel that what I'm really afraid of is that we will lose the love we have between us, and with our daughter. It all traces back to love at the core. And in those times when the anger is most intense, often afterward there's a cathartic crying that comes back to the deepest parts of the love that's there.

Gangaji: How beautiful, this concrete example. That's what's essential, that it not just be an abstraction, to say "Well, it's all based in love." We must be willing to experience what is here. Then we can have empathy.

You love your wife, yet you know how you can fight and disagree with your wife. And look at our culture, and our world! We may be fighting and disagreeing with people we don't know and love.

But if we are willing to see that the anger and the grief of that is based in the fear of losing love, and if we are willing to meet that, then when you discover "I am love," it's not "I am loving, you are not." "I" IS love.

As challenging as relationships are – even in deep love relationships, and certainly in political, social relationships – we must be willing to not hate our hate, or fear our fear, or be angry with our anger, or fight our fighting... but just to open to it.

That then is the call of love. It's the call home. ●

"Love is the reason we have other emotions."



KRISHNA DAS

Spiritual musician, actual rock star, and devotee of Maharaji, Neem Karoli Baba

KD: Love has no object. Love is the subject. It's everything. There's no one loving, in real love.

So, what we experience with a being like Maharaji [Neem Karoli Baba, KD's guru] is unconditional love, because there's no one there to have conditions. There's no one judging: "This one's good, I love him more, I love her less," and this and that. There's just a flow.

The Sun is a good example of unconditional love. It shines on every motherf!@\$ in the Universe. It shines on the worst people and the best people, equally. It doesn't say, "Well, maybe I shouldn't shine too much on that guy. You know, he's a miserable guy." No, it shines. That's love. That's real love.

And that's Maharaji. That's what we call Maharaji.

Our understanding of Maharaji is that there was no one loving. There was only love. That love responded naturally to the karmic situation of everyone and everything around it. There was no agenda: "OK, I'm going to shine a little bit more over there."

MM: This reminds me of something you wrote about KC Tiwari:

"Once I was very much in love with a woman. I was telling my Indian father, Mr. Tewari, about it and he was listening very patiently. When I finished he said, 'My boy, relationships are business. Do your business. Enjoy your business. But love is what lasts 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Real love is who we are; it's not between people. It's not affection, it's not caring, not attachment. It's →

actually who we are. It's our true nature."

Do you feel that our true nature is love, even when we don't realize it, even when we're not embodying that? Or do we need to cultivate love in order to "be" it?

KD: All we need to do is clean the mirror of our hearts. Everything we see "out there," we're looking into a mirror, and seeing "our version" of stuff. And our version of stuff is based on our own attachments and aversions, likes, dislikes, etc. So as we free ourselves of that conditioning, what we see changes. How we see the world changes.

When I had that conversation with Baba, he said, "Do your business! Enjoy!" There was no judgment about the "business." He was just pointing out to me that relationships are based on multiple people, relating with one another.

Each one of those people thinks they are who they think they are, and they're relating based on that.

But True Nature is always the same, in every being, all the time.

It doesn't need to be cultivated. What needs to be cultivated is awareness of it.

And that's not a willful [cultivation]. You're not making yourself aware, you're recognizing awareness. It's very subtle.

That's why we have to start with just calming the mind down. And all these thoughts... it's just idiocy. It makes no difference, all this shit that we think. All we need to do is calm our asses down. All the answers will come from inside." ●

"Love has no object. Love is the subject. It's everything. There's no one loving, in real love."

DEEPAK CHOPRA

Popularizer of meditation & mysticism in America

Deepak Chopra: What is love? That in itself has been the biggest mystery of existence. Just like awareness and existence, everybody feels this thing that they call love. But if you ask them to explain it, they can't.

It's a sensation, actually, in your body. Somewhere in your heart. And sometimes if you're madly in love, every cell of your body is intoxicated with love.

So, what is love? Quoting the Indian poet Tagore: "Love is not a mere sentiment or emotion." Not a MERE sentiment. Of course it is a sentiment, and an emotion. But love is not a MERE sentiment or emotion... it is the Ultimate Truth at the heart of creation.

And what is the Ultimate Truth at the heart of creation? There is one Consciousness, differentiating into different knowers, different modes of knowing, and different things known.

A human being is just one species of consciousness. But consciousness, being infinite, differentiates into all species of consciousness.

Just like when you were conceived as a fertilized egg, you were one cell. Then you divided fifty times. One cell became two, two became four, four became eight, etc. Within only fifty divisions, you were thirty or forty trillion cells – more than all the stars in the Milky Way Galaxy.

Now, eyes look different from nose. Nose looks different from teeth. Teeth look different from heart. But they all came from one cell. And this process is called morphogenesis and differentiation. Morphogenesis gives rise to form. Differentiation: one becomes many. Not separation. The stomach cell is not saying "I'm separate from the heart cell, so I shouldn't digest food for the heart." The heart doesn't say, "I'm giving oxygen to everybody. What am I getting in return?" They function as one whole system. Similarly, you and the Cosmos function as a system.

So where does love fit in?

Love starts as a personal thing. You love another person. You can love a person without sexuality or

intimacy, or you can love a person with sexuality and intimacy.

Human love goes through certain phrases.

First stage: Attraction.

Second stage: Infatuation. Deep attention, affection, appreciation, acceptance.

Third stage: Communion. There's a sense of equality, and you're speaking at the level of the soul.

Communion can lead to intimacy and sexuality. Which can then lead to surrender and non-controlling, non-manipulation. Surrender can lead to ecstasy, and ultimately to transcendence.

So this is the journey of love that we all experience.

But unfortunately most people stop at the first or second phase, because they realize that the one they loved is not (the idealized object) that they thought they were. And they forget that "you" – the one who is loving – is similarly not what you think you are.

So, love doesn't move beyond the stage of infatuation, normally.

But if we surrender again to the deep mystery of love as the Ultimate Truth at the heart of creation – not separation but differentiation, the one becoming many – then every impulse to love is to go back to our source, which is divine.

T.S. Elliot said: "We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." And that place is love. ●

PHOTO: MICHAEL ALLEN

Love Never Leaves

We are all born with love in our hearts.
Sometimes we forget it, but it's always there.

Words by Stephanie Adam

When most of us think of love we think of romantic love. It is something that many search their entire lives for. Some can find it, but unfortunately, others search and never find romantic love. One of my biggest desires in life is to reveal to others that love is who they are and that love is all the love they need. Whether they find romantic love or not. Knowing that you are love, seeing that love, feeling that love, and most importantly, being in touch with that love makes romantic love, and even life for that matter, so much easier.

I feel so fortunate to have known and understood the love that I am at a very young age. I was about 5 when I came across a dead kitten. At that age, I did not understand death and I thought that all that kitten needed was my love, care, and nurturing to bring it back to life. I put that kitten in my coat pocket and carried it around for days! I would talk to it. Rub it. Even kiss it! I didn't care. I was convinced that kitten would come alive and be mine as long as I poured all of my love into it. Needless to say, I learned a life lesson, or a few, when my mom found out that I was carrying and kissing a dead kitten.

To this day, 36 years later, I can still feel that little girl inside me wanting to help that kitten. That was my true self. That was love. We all have it. We just are not all tuned into it. It is important to note that NONE of us are tuned in all the time. As with everything in life, it waxes and wanes. Life and trauma happen and we forget that we are all love.

Somewhere along the path of life from the time I was 8 until my thirties I lost touch with myself and that part of me that is love. It's almost as if I thought I was undeserving of it, that I was made differently and not made to BE love, and I spent many years in self-hatred, anxiety, and depression.

Something happened that made me think that part of me was taken. I experienced sexual assault. At that

moment it is as if I had an out-of-body experience and that was the part of me that left. I stood and watched the event unfold and walked away. It felt like all the love left me when that out-of-body me walked away. I continued to be a loving person, however, I never felt that love for myself or that I was love. I never believed that love was there like it was for everyone else. I no longer believed that I had and was made from a kind of love that could heal like I thought I was when I found that kitten.

It took many years of mistakes, loneliness, and abusive and toxic relationships before one day little glimpses of that love started to reveal itself. During those years I was forever searching for ways to heal others because that was the only peace I was able to find. I became an EMT and firefighter. For 20 years I worked in the inner city trying to help heal the sick and injured. I also became a yoga and fitness instructor, a certified holistic health coach, and finally an elementary school teacher. It is as if I was trying to find that proverbial kitten to love back to life so I would know that love was still there. Now, at 41 I realize that the love that we are all made from never leaves us, even in the most traumatic moments of our lives, no matter how much we feel there is no love there and we do not deserve it, it is there. It cannot leave us. It is who we are, it is where we come from, and it is in every single part of our being. NO ONE CAN TAKE IT AWAY.

I owe every bit of my healing to my grit first and foremost, but then to yoga and meditation. I did many years of therapy with many therapists with the help of many medications. All of those professionals recommended some form of yoga and/or meditation and I always poo-pooed the idea. I was seeing them and taking medication, I didn't need anything else. I didn't see yoga and/or meditation as another valuable tool for my healing just as the therapy and medication were. One day, after finally leaving a 2 year long abusive

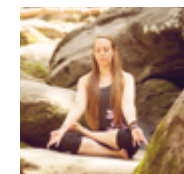


ILLUSTRATION: FREEPIK, PHOTO: ARUNA TALAPATRA

relationship, I walked into a local gym and found yoga. I hated it at first. I thought it was weird and hard as a former cheerleader. Hello EGO! However, something about it had me coming back. I was shown a glimpse of myself, at that love that I thought was no longer there. As I sat meditating in shavasana I cried because I had once again found that healing love inside me. I regularly “Stepped Onto My Mat” for 5 years before I decided that yoga and meditation were how I was going to heal that “kitten”. I became certified to share with others and invite them to Step Onto My Mat and learn what yoga and meditation had done for me. The therapy and medication got me to a better place, but it was the yoga and meditation that got me back to love.

Since then I have been pouring my love into others through yoga and meditation in hopes that I can provide the glimpses that they need to see themselves as the love that they truly are.

There are so many myths that block us all from meditation. So many ideas of what we have to do to be “good” at meditation, but the truth is, all you have to do is try. Find a teacher that resonates with you and let them show you. As the Alcoholics Anonymous saying goes, “Keep coming back. It works if you work it and work it because you are worth it.” ●



Stephanie Adam is the founder of Step Onto My Mat Wellness. Stephanie loves to meditate, of course, but also spending time with her family on her lake with her dogs and teaching yoga. You can connect with Stephanie on Instagram @Stepontomymatwellness or her website, stepontomymatwellness.com.

The Day I Died

Kerry Clancey had a near-death experience, and found herself in a Universe filled with Love.

Words by Kerry Clancey

ILLUSTRATION: FREPIK.COM

I remember my death well. 15th February, 2011. The day started like any other. I was sitting with the doctor, telling her how good I felt, when suddenly I looked at her and said: “There’s something wrong... my feet are so hot and heavy.” I was having an adverse reaction to the medicine.

The doctor picked me up and put me on the gurney. I felt someone touching my face and hands, saying “Kerry, Kerry, stay with us.” I was unable to control any part of my body. I felt excruciating pain move through every muscle and limb.

And suddenly: Poof! I’m above myself, looking down at my body from the corner of the room. I can see myself, the nurses and doctors as they work frantically trying to keep me alive. Something is taking over me. I’M DYING!

As I ascend into the cosmic realm, I let go, and surrender to the world of spirit. I am overcome by goodness, Love and bliss.

Gliding into the spiritual realm, moving in and out of different dimensions, all I can feel is Love. Combined with joy and euphoria, I am in the recipe of cosmic bliss.

I rise up into another dimension. I see my three children, and tell them “I’m dying – it’s so euphoric and magical – I’m ok!”

In and out of different dimensions I go, no longer attached to my physical body, no longer attached to anything or anyone. I am no longer my emotional struggles. I am no longer suffering the pain of the past. A new me is being created, transforming and ascending all in one moment.

I look down at myself, and I’m a light being. I have little light fingers and little light toes. It’s like being a smiley emoji on a phone. The biggest thing I notice is that the pain has gone. It’s just bliss. I’m filled with joy, inner peace and Love.

Through my Near Death Experience (NDE), I realized that The Universe is Love.

The Universe is here to guide us deeper into

lovingly and peacefully being of service to humanity and assisting with the ascension of Love and light.

During my experience with the other side, I felt the Love of something that is no longer available to me, in the world of the living, here on this planet.

However, I eventually came to understand that all I needed to do was meditate from my heart. Through this type of heart-centered meditation, I am still able to reach a very potent Love activation, which takes me into all of the emotions associated with Love – kindness, forgiveness, joy, euphoria – that we can tune into through the heart.

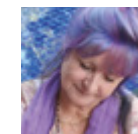
In my daily practice, and as a Sacred Heart Meditation Teacher, I converse with the light daily, for myself and others. We are all little light beings with so much power, love and purpose. We can light up the world from the inside out.

We are all different in the ways we weave our tapestries of life. Some people weave patterns of joy and love, while some struggle even to thread their needles. We

light-beings and lightworkers, who have gone through the many layers of life and lifted their veils, have the responsibility to uplift others here on this beautiful planet on which we live.

The more we access Love & light, the more inner peace, happiness, and joy we become. Bringing in love with no conditions, we become One with all others, our beautiful planet, and the Universe. We are the Love and the light, and we are here to shine bright.

From my heart to yours. Sending you so much Love and light. ●



Kerry Clancey is an intuitive heart attunement spiritual teacher, author, speaker, humanitarian, reiki master, transformational light coach, sound healer, yoga, craniosacral therapist and sacred heart meditation teacher. Keri is Bali’s ambassador for 1Million Meditators.

Let The Sunshine In

What is the True Nature of Love, and how do we access it within ourselves? *Pauline Müller* explores these profound questions through the insights of Wangyal and Urgen Rinpoche, who provide some fascinating ideas from the Tibetan Yungdrung Bön Tradition.

From the highlands of the Tibetan Plateau – a geographically far cry from the 1969 Summer of Love – the Yungdrung Bön Tibetan Tradition invites us to embrace Unconditional Love for ourselves and all beings.

Historic Bön scriptures teach that the Yungdrung Bön Tradition of the Himalayas was handed down 18,000 years ago by Tonpa Shenrap, one of many fully enlightened beings - or buddhas - who preceded Siddhartha Gautama – the buddha who is most commonly referred to as “The Buddha” today (Gautama Buddha lived around 2,500 years ago).

Over millennia, the ancient Yungdrung Bön Tradition has become known as Tibetan Bön Buddhism. It is similar but different to Tibetan Buddhism, and significantly precedes it.

Yungdrung Bön holds Dzogchen as its highest technology out of its Nine Ways - a range of nine perspectives or distinct paths from which followers can approach the Bön teachings.

Embracing our True Nature: wide open spaciousness

In Bön, alongside the four elements of fire, water, earth, and wind, the fifth element – ether, or wide open spaciousness – plays a leading role in taking refuge within.

While it may be an unfamiliar form of self-love for us as westerners, merging with “spaciousness” brings us home to ourselves. Only once we open up to ourselves can we open up to those around us. “Openness is the ultimate Love,” Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, lama (teacher), founder and director of the Ligmincha Institute, explains.

There is more to opening up to the world than simply sharing sunshine smiles with strangers - even though that is lovely, too.

“The teaching says [that, ultimately], you are unbounded space. You are this infinite light and awareness. You are this genuine warmth,” Rinpoche continues. “The most important thing in that boundless space, in that absence of ego... [is] feeling illuminated. That sacred space needs to be [illuminated] by being aware of it.”

Honing this awareness of illuminated spaciousness is the first step toward developing a deep sense of well-being, which subsequently gives rise to pure, Unconditional Love.

Deep happiness is the seat of Unconditional Love

According to the late Tulku Urgen Rinpoche, one of the greatest Dzogchen masters of his time, deep happiness is the seat of Unconditional Love.

“Without the experience of joy or well-being, there cannot be an experience of Love,” Urgen Rinpoche wrote. “Without this [foundation of joy or well-being], there cannot be the action or function of Love, [and] no boundlessness to Love.

“We have to start with the experience of well-being. We have to feel well-being or happiness. We have to experience it in our bodies, in our minds, and in our perceptions.”

Urgen Rinpoche’s teaching highlights that this sense of authentic joy is not tethered to any external force, substance, or condition. It is a spontaneous arising of loving-kindness within.

How to maintain a state of happiness & well-being

The secret to attaining and maintaining this simple yet elusive joy (according to the Dzogchen Vajrayana system) is to carefully tend to the state of the subtle body.

In Dzogchen, the subtle body consists of tsa (channels), lung (energies), and tigl (seeds of energy). Our consciousness, which moves on these energies, attains a sense of calm and well-being when it has a balanced system on which to circulate.

The rigors of life often cause disturbances to the subtle body, allowing fear and rumination to throw our systems out of balance. In Vajrayana, the relentless white noise of looming dread that runs through our nervous systems causes the tigl, or seeds of energy, to go entirely haywire. Subsequently, compassion, happiness, and love begin to wither, while a general sense of ‘meh’ can snowball from mild depression into complete hopelessness.

Fortunately, there are several ways to return oneself to a state of loving-kindness.

One of the best solutions to rekindle a sense of well-being, happiness - and finally, Love - is Vipassana meditation, which delivers one to a state of samadhi.

Just as a busy mind can wipe out the vitality of our tigl, becoming utterly still and deeply meditative can revive it.

To fully leverage the meditative shamatha state of calmness & stillness, Urgen Rinpoche counseled holding a steady sense of mindfulness of the body & its sensations, the mind, and the meditative sense within.

As one progressively moves into a sense of deep calm and open spaciousness, well-being – the source of Unconditional Love – is rekindled. Allowing the mind to rest deeply in the present moment is the great secret.

“It is said that the body rests on the meditation cushion - and the mind rests on the body.”

Transcending fear allows Love to shine through

In Bön, Unconditional Love arises through transcending fear and finding The Source within.

According to Wangyal Rinpoche, fear and conflict stir a false sense of “love” in romantic relationships - alongside the drama that often makes Western relationships feel “passionate.” The result is a gradual move from genuine peace & love toward a disconnect from ourselves and the other, which we take into the world. “If you are not uncomfortable with anything, why do you have to relax? Why do you have to put →



PHOTOS: PEXELS

“When our own cups of happiness and Love are full, it is easier to share with others.”

so much effort into [loving] somebody?” Wangyal Rinpoche asks, highlighting a glaring societal blindspot.

“‘I love you.’ Three words. It is such a simple thing. There are so many people [who] just cannot say it. Probably they just cannot feel it. Because of another identity [they have claimed that prevents them from doing so]. Like in some cases, fear,” he says.

We can calm the mind & body through jam lung (soft breath) meditation.

When we dive into meditation, old suffering and fear of the future naturally make their way to the surface. That is a fundamental part of meditation, and it is not something to avoid. Instead of reacting to the emotions, we can mitigate the mental pain by becoming aware of the body and the physical sensations that precede the arising of the emotions.

Often, these sensations reverberate in the heart center, whence such energy can cause negativity within our minds and nervous systems.

In Dzogchen, emotions cause what is known as “speed” - an energetic velocity. While this velocity can become either positive or negative, it mostly turns negative when left unchecked, causing fretful and anxious demeanors.

An aid in reaching a deep sense of calm from such agitation of the body and mind is the practice of jam lung, or soft breath, as described by Urgen Rinpoche.

To practice jam lung, draw in deep, leisurely breaths, and release equally leisurely out-breaths.

Deliberate breathing turns the mind to locating the velocity of the emotion, which tends to anchor in contracted areas within the body - often alongside pain or discomfort.

On the in-breath, we can shift the disturbing “speed” by imagining drawing the sensation of discomfort from its location through the body, and visualizing storing it in the area located three fingers below the navel.

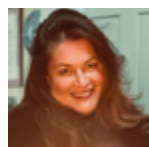
Over time, following this protocol is meant to restore and balance the entire body-mind-emotion system.



From here, one can achieve the sense of well-being that is the ultimate source of Unconditional Love.

Once this skill is solidified, Urgen Rinpoche advises us to treasure and nurture the meditative process by sharing loving kindness generously - as that is its “ultimate function.”

When we become Love, we share from brimming urns. When our own cups of happiness and Love are full, it is easier to share with others. May your sun shine in, today. ●



Pauline Müller, the author of this article, is a freelance writer, seasoned meditator and novice meditation teacher, based in Southern Africa. She is also a perpetual people feeder who loves wide open spaces and great adventures. Connect with her at pauline-muller.com. Geshe Losar (who provided significant input in this piece) is a Tibetan Bön lama and founder of Canada’s only Bön Buddhist Center, Sherab Chamma Ling, in Courtenay, British Columbia.

ADVERTORIAL

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ADVERTORIAL

Here’s a soul-igniting question for all of you women who are feeling stuck, living on auto-pilot, and struggling to make a change in your life without feeling guilty...

Have you fully stepped into finding your voice, and living the life that lights you up -- even if it’s not “the norm?”

Or are you still neglecting your needs to make others happy, and hiding parts of yourself because you’re afraid of disappointing others, being judged, or what people may say?

If you knew you could successfully own who you are and what you want, and explore something different, without the second-guessing, guilt and insecurities standing in your way...

...would you finally feel confident to break out of the box you have outgrown, and step into that version of yourself who inspires others to do the same?

#REALTALK. It is time for you to begin reclaiming your worth, and give yourself the love you deserve. Here is a way for you to implement that. ►



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RELATIONAL LOVE

Self-Love: The First Love

If you make a list of all the things and people you love... where do you find yourself on that list?

Words by Marcus Brown

When you hear the word “love,” where does your mind go? To your spouse? Your parents? Your kids?

Take a few moments to jot down a quick list of people & things you love, before reading on. Don’t try to write out an exhaustive list – just the first few people & things that come to mind.

When I do this exercise with my Spiritual Advising clients, very few people think of themselves. Even fewer think of themselves first.

When asked “What or whom do you love?” the mind automatically goes to something outside of itself. Isn’t that strange? And yet, we never ask why.

To understand the reasons for this, we have to look at self-esteem and self-love as a unit, a two-part system.

Healing Our Wounded Self-Esteem

If you ask someone right now to make a list of the things they dislike about themselves versus the things they love about themselves, you’ll see that the list of dislikes usually outweighs the list of loves.

Why do we criticize ourselves so much, instead of building up our self-esteem & nurturing our relationships with our inner selves? For many of us, these self-destructive habits begin in childhood.

As children, our natural focus is to learn what we love and what we don’t by trying new things and having new experiences. We reflect on our experiences, develop self-awareness, and do our best to give ourselves the experiences that we want. This is a healthy and natural way to relate to the world around us.

But in our society, children are not taught the ways of inner reflection and self-acceptance. We are taught to be socially acceptable. We are taught more about others than about finding our own purpose in existence. We are taught to change and mold ourselves to fit into society, rather than how to grow into better versions of ourselves, and what we want to become.

And so, even at a young age, we begin measuring our self-worth and self-love by things outside of

ourselves, by what’s acceptable and what’s not.

Having grown up in the foster care system in Mount Dora, Florida, I am all too aware of the ways in which we deny ourselves love in response to external environments and situations, and the traumas from our pasts that can cause us to self-hate instead of self-love.

Looking Inward & Cultivating Self-Love

Transmuting self-hate into self-love starts with looking inward, and paying more attention to how you feel about yourself, rather than thinking about how others are thinking and feeling about you.

By focusing inward instead of outward, meditation allows us to connect with our souls, or the Light energy that all humans have emanating within them, to sense the things that feel best for us.

It’s so easy to forget about yourself when you are focused on everything else, but once we learn to love ourselves first, we see how much better it is to experience life from a self-accepted and self-loved space.

Instead of beating ourselves up, we build ourselves up. We use our strengths to find ways to improve our perceived weaknesses.

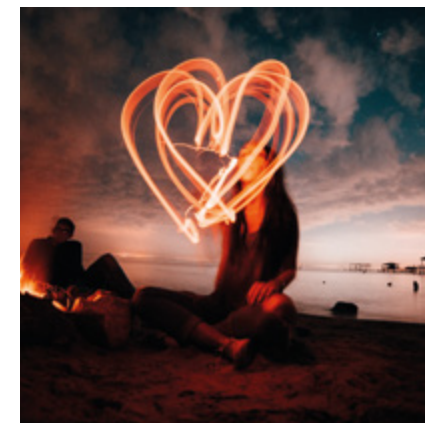
Once we start to love ourselves first, we increase our

ability to step into the experiences we want, rather than just accepting the things we get from the world. Our boundaries become our own, and not initiated by others first.

When we are loving ourselves, we are living in a resonance that I like to call “vibrating higher.” So let’s vibrate higher peeps! And always remember to love ourselves first. ●



Rev. Marcus Brown (aka Metaphysical Marc) is a Spiritual Advisor and Speaker. He loves to share his knowledge through his experiences, and uplift as many as he can. You can follow him on social media under “Metaphysical Marc” and on Amazon as Rev. Marcus Brown.



“When asked, ‘What or whom do you love?’ the mind automatically goes to something outside of itself.”

PHOTOS: PEXELS

The Lost Formula to Happiness

Ease anxiety and embrace happiness with the P.E.R.L.O.V.E. Practices

Words by Holly McNeill

Unbelievable but true, each of us has somewhere between 6,000 to 70,000 thoughts a day - 80% are negative, and 95% repeat (NSF, 2005). Many of them instantaneously telegraph throughout the body in the form of emotions and feelings. And though a vast majority of negative self-talk is misguided and destructive, we tend to accept it as truth and from this create our world.

See the problem?

From birth, we're ambushed by these mostly negative and repetitious thoughts, emotions, and feelings - what we will refer to as T.E.F. Think of it like taffy, which is sticky and sweet, only it's 'TEF-fy' - sticky and painful, deceiving and tenacious, easy to get stuck in, and the basis for our mindsets, default patterns, behaviors, and neuroses.

Through this inevitable enmeshment in our T.E.F., we keep stories about ourselves alive over time. We then identify with these stories, attach, and suffer. In fact, many of us have unknowingly taken our T.E.F. and locked ourselves in a prison we've willfully created in order to protect what becomes our ego, our identity, our own sense of importance.

Let's call this false identity the Happiness Thief. Regardless of how

screwed up our stories may be and irrespective of how miserable they make us, this bandit coaches us every day, via our conditioning, to protect our negative tales and the patterns and behaviors we've built around them - at all costs. Happiness is lost in this unaware and automated training of the mind. As we age, we often don't have a clue what T.E.F. we're operating from or that this Happiness Thief is actually in control. **BUT ALL IS NOT LOST!**

I've come to realize from many wise teachers and gurus that they all, in their own way, point back to a few simple truths. We are NOT our thoughts, emotions, or feelings. We're not our T.E.F. We are SO much more than that.

Thoughts will arise and trying to push them away will only make them,

and their corresponding emotions and feelings, stronger. We must see through them to what they truly are - powerless. If we don't engage with our T.E.F., it falls apart because the Happiness Thief has no center. This is important.

Your true nature is peaceful and wise. All you have to do to reconnect with this inner sanctuary is unmask the Thief and unravel the stories that have kept you stuck. And you don't have to be a monk or nun, meditate for several years in silence, or live in a cave to do it. Who has time for that?

As an aid in such a journey in this busy, modern, distracted world, let me introduce you to a new, straightforward set of mindfulness and meditation practices.

First, We Train Our Minds

This formula starts with just six minutes a day. We PLEDGE to watch our minds for one minute six times each day, next we EVALUATE any negative T.E.F. that's been flying under the radar, and, finally, we RECOGNIZE these painful patterns in our daily lives, seeing the Happiness Thief for what it is. These three simple practices - P.E.R. - form the foundation of our mental transformation.

Then, We Train Our Hearts

Here, we first LOCATE what remains when the T.E.F. is removed, then we OPEN our hearts, VEST in what we find there, and then EXPAND beyond our conditioned limits. In L.O.V.E, we uncover the most genuine of truths - our true nature.

P.E.R.L.O.V.E. provides practical tools that become objects of meditation. It complements an 'on the cushion' practice or can become a primary path in our otherwise overloaded lives.

Finding happiness doesn't take a lot of your time. It's not hard or complicated. All it takes is your attention. With awareness and intention, we can release our stories, attachments, and struggles. With repetitive, purposeful practice, we can unravel our daunting egos, find our true nature, peace, freedom, and happiness.

We can do this - TOGETHER



You are not Alone

Hello. I'm Holly.

Anxiety, worthlessness, and shame were my struggles of choice. Whatever yours may be, this formula can help. I suffered for years. At age 34, in the middle of the night at this lowest point of my miserable, self-absorbed, and unhappy life, I vowed to 'do better'. Then spent the next twenty years searching across the country and from coast to coast, making good on my vow.

Based in Buddhism, secular spirituality, modern psychology, and neuroscience, and grounded in the teachings, gurus, and truths I encountered along the way, this effort culminated in the P.E.R.L.O.V.E. Formula.

Now, I invite you to share in this amazing journey with me. Let's do this!

Scan the QR code below to find out more at perloveformula.com. Hear the entire P.E.R.L.O.V.E. path from soup to nuts by attending a Lost Formula to Happiness FREE Online Intro Class. Subscribe to The P.E.R.L.O.V.E. Circle, our newsletter, for monthly insights into the practices. Deep dive monthly into the selected practice with the support of a like-minded and safe community by joining either the P.E.R.fect Practice or Clarity of L.O.V.E. Forums. Or get the extra help you need by scheduling a P.E.R.L.O.V.E. One-on-One Coaching Session. And keep an eye out for in-person events!

perloveformula.com



P.E.R.L.O.V.E.
with Holly McNeill

Testimonial

"I highly recommend this work for anyone who needs tools to transform the cycle of pain we can't always see and get stuck in. In a one-on-one session, Holly very quickly got me to a safe place where I could separate my true self from my negative thoughts and fears. I was then able to see why I've been 'freezing' in some current situations, especially with toxic family members. I couldn't believe how quickly we found a correlation to something in my past that made me understand my lack of response to recent stresses. She did this, all while giving me easy and applicable tools to work with. Holly's P.E.R.L.O.V.E. formula is simple, and it gives me real hope."

JP - Art Director





Self-Love vs Selflessness

How can we balance these two beautiful practices?

Intro and question by Kevin Ellerton
Answer by Amma (Indian Spiritual Leader Mātā Amritānandamayī Devī)

Jovanna and I have traveled the world interviewing spiritual masters, gurus and saints for Meditation Magazine. We met many amazing luminaries in our travels... but when we met Amma (sometimes known as “The Hugging Saint”), our hearts were blown open by her purely loving & selfless way of life.

Pretty much everyone we meet in life exhibits some degree of self-centeredness. We all have some agenda for serving ourselves. We all dedicate a significant portion of our attention to fulfilling our own needs. But, when we met Amma, we met a being that did not appear to have this type of self-centered process at all.

As far as we could see, Amma spends all of her time in service to others. She gives out hugs, love, and blessings, all day every day. She often sits for 20+ hours per day giving hugs to people who travel across the world to meet her. To date, Amma has given hugs to over forty million people. Amma lives a simple life, in a small room in the ashram. The vast majority of the money and support that flows into the ashram flows out to disaster victims and people in need.

We have heard tales of other gurus/saints operating in this selfless, other-centered manner, and it seems to be a powerful & beautiful way of life. It seems like those who devote all of their attention to the needs of others end up being the happiest, wisest, and most enlightened beings of all.

At the same time, there is an emerging movement in some spiritual circles in the world toward “self-love,” which encourages us to love ourselves first.

The self-love idea often comes with the instruction that we need to be more “selfish,” more self-centered, more focused on fulfilling our own needs.

Self-love and selflessness both seem to be important practices, but they also seem to be somewhat contradictory. So we asked Amma:

How do we balance self-love with selflessness?

Amma: Self-love will transform itself into selfless love when you start loving others as your own self. True self-love is seeing your own self in others. At that point, the divisions of “I” and “you” cease to exist, and you become one with everything. However, until we have realized that the “I” in “me” and the “I” in “you” are the same, such doubts as you have mentioned will continue.

In reality, all beings are one. If we place 1,000 pots of water in the Sun, they will reflect 1,000 suns, but in truth there is only one Sun. It is the same with all the so-called “different beings” in this universe. In truth, they are all one being alone—one supreme consciousness.

Having understood this truth, the spiritual masters compassionately serve all beings with the same intensity that other people reserve only for themselves. For them, it is no different than the right hand soothing the left hand when the left hand gets injured. Their compassion and service to “others” are born of their sense of unity and oneness.

Until we develop that understanding and deeply feel that oneness, we should serve others anyway—viewing it as our duty to do so.

In today’s world, there are two types of poverty: the poverty of food, clothing, healthcare and shelter, as well as the poverty of love and compassion. In fact, it is society’s lack of love and compassion that needs to be addressed first. Because once that is done away with, people will naturally and spontaneously come to the aid of those who lack necessities such as food, clothing, healthcare and shelter.

Of course, we have to take care of our own bodies as well, but the impulse for this is already there. It is natural and spontaneous because we already view “this” mind and “this” body as “ours.” We shouldn’t neglect our own needs, but let us try to expand our vision—to see ourselves in others as well. The problem today is not people taking their own share from the world but in taking other people’s shares as well. The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for even one person’s greed.

Once, a woman from the West who was very much attached to buying fancy jewelry came to visit our ashram. Before coming to the ashram, she had been saving up for more than a year in order to buy a designer watch. However, when she came to the ashram, she met some of the

children living in our orphanage. Seeing their plight had a big impact upon her. Soon after she returned to the West, she got enough money to buy the designer watch she had been longing for, but when she went to buy it she again found herself thinking of those poor children and other needy people she had seen on her trip. She thought, “This expensive watch and a \$50 watch tell the same time. Let me buy a \$50 watch. Then I can give the rest to help people in need.” She wrote all this in a letter she sent along with a donation.

This is the type of attitude we need to adopt. Let us take what we need, but not more than that. We should not only be takers; we should also be givers. This is what we see in Nature. There is harmony and balance in all the give-and-take found in every aspect of Nature. We should try to align ourselves with that harmony. If we can do this, we can make this world a heaven, and we will also make spiritual progress as well. May all of you have the grace to do so. ●



“Self-love will transform itself into selfless love when you start loving others as your own self.”

"Vah!"

For The Love of Life!

Most people think of "relational love" as something that is reserved for people, pets, and conscious beings in general. In Kevin's interview with Satpal Singh, Satpal mentioned that we can feel love for "things," like interests and hobbies as well. Kevin took the opportunity to dig into the Sikh concept of "vah" – the feeling of "wow" toward life itself.

Intro & Interview by Kevin Ellerton

Kevin: Many people think of relational love as something that can only be directed toward other conscious beings, like lovers, friends, family, and pets. But as you mentioned, love can even be directed toward hobbies, interests, and things like that. I've heard that in the Sikh tradition, there's a word for this type of "love of life," called "vah," which translates to something like "wow." What is the concept of "Vah?"

Satpal: The core fundamental spiritual tradition within the Sikhs is to remove the sense of separation of yourself from the rest of the Universe.

Most of us don't experience life in that [state of Oneness]. The way we experience life is almost like we are this self-enclosed being within our body, and everything outside of our body is something separate, something distant. It is that sense of separation – from others, from everything else, from life – that then creates a state of inner conflict.

When we look at everything and everyone around us, most things don't correlate to how we want them in our heads. I'm a parent. Most of the time my struggles come when I'm just trying to get my children to do something that I want them to do. So a conflict happens within my mind. There's an idea of what I want to happen, and then there's the reality of life itself. The same with my partner, the same with colleagues at work. The same with any circumstances, right down to what the weather's like today, or how much traffic there is on the roads. There's always this inner sense of conflict, which is that "I want to change life, I want life to be different."

Being in conflict with life is one of the most egotistical things that you can do. This tiny little person that you call 'me' has an idea of how the Universe should be. We want the entire Universe to work according to our small minds. And that's where conflict comes from.

The moment that you realize how foolish your mental desires are, you can begin to drop those desires. And as soon as you drop them, you're left with this state of wonderment, which is "Wow!" It's not that the Universe is doing everything that you want it to do, but "Wow, what is this thing called life?"

When I wake up in the morning, the first thing that happens to me is, my mind just starts going into this crazy cycle of thoughts. I start thinking about dropping my kids to school, and things that I need to do at work, and meetings and interviews that I need to do, and things that aren't quite happening, and my future plans, and I've got financial constraints, and I've got work that I want to get done in the house, and I've got this and that. And all these things are floating around in my mind. And all of these are a state of conflict. Because you're listing the things that you want changed in the world.

And the moment of realization that comes, where you say, "Actually, what if I just accepted the flow of life? What if I took a step back and just realized: life is going to do what life is going to do?"

In fact, this is how it's always worked. Life has always flowed the way it needs to. It has never asked my permission for anything. The Universe doesn't seek my blessings. The Universe is always going to do what it's going to do.

It's like me having a desire for what the weather is going to be like tomorrow. The weather is going to be whatever is going to be. There's nothing I can do to change it. Imagine waking up every morning and looking out of your window and being frustrated with the weather. That's kind of what we're doing with the Universe.

And you take a step back and you realize, there's nothing I can do about this.

A phrase that I love is: "I can't change the world, but my response is my responsibility".

So I change my mentality, so that, "I'm only here to control what's going on in here (in my own mind). I can't control what's going on outside." When you realize that you, yourself, are part of the flow of life, you can just let go.

When you're in that state of acceptance and non-conflict with the Universe, that's when you end up with this undeniable experience of just: "Wow, life is beautiful!"

Kevin: Vah!

Satpal: Vah.

Kevin: I've heard that Sikhs call gurus "vahegurus" – because the guru leads us to this feeling of "vah." Is that the function that the Guru is supposed to fulfill in the Sikh traditions?

Satpal: Absolutely. The Guru is, essentially, the highest Wisdom in the Universe. The Wisdom is the Guru... not the individual human.

So we don't bow down to a person; we bow down to The Wisdom.

That Wisdom has been around since the beginning of time. And when your mind is in alignment with that wisdom, we call that "guru."

The word "guru" literally means "darkness to light."

So, when you are transforming your mind from your own darkness (which is that everyday "ego mind" that we all have, that we all run around with) – when that ego mind is let go of, and you have this awakened mind which can see clearly how wonderful the Universe is – that transformation is called "darkness to light," "gu-ru."

So that "wow" is dependent on that transformation. That "gu-ru" has to happen first.

And we have to receive that wisdom from a higher truth. Once we receive that wisdom and we transform our thinking, that "guru" is a process which leads us to this state that ultimately leaves us wonderstruck, saying, "Wow, I can't believe that this beauty was right in front of me all this time." ●

Spirit Friends

5 Tips for Fostering Spiritual Friendships in a Post-Pandemic World

Words by Monique Schubert



As we recover from a global pandemic and the prolonged experience of social isolation, spiritual friendships are more important than ever.

The concept of “spiritual friendship” is as old as yoga itself. In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali references friendliness, a necessary component of any friendship, multiple times. In Sutra 1.33 Patanjali speaks about friendliness as a spiritual practice that can be as impactful as yoga and meditation for developing positive qualities and elevated states of mind in the practitioner.

In Buddhism, friendliness is so significant and nuanced that it is outlined through several distinct definitions. Buddhist thought expands the landscape of friendliness to include: Compassion (karuna): care and action in response to the suffering of others, and Sympathetic joy (mudita): the ability to take delight in the wellbeing of another.

When we deepen our connections and spiritual friendships, we increase our opportunities for happiness and wellbeing, and we offer the same to our friends.

Swami Kripalu emphasized the role of friendship on the spiritual path, with the guidance that “company is stronger than willpower.” When we want to move in a new direction in our life, our friends can offer obstacles or support for our endeavor. Choosing to walk with spiritual friends, who share our interests and values, increases our chances of success. Here are five things you can do to find and foster connections, deepen bonds with like-minded folks, and create community on the path to developing a richly fulfilling life, filled with spiritual friendship.

1 Cultivate friendliness

To cultivate friendliness, we must develop (at least) 2 points of awareness: increasing our own capacity to offer warmth and friendliness, and developing our receptivity to the kind gestures of others. Practices like Metta (Loving-Kindness Meditation) strengthen a felt sense of goodness. Over time, one becomes more readily able to generate and offer positive emotions like warmth, kindness and friendliness to self and others.

2 Reach out

Find and foster connections. Undoubtedly there are some folks in your world who would light up hearing from you! Friendships, like all relationships, require time, effort, and attention to grow. The good news is that the energy we put into nurturing spiritual friendships can return to us as an increase in our own well-being. An almost 80-year study conducted at Harvard University (1938-2004) demonstrated that positive, social relationships are the number one contributing factor to a life that is meaningful, joyful, and healthy.

3 Seek community

Sometimes we can experience companionship and camaraderie in a community-centered space. Even if we don't feel that everyone in the community is a close, personal, friend, we may still benefit from the reciprocal nature of a communal experience where the bonds of affinity are built more on shared values and shared interests than on personal familiarity and fondness. When seeking community we can join existing groups, volunteer for causes we really care about, or create our own circle to invite folks in.

4 Notice what stops you from connecting

Are you telling yourself that you're too busy? Is there a story about what keeps you from being

receptive? Perhaps you're just not sure where to start? Rumi says, “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” Inquiring into the limits to friendliness each of us feels might be uncomfortable, but dismantling those walls is a necessary step to inviting folks into fellowship.

5 Practice some form of self-regulation

It can feel risky to initiate new friendships or join a community of folks who already have close connections. Our own state transmits info about how we're feeling, so if we're anxious or closed-off we may not be as receptive to the overture of another who is also open to friendship. Practices from mindfulness such as slow, smooth breathing and being present can help us to find a sense of calm that makes it easier to connect.

The practice of cultivating spiritual friends might start with being a good friend to ourselves.

In yoga and mindfulness, the traditional advice is to practice for yourself before extending your efforts to others. Which of these practices feels like it would make the biggest difference in your relationship to yourself and others?

What is one thing you could do today to put yourself on the path to building and deepening meaningful spiritual friendships? ●



Monique Schubert, MFA, is a lead faculty member at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Monique has taught yoga and mindfulness for almost 20 years in New York City and the surrounding area. You can follow Monique on insta @omsocietyyoga or at kripalu.org.

ILLUSTRATIONS: FREEPIK.COM, PHOTO: CLARA PITT

TAKE THE LABELS OFF & FLOW

Jovanna interviewed Zuri Adele, the yoga teacher, meditation enthusiast, and charismatic actress who plays Malika on Hulu's hit drama, Good Trouble.

Photography by Ally Green and Tayo Kuku Jr





Zuri Adele meditating (above) and sitting in an egg chair (right).

Meditation Magazine: How was it for you, as a person with a mindfulness practice, to explore polyamory and different types of love through your Good Trouble character, Malika?

Zuri Adele: It’s been SO liberating. Because as a queer millennial myself, I am on a journey of exploring my own love styles, and my own sexuality.

Take the labels off & flow.

It’s been so affirming to portray Malika, who has never seemed to feel stressed out about labeling herself.

That was a big part of my own journey, where I was like, “Do I need to label? How do I label my queerness? Am I Bi? Am I Bi+? Am I Pan? What’s gonna be the thing that honors who I’m in relationship with, or who I am? And how important is it to do that at all?”

What I love about Malika’s journey is that she’s just very present with her interests. She’s like, “Okay, well, I got a little crush here...”

As a single queer person growing in my career, it’s just been really fun to be inspired by Malika to take the labels off and flow.

Explore and observe without judgment. Learn to play.

I also love my cast mates, who are all so safe to play with. They are so beautiful, and so charming and fun, and we have such great chemistry to safely explore all the things that Malika is exploring.

And I love the way in which the writers have given us permission to play, but have also held us accountable to explore Malika’s Journey, without judging Malika’s journey.

[My castmates] have their own love styles in

their own personal lives too, that are different from their characters’ love styles. So all of us are doing it together. We’re just like, “Okay, we’re learning! We’re learning to observe without judgment, and to also play!” That has helped me have more playfulness in my own romantic life.

Communicate honestly & imperfectly.

Malika does her best to be honest with people about what’s going on, and to talk about it as best she can, without feeling like she has to be word-perfect... and she’s really inspired me to do that too.

Malika’s just like, “This is what I’m doing. I think I’m going on this date with so-and-so, and I’m gonna date this woman, and I’m gonna go on a hike with this woman... it feels like it’s platonic, but now it’s feeling like it might be romantic... and I’m also loving this man over here, and we also work together, and here are boundaries that we need to have... and then I also have been primarily partnered with this other man who is monogamous...”

Prioritize your own interests & boundaries while honoring others’.

Malika’s also been really good about prioritizing her own interests and boundaries, while honoring other people’s boundaries.

When something hasn’t worked for someone, it’s been okay to move on... instead of staying and lying. And that’s been really inspiring to me as well.

I mean, I haven’t done the “staying and lying” thing in my own life, but I know that that can be really tempting... to just live our lives and not think about the harm we might be causing people.

There’s always room for renegotiating our agreements – as long as we do so with compassion and honesty – about what curiosities are coming up in our lives. We can start asking questions like: “What are some safe ways that would feel amazing for you, for us to explore these interests?”

I’m really proud of our generation for asking those questions, and finding safe consensual ways to tap into all of our curiosities, in a way that dismantles what we think society has been expecting of us, or what may feel is the most “safe.”

We are allowed to rock the boat. We’re allowed to continue to explore, and be students of life. And I love that we’re choosing to be consensual, and honest, and vulnerable about that. Because who knows? Maybe whoever we have that conversation with will say, “Oh my god, I’ve been hoping you would bring that up! Let’s have a conversation!” ●



Deepen Love

Gabby Bernstein's tips for using mindfulness & meditation to improve relationships.

Interview by Kevin Ellerton

Photos by Chloe Crespi



How can meditation help us attract the romantic relationships we want?

Gabby: The deeper our meditation practice, the more connected we are with every part of who we are.

The deepening of that connection allows us to send a different kind of energy out to the world that's more magnetic. It also allows us to be more comfortable in relation to others.

Meditation amplifies our attracting power, and helps us be more resonant with other humans.

How can meditation help us improve romantic relationships once we are in them?

Gabby: When we meditate, we can return to the truth of who we are: the undamaged, resourced, adult, calm, compassionate, courageous part of ourselves. The more time we spend in that stillness and that higher self, the more we can bring it into our day-to-day lives.

Our relationships are also where we get triggered the most. So a meditation practice that's regular, steady and committed can help us self-soothe in those moments of being triggered, can help us have more sustainable calm and peace, and help us be less activated in those moments.

How can meditation help us resolve conflicts in romantic relationships?

Gabby: When we are in a reactive place, we can use our meditation as a way of grounding, as a way of finding a center, as a way of practicing forgiveness, and releasing and surrendering. So it's a great way to recalibrate when we don't have that kind of aligned connection.

The habit and the practice of meditation creates a healthier human. It gives you a lot more resilience, and a sense of safety inside. And so, when you have activated that place of safety within yourself, you can be less activated by others.

How can meditation help us heal in breakups?

Gabby: There are a lot of forgiveness meditations that I've taught over the years about releasing people and cutting cords, and really energetically sending someone off.

Because sometimes, when we break up with someone, we still carry that attachment cord towards them. We hold on to it, and obsess over it. And sometimes the healthiest thing to do is to cut the cord to let it go. So much of that can be done through our energy, not just through our words and our actions.

Our meditation pillow is sometimes the greatest place to forgive, release, let go, surrender, and cut the cord.

Has meditation helped you be a better mom?

Gabby: Yeah, without a shadow of a doubt. Because our children are always co-regulating with our energy. They need our presence, because they can't access their own with ease.

The more we are grounded, the more we are connected, the more present we are, the calmer our energy, the more stable we are, the more they will be. Because their sponge neurons are just picking up everything.

So our meditation practice is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children, because that steadiness offers steadiness in their lives.

Do you think meditation can help us give more love to our kids?

Gabby: Sure, of course! When we love ourselves more, we can love our children with a lot more of an open heart. When we feel at peace within ourselves, we can bring more peace to the relationship with our child.

I think that they can feel a deeper connection to us when we have that connection to a higher power of our own understanding, and to our breath, and to our serenity... the ripple effect is real!

Can meditation help us receive more love from our kids in a more powerful way?

Gabby: Yeah! I think that the result of having a meditation practice is that you can create a safer environment for everyone in your life, and in that environment you can receive more love. →

"The deeper our meditation practice, the more connected we are with every part of who we are. The deepening of that connection allows us to send a different kind of energy out to the world."



Gabby's...

5 Meditations For Romantic Relationships

1

Drop the baggage.

Sometimes we carry baggage from past relationships into present relationships. If this baggage is weighing you down in your current relationship, you can do a visualization meditation, where you visualize your old partner in front of you, and see the cord that's attached. Then you can welcome, whether it be a sword, or an image of an angel holding the sword, and cutting that cord. And so, through visualization meditation, you can cut the cord between yourself and that previous partner, to release you from past relationships, so that you can show up for your new relationships with freedom, and no baggage from the past.

2

Do a "heart-hold."

Place your hand on your heart, and your other hand on your belly, and meditate in that hold to create a sense of safety, and to feel less codependent, less needy, less reliant on others for your own happiness.

3

Use breath practice to self-regulate during conflicts.

Inhale two short strokes through your nose, and exhale one long stroke through your mouth, as a way of self-regulating when you're in the midst of an argument or a conflict when triggered.

4

Practice a mudra and a mantra to take responsibility for dissolving conflicts.

You can repeat the mantra (out loud or in your head): "Peace begins with me. Peace begins with me." You can combine this mantra with a mudra, to help you focus and stay grounded in your body. For example, as you repeat each word, you can touch your thumb to the other fingers on the same hand:

When you say the word "peace," touch your thumb to your forefinger (both on the same hand).

When you say the word "begins," touch your thumb to your middle finger.

When you say the word "with," touch your thumb to your ring finger.

When you say the word "me," touch your thumb to your pinky finger.

This mantra & mudra can help you to dissolve conflict, give you confidence in the moment, and relax your nerves.

5

Send love and light.

When a partner or friend is struggling, you can hold their vision in your mind, and send them love, send them light from your heart. You can't control them, but you can extend your energy to them.

3 Ways Meditation Improves Parental Relationships



1

Meditation calms your nervous system.

Children co-regulate with their parents, so this calms their nervous systems as well.

2

Meditation can help you get better sleep.

The better you sleep, the better parent you are.

3

Having a meditation practice helps you be less reactive and more compassionate.

Having compassion for small children in particular is extremely important, because we can get flooded when they're flooded. So having that steadiness and compassion is a great gift to them. ●



SCAN THIS QR CODE WITH YOUR
SMARTPHONE'S CAMERA TO HEAR
THE FULL INTERVIEW!

"When we love ourselves more,
we can love our children with
more of an open heart."



True Love Is Not An Emotion

Is “true love” (in romantic relationships) something
that we feel, or something that we do?

Words by Dr Jenelle Kim

T rue Love can be seen in the deep connection and relationship between romantic partners, or between a parent and child. It is also in our deep connection with life, with nature, the Universe, our purpose, our families, friends, and communities.

True Love is not found or cultivated by looking outward for the “feelings” of love. Fleeting emotions come and go, but True Love is stable, consistent, and rooted in the heart. True Love is not just an emotion, it is a commitment. True Love is consistent, and does not move with the changing winds of life. This is the difference between commitment and emotions.

Emotions come and go; this is natural and a part of life. When you haven’t eaten, you become hungry. The feelings of hunger can be very intense, but the moment you eat, your brain decides that you are no longer hungry, and the feelings go away.

All emotions ebb and flow. It is important to be aware of your emotions, without letting them drive you to say or do things that you will come to regret. This is why it is vital to keep these emotions balanced, and to be rooted in your commitment.

When you first meet a new romantic partner, everything is new and exciting. Your brain and nervous system are heightened. This is a beautiful and important part of a relationship. Then time passes, and although love continues to grow, the excitement can wane, and the initial feelings that you once felt may not be the same.

That is why true, deep Love is a commitment. It is an acknowledgment that even though life will bring

the ups and downs of emotion, the commitment you make with another is deeper than the emotions. It is grounding.

Keeping Your Balance

In life, challenges arise and can start to make cracks in the foundation of your love.

In Taoist philosophy, the ultimate goal, in every aspect of life, and particularly in relationships, is to keep your balance. When you are able to balance,

with your situation and with your loved ones, you gain the ability to rise above fleeting emotions.

In the reality of life, when moments arise where tension hits a peak between you and another person, especially a loved one, ask yourself: “What am I trying to gain from this?”

When it comes to love – family, friends and community – there is no “winner.” Love is like water. No matter how many times you try to cut

water, the water will not separate. So, when you find yourself in a tense moment with a loved one, think to yourself, “If I win this fight, what good does it actually bring?”

Communication and understanding from a place of Love goes much further than trying to be “right.” When we stop to listen, and to see the other perspective, it is much easier to move with the flow of life – the Tao – and to keep your balance in every situation.

By standing strong in our commitment to love, and keeping our balance in the shifting sands of emotion, we ground ourselves in our hearts, and live lives that shine with the light of Love. ●

**“True Love
is consistent,
and does not
move with the
changing winds
of life.”**



Cultivating Love

7 ways mindfulness & meditation make
you more empathic, compassionate, and kind

Words by Kevin Ellerton

If you've ever spent time in meditative communities, like monasteries, ashrams, or even yoga studios, you may have noticed that the vibes tend to lean toward the empathic, compassionate, kind, and loving end of the spectrum. If you have many passionate meditators in your life, you may notice a similar pattern.

Practices like Metta (loving-kindness) Meditation can account for some of these tendencies toward kindness, but basic mindfulness meditation helps us become more empathic, compassionate, and kind as well. There are many ways that meditation & mindfulness naturally develop these attributes within us.

Here are our top seven:

ILLUSTRATIONS: FREEPIK.COM

1

Deeper self-awareness

In meditation, we turn our attention inward, to our own thoughts, sensations and emotions. Through this inward-focused attention, we become more aware of our own experiences of life. This deep awareness of our inner experiences (thoughts, emotions, and sensations) allows us to develop much deeper empathy and understanding toward the thoughts, emotions, and sensations that other people are experiencing.

can be scary to allow yourself to feel the intense (and often difficult) emotions that someone else is feeling. When we sit down in meditation, we literally stop running away from our own emotions. When we sit in calm awareness and face our feelings, we develop a sense of safety and security with our own emotions. When we feel safe and secure with our own emotions, we can engage with others, and fearlessly allow ourselves to feel their pain as well.

2

Seeing people more clearly in the present moment

When we bring our attention into the present moment, we can see the people around us more clearly. When we look into their eyes, we are no longer distracted by our own thoughts & emotions. Instead, we can clearly see the emotions in the eyes of the people in front of us – all the joy, and all the pain. When we see the emotions of others, our mirror-neurons fire so that we can feel and understand those emotions as well. Feeling and understanding the emotions of others is literally the definition of empathy. Thus, being in the present moment and seeing others clearly – unobstructed by our own projected thoughts & emotions – is a direct prerequisite for empathy.

This sometimes happens naturally (we are all in the present moment sometimes, even if by accident), but practicing mindfulness & meditation greatly facilitate the process.

5

Befriending difficult emotions

When we stop running from our own emotions, they catch up to us, and we experience them fully. This allows us to develop a deep familiarity, friendship, and even love for those parts of ourselves. When we can befriend

and love our own emotions, we can befriend and love the emotions of others as well. This allows us to be with others in an empathic and compassionate way, where we love them for who they are, rather than trying to change them.

“When we can befriend and love our own emotions, we can befriend and love the emotions of others as well.”

6

Stronger concentration

When we dive into deep states of concentration, through focused meditation, we develop our ability to stay with

a single experience, rather than becoming distracted by random thoughts, sensations, and emotions. In many situations, empathy arises naturally, on its own – but we become distracted before the empathy can turn into compassion and kindness. By strengthening our powers of concentration, we are able to stay with the feelings long enough for them to blossom into love.

3

Less judgment of others

Part of the meditative path is the development of equanimity: calm, open, non-judgmental awareness. When we stop judging our experiences of life and the world around us as “good” or “bad,” and just see things (and people) as they are, we move past our prejudices and projections, and get in touch with Reality as it is. Only then can we truly get in touch with the emotions of others.

7

Realizing that we are all one

We humans often cut ourselves off from the world around us. Through meditation, we begin to realize that we are not fundamentally separate from The Universe — we are part of it. We start to realize that the separations between “ourselves” and “other people” are actually just an illusion. This allows us to feel connected with others, thereby unblocking the free flow of empathy, compassion, kindness, and love for all beings. ●

4

Less fear - not running away

To fully engage with someone who is going through an intensely emotional experience is not an easy task. It

Friends of NICU

When his twins were born premature, Tim found pain & compassion in the NICU.

Words by Tim Purkis

It was Friday the 13th when the contractions started. Elanie was only in her sixth month of pregnancy – the twins weren’t due until springtime!

We thought it was Braxton Hicks at first, but by 3 am the pain had gotten so intense that I drove Elanie to the hospital. The doctors and nurses tried to stop the contractions, but they weren’t slowing down. At 7 am, we welcomed our twin boys into the world... 10 weeks premature.

It all went so fast that we never had a chance to think about what was happening. All we knew was that our boys were born, and alive.

The only exposure we’d had to premature babies was what we had seen on TV: babies that fit into the palm of your hand. When Matthew and Ryan were born, they were so much bigger than that! I was so excited when I saw them, I yelled, “Oh my God El – our babies are huge!”

Hardly, but not too bad. Matthew was born at 3 lbs 7 oz and Ryan was born at 3 lbs 2 oz. Our babies were immediately rushed into the NICU, and Elanie was taken to a recovery room. The doctor came into the recovery room a few hours later and told us, “Your boys are pretty sick – one in particular.” Not knowing the severity, my first thought was: “OK, let’s give them some Tylenol and get out of here!” If it were only that easy.

Ryan wasn’t breathing, and had been put on a ventilator. The doctors weren’t sure if he would make it. Matthew was breathing, but still required lots of medical attention.

The next ten weeks were awful. We visited every day - it’s the least we thought we should do. Watching our babies attached to a million and one different wires, listening to the alarms beep every other second and not being able to do anything except be there and just hope they get better almost drove us to insanity. All we could do was sit next to them and read them bedtime stories while they fought for their lives inside those plastic isolettes.

I decided to keep working to keep my mind busy, but that also meant that I could only visit our boys at night. After a full day’s work, spending the evening hours watching our babies fight for their lives took its toll on me. There were so many nights that I would drive home and my mind would take me to some really dark places. What would I say at their funeral if they didn’t pull through? How would my wife deal with that loss? How would it affect our first born? Would we try again for more kids? I will never forget the night that the Pink Floyd song “Wish you were here” came on the radio. That was an especially dark night. My mind was unsettled, restless and confused, and I didn’t know how to deal with it.

PHOTO: PEXELS/JUDITH KADOW. FROM THE AUTHOR

Sometimes we would get phone calls at night with updates. Elanie would always take those calls. It was easy for me to tell from the look on her face what type of news she was getting. Tears were a sign of regression or lack of progress. A smile (still followed by tears) would mean things were improving.

Although I was extremely emotional during those ten weeks, I never cried. Not because I am heartless or dead inside, but because I felt I needed to stay strong for my family, especially my wife. That was one of the worst decisions I could have made. Being emotional doesn’t make you weak - it makes you human. My wife didn’t need me to be a robot - she just needed me to be there. That was plenty.

During those ten weeks in the NICU, we started to get to know some of the other families. Many of them didn’t visit their babies as often as we did. Initially, I had thought that they were just bad parents who didn’t want to deal with their sick babies. But after talking with them, I found out that they just couldn’t financially afford to be with their babies. I felt awful for having been so judgmental toward them.

Not every hospital has a NICU. For families living in remote, rural areas, the drive back and forth from the hospital could take 2-3 hours (or more) each way, and cost hundreds of dollars in gas while their babies were in the NICU. There were families who were trying to keep their jobs to pay their usual bills, along with the pile of medical bills they were accruing. At some point they had to make a decision: do we keep working so we can pay our bills? Or do we quit our jobs so we can be with our sick baby? For many of these families, there was no middle ground.

We humans tend to avoid pain & suffering, just like I tried to do. Avoiding pain is a natural impulse, and it is helpful in keeping us healthy, happy, and alive. But the dark clouds of pain & suffering do come with a silver lining: they help us develop empathy (emotional understanding) for others who are going through similar kinds of pain.

Pain naturally gives rise to empathy (seeing and understanding the pain of others), which naturally gives rise to compassion (wanting to help alleviate the

pain), which naturally gives rise to kindness (taking action to help others).

It was through that process – pain giving rise to empathy, compassion, and kindness – that Friends of NICU was born.

The pain we were experiencing in our own situation allowed us to naturally empathize with the struggling families around us. We were all going through the same kind of pain. That empathy naturally led to compassion and kindness – we immediately knew that we had to help these families, and we started a non-profit called Friends of NICU, to help families be with their babies in the NICU.

We provide gas cards, food vouchers, and hotel vouchers, so that families can be with their babies in the NICU. We also have two trailers stationed at Mercy San Juan Hospital in Carmichael, CA, where families can stay for extended periods of time.

I am now working toward my Meditation Trainer Certification through Meditation Magazine’s MTT-200 program, and I keep finding myself wishing that I would have had these meditation tools available to me sixteen years ago, when the twins were in the NICU.

I was angry. I judged others. I shut others out of my life.

It wasn’t until I started looking at things with equanimity – calm, non-judgmental, meditative awareness – that my healing process started. It helped open my mind

to the beauty of the present moment. Empathy, compassion, and kindness were all natural by-products of my meditation practice from that point on.

I am convinced that if I had the meditation tools that I have today, I would have been able to avoid a horrendous drinking problem before it started, and would have been able to help more families sooner.

For now, as I complete my Meditation Teacher Training, I look forward to providing meditation training to NICU families free of charge.

If you would like to help us in our mission to help parents be with their babies in the NICU, please consider sending a donation, at friendsofnicu.org/donate. ●



“It wasn’t until I started looking at things with equanimity that my healing process started.”

Matthew and Ryan with feeding tubes in Mercy San Juan’s NICU in February of 2006.



Make A Wish

The Make A Wish Foundation grants wishes to children who are suffering from terminal (and potentially terminal) illnesses. Jovanna saw a social media post about a little girl named McKenzie and felt called to support Make-A-Wish.

Words by Jovanna Benavente



I've known that I wanted to highlight a charity in the Love issue for many months now. While there are so many beautiful charities to support, I feel called to highlight one in particular that is setting a very beautiful example for all of us.

I was scrolling through Instagram one morning when I came across a post by @thespacegal. She shared a short reel about her day of doing science experiments with a little girl named McKenzie.

It was McKenzie's greatest wish to spend one of her very last days in her physical body laughing, getting to know, and learning from Emily of "Emily's Wonder Lab" on Netflix.

The Make A Wish foundation reached out to Emily, and together they were able to give this little girl and her family a small token of peace amidst a heartbreaking circumstance.

There is something inexplicably powerful in sitting with someone in their suffering (especially when you don't have to). It is perhaps one of the highest forms of unconditional love; not trying to convince someone that everything will be okay or that they will get better, but just surrendering together to life as it is. Holding hands, being present, enjoying whatever moments we have left on Earth with all of the joy and passion that we can muster.

"There is something inexplicably powerful in sitting with someone in their suffering"

I realized while watching Emily recount her day with McKenzie that I wanted to play a small part in making dreams come true for children like McKenzie all over the world whose time has tragically been cut short. As a mother, I honestly cannot imagine the grief that these families are experiencing, but if I were in their shoes, I would make damn sure that my baby got to live as full of a life as possible by making her greatest dreams come true.

This is the work that the Make-A-Wish Foundation has been doing for over 40 years and I can think of no greater act of love. Please help us in raising money for this truly incredible Non-Profit charity and together, we can make childrens' most precious dreams come to life.

ILLUSTRATION: FREEPIK.COM / GSTUDIOIMAGEN

VISIT WISH.ORG TO DONATE TO THE MAKE-A-WISH FOUNDATION!



Meditation



In A Prison Cell

This powerful article was written for our magazine by a young man who is currently incarcerated. Names have been changed to protect the author and his family.

Words by Raphael Franco

The main thought that enters a person's mind upon entering a prison like this one is survival.

Naturally, we have a tendency to adapt and react to our environment. Like a chameleon... except the only thing we can't change is our color.

I walked into this harsh environment from a comparatively soft one. You could even say that I had a soft heart (inside) and a soft shell (outside).

My new surroundings were extremely abrasive to me in the beginning. I had to evolve into a person with a hard outer shell in order to protect myself and my precious internal components, both physical and emotional. This, my friends, is not such an easy thing to accomplish.

The process of "hardening" one's self is usually a thorough process. Meaning that if I allow myself to "harden," it would usually be done in a complete and full manner, on the inside and out. Yet somehow I managed to prevent this from occurring.

I was able to strengthen my outer shell while preserving my interior. Although there were adjustments made, I am still a humble and caring person in regard to others. If I am able to help someone in any way, I will do so without hesitation. I have compassion for all people. Especially people in prison. Because we are still people.

There are some people in prison who will take advantage of you if you allow it, or if they deem you an easy target. They will feed on you, pick on you, tease you and bully you. It's completely up to you to let it affect you or not. This goes for inmates, officers... anyone really. In fact, this is one of the factors that strengthened me into the person that I am today. One day these inconsequential things just stopped bothering me.

I used to try to act calm on the outside, but I would apparently turn red in the face. Now, I actually am calm on the outside and the inside.

This led to the beginning of my spiritual and intellectual growth spurt.

On my journey, I have met others with a similar mindset. I have also met a lot of people here that have very big hearts.

There is another category of people who let the "hardening" spread to their heart and soul. It's very sad and unfortunate. I used to try to alleviate their pain, but I learned that I can't

help everyone, because some people simply don't want to be helped. I can sympathize with them, because certain peoples' circumstances amplify the feelings of despair and loneliness they encounter in confinement. But bitterness and hatred are like diseases, because they easily spread from one person to another. This is why I know that I must remain strong in my positive way of living and thinking, because that too can spread, to and through others.

At night when my cell is dark and silent, before I prepare to go to sleep, I first release my mind from my body. I set my mind free from the cement walls and barbed wire fences around me. I sit on my mat with my back straight, legs crossed and my hands resting on my knees. I imagine a calm, soothing environment.

Usually I end up at a magnificent beach. With a bright sun and a cool breeze. The seagulls squawking, the crabs crawling, and the waves lapping. I picture myself walking barefooted through the hot sand. I can even

"I have compassion for all people. Especially people in prison. Because we are still people."

feel the grains of sand that worked their way between my toes and I can smell the salted moisture of the ocean as the waves continuously crash and roll in the background. At this point my entire body is completely relaxed and my mind at peace.

This is how I regain my composure and find myself again after each day is done, because we tend to get lost at the slightest distractions. Needless to say there are many. I find these meditation exercises to be extremely rewarding and satisfying to the needs I didn't know I had.

You may do a million things, or try to help a million people, but at the end of each day it's vital to help yourself, and make sure that you are okay, and ready for whatever might come the following day. ●

Soon after his 18th birthday, Raphael got into a fight while drinking with some acquaintances. He was beaten badly, with a broken nose, two black eyes, stitches and a bruised ego. Intoxicated and in pain, Raphael made the unfortunate decision to grab his grandfather's gun. He fired one bullet each toward the roofs of the houses of his assailants, in a misguided attempt to deter them from future violence. Raphael didn't intend to hit anyone, and fortunately, nobody was hurt. But when he returned home, the police were waiting for him. Raphael was sentenced to more than 18 years in prison: longer than he had been alive until that point. Raphael's name has been changed for the purpose of this article in order to protect him as he continues to live out his sentence in prison.

ILLUSTRATION: FREEPIK.COM

Finding Common Ground Through Love and Pain

Democrats and Republicans, Bloods and Crips.
In meditation, we are all human beings.

Words by Brett Cotter

It was late in the summer of 2020, and political tensions were boiling over in the USA.

I had just finished lunch and was about to start my weekly “Military Mondays” session – an open zoom call I facilitate where veterans come together to heal from trauma.

Logging in that day, I noticed two men were beet red and very unsettled. As I connected with them, I could feel the emotional tension build inside my body.

I asked one of the gentlemen, “Are you okay?” Well, he immediately let loose with a no-holds-barred political rant. Before

I knew it, the other gentleman jumped right in, defending his own positions and making angry accusations.

Politics are not allowed in our sessions, but this situation erupted like Mount Vesuvius! I remember thinking, “How the heck are we gonna get out of this one?” Thankfully, a flashback immediately came to mind from another session I had led over ten years earlier.

Meditating with Bloods & Crips

It was my first Stress Is Gone group session in Hempstead, New York, at the Family & Children’s Association. As I

got off the parkway and drove through the neighborhood, the vibe changed. I remember police cars speeding through red lights, sirens echoing in the distance, and large groups of people hanging out in the street. While some blocks looked okay, other blocks made me feel grateful that I was driving and that it was during the day.

I was under the impression that I would be working with a group of teens who had been through a lot in the foster care system. But when I arrived, the program director filled me in on some unsettling details.

The FCA’s recent gang prevention initiatives had sparked a response from

the bloods, crips, and MS13 gang members in the neighborhood. Three weeks earlier, the facility had been under siege. Their power and phone lines were cut. Gang members forced their way in and vandalized the building. Staff members locked themselves in one room before a police SWAT unit ended the siege. The program director then proceeded to let me know that Michael, a troubled and explosive young man, had just showed up for my session. This would be the first time a Blood and a Crip would be in the same room at the same time in their facility.

I’m not gonna lie – for a moment, I was scared. But I thought to myself, “I am here for a reason,” and the fear faded away. The program director told me I would be going into the room with a security guard and two other program directors. I knew that wouldn’t work, because the kids wouldn’t feel safe enough to let their guards down. “I go in alone,” I said, “or not at all.”

The program director objected, but I stuck to my guns and she reluctantly agreed. I remember as we walked to the room, she said, “You know, you’re probably going to get jumped in there, Brett.” But with each step, I felt more and more spirit all around me. I just smiled and said, “I’ll be alright.”

It turned out to be one of the most soul-touching Stress Is Gone sessions of my entire life.

At the end, when I opened the door, half of the facility’s staff fell through the doorway. They were listening the entire time.

After our session, I saw the two alphas, Keith and Michael, walking toward each other in the parking lot. Staff members were about to run over and separate them, but before they could, we all witnessed something beautiful: just two seventeen year old kids, talking in a parking lot. Maybe not as friends, but at least as human beings who had found some common ground.

Getting into my car, looking out the window, seeing them talking – the memory of that moment is bringing tears to my eyes as I write this.

I drove away that day with one thought

reverberating inside me: “The pain of this world is what we all have in common... and it’s the love that sets us free.”

Meanwhile, in 2020...

Ten years later, as two veterans yelled at each other in our Military Mondays zoom session, I flashed back to Keith and Michael. The memory of that day reverberated through my entire body, and helped me guide a Democrat and Republican to find common ground.

I calmly put my hand up – softly signaling “stop” – which eventually caught their attention. Once the two men had quieted down, I motioned to one gentleman and asked: “Is it OK if we start with you?” He nodded.

“What emotion are you feeling right now?” I asked. “Rage,” he answered. “Great,” I continued. “Who were you most angry with as a child?” His rage turned to sadness as the question brought up a memory and deep feelings about his father. I guided him to touch his heart, and start breathing deep and slow.

Then I directed my attention toward the other gentleman, whose demeanor had completely changed. He spoke before I could say anything. “My mother... I’ve been upset with her my entire life.” “Where do you feel it?” I asked. “Place your hand there, and breathe deep and slow, right into the pain.”

Once both men were breathing deep and slow into the pain from their pasts, we proceeded to let that pain go. “Now,” I continued, “both of you repeat after me: ‘Universe, I would love to let this pain go, unlock and release it, right where I absorbed it, inside my body, right now.’”

After a few more emotional layers released, it was easy for both men to see that the source of their anger was much deeper than politics. Their shared journey into the past had bonded them immediately, as they each let go of pain they had been carrying for their whole lives.

“The pain of this world is what we all have in common... and it’s the love that sets us free.”

It was the same realization that connected us all, back in Hempstead and on our zoom call – “The pain of this world is what we have in common... and it’s the love that sets us free.”

Keith ended up changing his life around; last we spoke he was working a nine-to-five down south. I haven’t heard from Michael, but I hope he’s doing great. As for the Democrat and Republican, I see them often, and have never heard them mention politics again. Amen. ●



Brett Cotter is the founder of *Stress Is Gone* and Author of “3 Keys to Managing PTSD.” Brett is a trauma relief expert and meditation teacher. He teaches classes in corporations, schools, hospitals, military bases and disaster sites, and leads retreats at the Omega Institute and the New York Open Center. Find more from Brett at stressisgone.com.

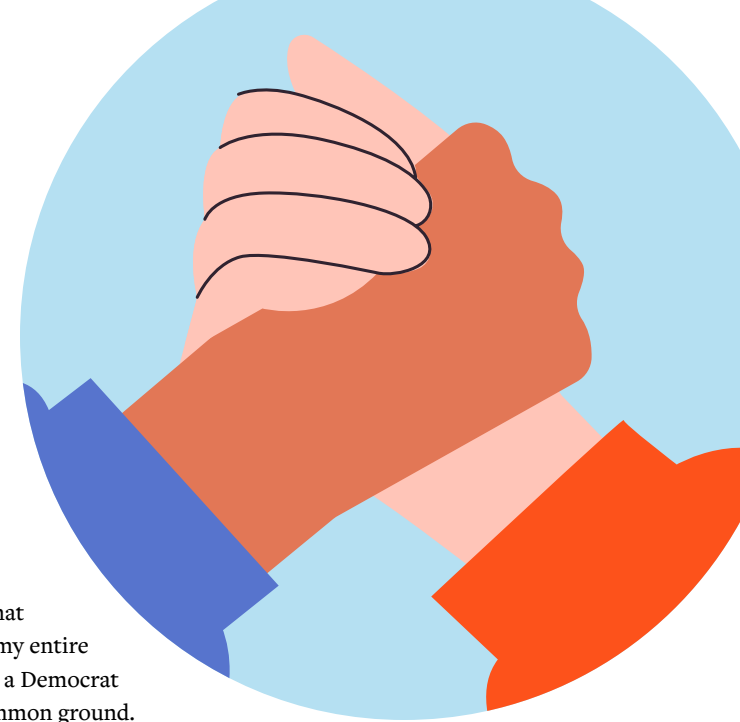


ILLUSTRATION: FREEPIK.COM

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

The Birthright of ALL Beings

We cultivate empathy, compassion, kindness, and love for ourselves and for other human beings. But what about the rest of the conscious beings on our planet?

Words by Phil N. Rossner

"The first step in spiritual life is to have compassion. A person who is kind and loving never needs to go searching for God. God rushes toward any heart that beats with compassion - it is God's favorite place."

Amma (Mata Amritanandamayi)

Where I live in the Pacific Northwest, we get a lot of precipitation.

After it rains, the earthworms always seem to find their way onto the sidewalks. When I see them during my walks, I pick them up and place them back onto the earth from whence they came.

This is not something that I go out to do intentionally, or really even think about... for me, it just seems like the right thing to do. Somewhere deep inside I feel a sense of connectedness, which becomes compassion in action through a kinship of life.

Meditators & spiritual practitioners throughout the ages have experienced similar feelings of kinship toward animals.

Tibetan Buddhists are loath to cause any harm to worms during building projects, and will painstakingly sift the dirt from a building site in order to ensure that none of our wiggly friends are harmed in the process.

Jain monks and nuns cover their mouths with cloth masks while walking around outside, to avoid unwittingly swallowing any of our flying friends.

Kevin Ellerton tells the story of a monk he met in a Thai Forest Monastery, who didn't swat at, or even run away from, mosquitoes. "It's dinner time," he said, "the mosquitoes are hungry too!"

It's not only monks and nuns; most humans feel love toward animals.

Many people have a true and abiding love for their pets, and spend much time and money ensuring that they are comfortable and happy. Some go to extreme lengths to bring rescue animals into their homes, to give them the compassion and love that they so rightly deserve.

And yet, the majority of humans living on Earth today are mindlessly complicit in the suffering & death of billions of farm animals every year.

Why do we differentiate between cats, dogs, and farm animals?

Why do we so starkly differentiate between our beloved pets and those equally sentient beings who live their lives under appalling conditions, who end up being killed, dismembered and eviscerated for human consumption?

In the introduction to his book *Why Veganism Matters*, Professor Gary L. Francione asks the question: "Many people, including those who think that animals matter morally, are mystified as to why some people are vegan, and, for moral reasons, do not eat, wear, or otherwise use animals. They think of veganism as an extreme position. ... I argue that what is extreme - in the sense of being extremely inconsistent - is to believe that animals matter morally, and yet not be vegan."

As a vegan myself, Prof. Francione's take on veganism is a no-brainer. But while his approach is steeped in morality, I would argue that many of those who consume animal flesh do not see it as immoral in any way. They are just following a traditional diet that they have been brought up with since they were born... a tradition that relegates some living beings as 'food' rather than 'friends.' →



PHOTO: PEXELS / KAT SMITH

Following the example of St. Francis

In an article entitled “St. Francis Would Want Us To Be Vegan,” Sarah Withrow King wrote:

“In St. Francis’ view, animals weren’t unfeeling commodities to be used for our own greedy gain or fleeting satisfaction. His words and deeds reflected the truth that each animal is a living, breathing, worshiping creature of God.”

“By preaching to birds and extending forgiveness and compassion to wolves, St. Francis radically undermined destructive early European philosophies, which pitted humans against nature and placed created beings on a socially constructed ladder to heaven.”

To St. Francis, cows, fish, pigs, turkeys and chickens are all individuals who feel pleasure, loneliness and fear, who worship our Creator alongside us, in ways or languages we cannot yet understand.

But in the meat and dairy industries, these same sentient beings are subjected to horrific abuses that would be illegal if dogs or cats were the victims.

St. Francis didn’t suddenly turn his life around the moment he became aware of God’s presence in all things. He resisted, stumbled, fell, and got a lot of things wrong. But... he kept moving towards compassion and love for all.

We can all follow St. Francis’ lead in this regard. It would be nearly impossible to become vegan overnight, but it is easy for most people to start with one plant-based meal a day and expand upon it over time.

What can we do to live with more compassion and kindness?

Rather than leather articles or other animal products, we can choose one of many alternative plant-based products now available.

Rather than going to a zoo or aquarium, we could take the family and friends on an outing to a wildlife rehabilitation facility or for a foray on the open ocean.

Rather than buying a pet from a breeder, we can adopt a homeless animal from a shelter.

During those seasons where we gather together to celebrate family and friendship, why not try a veggie roast, or any of the thousands of other delicious plant-based options available?

The next time you drink coffee or tea, try oat, soy or almond milk instead of cow’s milk/cream. With the widespread success of brands like Oatly and Chobani Oat, many people (even carnivores) are discovering that oat milk is delicious! Who knows, you might even prefer it to cow’s milk!

And the next time you see an earthworm stranded



on the sidewalk, take a moment to move it to a safe and nourishing place.

Every day, we make hundreds of choices between cruelty and kindness toward our fellow beings. We must take the time to STOP and mindfully examine our choices, in order to ensure that we are truly living lives of compassion and kindness.

Whenever possible, dear reader, please ignite the spark of unconditional love, which lies within the heart of each and every one of us, by choosing compassion and kindness for ALL beings. ●



Phil Rossner (aka Avinash Tām) and his wife Ana have been vegan for many years and follow a lifestyle of compassion and loving-kindness for all beings. Phil has been a meditation practitioner and teacher for 35 years. Both Phil and his wife are devotees of their Satguru, Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, also known as Amma. Phil is also a video producer, musician, recording artist and writer. Phil, Ana and their kitty Archie are transitioning from their home on Vancouver Island, Canada, to their new home in Panama in 2023.

PHOTO: PEXELS



Interviews With Activists

Brenda Sanders

While putting together this article, I interviewed the founder of the Afro-Vegan Society, Brenda Sanders.

Phil: Brenda, the main theme for this article is compassion and loving kindness for all beings, as those are basically the main teachings I grew up with while following the Buddhist path. So would you like to say anything about love and compassion for the animals?

Brenda: Surprisingly, I don’t often get invited to talk about compassion and kindness as it pertains to our fellow earthlings.

But I am of the opinion – and I have said this publicly and been shunned for it – that we have an opportunity, as humans, to evolve away from our cruelty, callousness and violence.

There are multiple avenues through which we can do that, but living vegan and having compassion for animals is a really effective way to question some of the normalized violence that we’ve been subjecting our fellow earthlings to. We can do better. We can do something that will make a huge difference in the evolution of humanity.

Even people who consider themselves to be animal lovers still eat certain animals. People who consider themselves to be kind and compassionate may still go to rodeos or the zoo.

This is an opportunity for us, as human beings, to seriously question our current behavior on the planet - to challenge some of the things that are really just habits that have been passed on from generation to generation. It’s not like we have to do these things!

I think that kindness and compassion, and just really looking at all the ways we can show that to our fellow earthlings, is a great opportunity for us to challenge those behaviors and to grow.



SCAN THIS QR CODE TO WATCH THE FULL INTERVIEW WITH BRENDA

Professor Gary L. Francione

Gary is the founder of the ‘abolitionist’ wing of veganism, which is best encapsulated in his quote: “Please wake up to the reality that, if you are not vegan, you are directly participating in animal exploitation.” I recently had the opportunity to chat with Gary about his lifelong activism in this regard. An excerpt from our interview appears below.

Phil: The majority of people believe in kindness towards animals, right? And yet, they will turn around and without even considering what they are about to do, they go and have a hamburger. So what is it Gary? For most people, is it just a habit that they’ve grown up with?

Gary: Yes, it’s a habit. [But it’s more than that. Many people have memories] of having Thanksgiving dinner with their grandmother, or Christmas dinner with people they love. And it therefore becomes rather difficult to think about those times as events of violence. It’s hard to think of your grandmother as a bad person because of her dietary choices, you know? And it’s the same with the rest of your family... are they bad people?

And so, in a sense, it’s habit... and it’s tradition. But it’s also the relentless meat and dairy industry propaganda that we’ve been exposed to since we were children.

There’s a group of people in the world who just don’t care, and you’re never gonna get them to care. But, most people do care. Most people have had loving relationships with non-human animals in their lives. And the question becomes, why is it that they don’t see the inconsistency between the animals they love and what ends up on their plate? All anyone can do is try to get them to see the inconsistency, and to deeply reflect on their choices in that regard.



SCAN THIS QR CODE TO WATCH THE FULL INTERVIEW WITH GARY

Healing Political Polarization, Racial Division, And War

There is far too much pain, tragedy, and injustice in this world. This is not a concept; real humans (and other conscious beings) are suffering right now. As meditators, it is our duty, our role, and our sacred responsibility to heal the suffering, injustice, and division in this world, by cultivating peace & love, both within ourselves and in the world around us.

Words by Kevin Ellerton and Jovanna Benavente

How can we respond mindfully to racial injustice?

answered by Zuri Adele

Meditation Magazine: Racial injustice can make us feel justifiably angry. That anger can drive us to take action, but at the same time, it can be a double-edged sword. As a meditator and racial justice advocate, how do you walk that line, and work with the anger that arises?

Zuri Adele: Our anger is so appropriate, and so valid. And it is most effective when we express it from the place of Unconditional Love.

Even with the people who think the most differently from us, there's a common goal that we can find. We can completely disagree on how to get there. We can even disagree that our goals are common. But if you really get to the root, the goal is common.

"Our anger is so appropriate, and so valid. And it is most effective when we express it from the place of Unconditional Love."

Taking the time to sift through my emotions [and anger around racial injustice], and not water it down, or gaslight myself either, helps me to pull out: "What's really true?"

Being patient with ourselves enough to sift through our emotions is such a huge practice in terms of finding that line and balance. ●

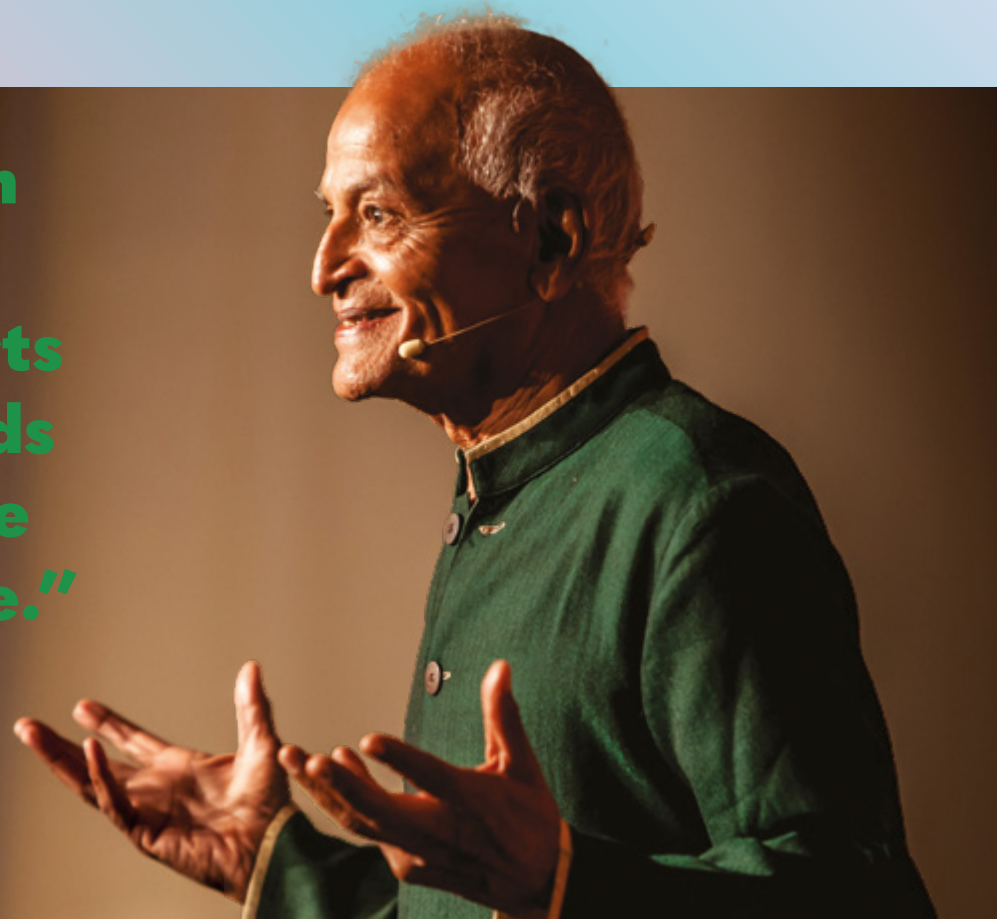


ZURI AND JOVANNA HAD A BEAUTIFUL CONVERSATION ABOUT WORKING MINDFULLY WITH THE ANGER THAT ARISES FROM RACIAL INJUSTICE. ZURI SPECIFICALLY TALKS ABOUT TWO PRACTICES THAT HELP HER CHANNEL THE ANGER IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION. SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH!

PHOTO: ALLY GREEN



"You can only win the hearts and minds of people with love."



Is War Ever Justified?

answered by Satish Kumar

Meditation Magazine: You say that violence is never justified. But what about in clear cases of unjust oppression and war? For example, shouldn't we fight back against the Russians in Ukraine?

Satish Kumar: No. Violent intervention is neither necessary nor justified at any time. Anybody can justify their violent intervention: Russia can justify their violence, and European countries who are supporting Ukraine can justify their violence. Justifying violence is not the right way.

If Ukraine wants to do nonviolent resistance, then all the citizens of Ukraine can stand there without arms, without tanks, without weapons, without airplanes, and say, "We are here. If you kill us you kill us, but we will not kill you back."

If the Ukrainians did not fight back, the Russians could not fight. They could not kill unarmed people. They can only kill if you are fighting back.

And I would go stand there with the Ukrainians, unarmed. And I would ask the Germans and French

and Indians and British... we would all go to Ukraine, unarmed, and say "We are prepared to die for a good cause, but we are not prepared to kill for any cause."

That is the non-violent resistance that we have to learn. That was the method of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King... we have many wonderful examples of non-violent resistance. So if the Russians are aggressive, we will resist, but we will resist nonviolently.

Anybody who thinks that they can "win" war in this modern day is living in a cloud-cuckoo land. Nobody can "win" war. You cannot win the hearts and minds of people with weapons. You can only win the hearts and minds of people with love. ●



SATISH KUMAR WALKED OVER 8,000 MILES FROM THE GRAVE OF MAHATMA GANDHI IN NEW DELHI TO MOSCOW, PARIS, LONDON, AND WASHINGTON DC, DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE COLD WAR, FINALLY CONCLUDING HIS PEACE WALK AT THE GRAVE OF JFK JUNIOR. OUR INTERVIEW WITH SATISH (FOR THE EARTH ISSUE) WAS EXTREMELY POWERFUL, HEART OPENING AND MIND-BLOWING. IF YOU'D LIKE TO WATCH, SCAN THE QR CODE!

PHOTO: ROY RILEY

How Can We Relate More Kindly To People Who Have Different Values, Beliefs, or Opinions Than Ours?

answered by Satpal Singh

Satpal: Even within our own families, we don't all agree on things. But that doesn't mean that we judge each other for it. We understand that everybody has their own path. They have their own understanding. The whole Universe has created them in their own ways. Their experiences are unique. And so we have to reflect and understand that we are not made the same... but we're all equally valid.

All of our opinions are valid. No matter who it is, and no matter how much you strongly disagree with someone else, take that compassionate view, to look at them and say, "I understand why you have the thought that you have."

It's better to sit and try and understand somebody else's opinion than to try to be understood.

First, try and understand what they're thinking. Where are they coming from? What are their experiences?

Sometimes you argue about something, and you're so sure about something. And after a while you look back, maybe a couple of years later, and you think "I can't believe I used to think like that. I can't believe that was me, I can't believe that's what I used to say." ●



KEVIN AND SATPAL COVERED A WIDE RANGE OF POWERFUL TOPICS IN THEIR LOVE ISSUE INTERVIEW ON INSTAGRAM LIVE. SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW TO WATCH!

"It's better to sit and try and understand somebody else's opinion than to try to be understood."



Should We Punish People Who Make Mistakes?

answered by Gangaji

Gangaji: As societies, we are trained to punish and imprison people who make mistakes.

We do that internally, too. When children make mistakes, it is quite common for their parents to say very horrible things to them... with the best intentions! And we grow up and do that to ourselves.

We can be absorbed in our mistakes and punish ourselves... or we can just be willing to recognize our mistakes as they appear.

MM: One of the articles in The Love Issue is written by someone who is incarcerated for a mistake that he made in the heat of a moment. He didn't harm anyone, but he did break the law. What should we do with people who make mistakes? Should we put them in prison? Or should we be doing something different?

Gangaji: I definitely think we should be doing something different.

There's a whole movement for the abolition of prisons. But I wouldn't say I'm an abolitionist of prisons in general. There are heinous crimes, and there are beings that are harmful to society.

But our prisons are overloaded with people who committed burglary, drug use, car theft – mistakes! They need to be taught that they are mistakes. That's essential – to learn what it means to be a responsible human being in a group of other human beings.

This can only happen when we recognize – as individuals, and as a society – that we are playing the role of the “punishing parent” or “punishing God.” We must be willing to forgive.

MM: Do you feel internally or externally, within ourselves or within society, that punishment is ever an appropriate response? Or should it always be replaced with things like education and meditation?



Gangaji: Maybe punishment is appropriate in certain cases... but it should never be *only* punishment. Punishment should always be accompanied by education, by love, by some attempt at generating understanding.

In the United States, our prison system is the worst in the world in terms of the numbers of prisoners, and the racial implications that go along with that. That's not based on love and understanding. That's based on hate and disposal. If we can recognize that within ourselves, and stop that, and recognize the horror of that, then we're more available to support the people who are caught in the system.

I'm so happy to hear about this prisoner's part in this issue of Meditation Magazine. We have a prison program at the Gangaji Foundation, that is, to me, in many ways, the heart of the Foundation. Because it's a recognition that there is no final difference between “them” and “us.” ●



KEVIN AND GANGAJI SPOKE ABOUT A WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS IN THEIR LOVE ISSUE INTERVIEW ON FACEBOOK LIVE. SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH!

The Lama's Tweets

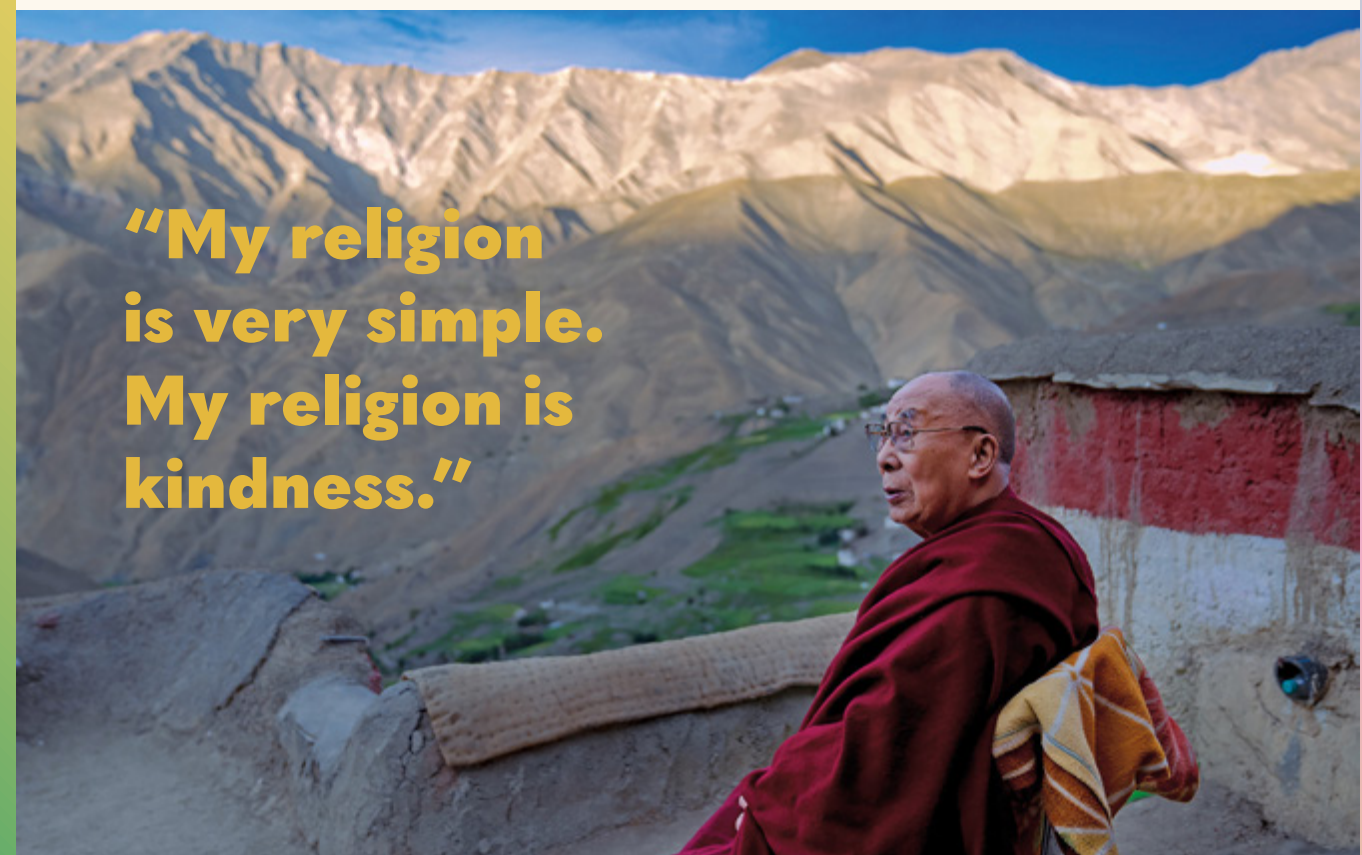
Instead of Buddhism or Enlightenment, HH The Dalai Lama's (HHDL's) core message focuses on love.

At the time of this writing, 7 of HHDL's last 10 tweets are about warm-heartedness, unity, altruism, compassion, kindness & love. If you take a moment to consider HHDL's background as a refugee from the horrors of Chinese oppression and persecution in Tibet, it is easy to see how that young Lama's suffering transformed into abundant love, compassion, and kindness.

If you read through his tweets, facebook posts, speeches, writings, and interviews, this trend is apparent everywhere: HHDL's primary message to the world is Love. ●



PHOTOS: DAN BAUMBACH, TENZIN CHOEJOR



Meditating With Israelis & Palestinians

Thich Nhat Hanh's
legacy is peace & love

Thich Nhat Hanh (affectionately known as Thầy, or “teacher,” to his millions of students around the world) was another great luminary whose focus on interconnectedness, compassion, and loving-kindness may be traced back to his own deep suffering.

Growing up as a young Buddhist monk during the Vietnam War, Thầy had a visceral understanding of the horrors of bloodshed. Thầy later became an ally and friend of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (the two men are pictured above), and spent his life teaching and writing about unity and love.

For years, Thầy invited Israelis and Palestinians to join his meditation retreats at Plum Village Monastery in France.

In his book, *Peace Begins Here*, Thầy describes the long and arduous (yet simple and profound) process of finding kinship among enemies.

Arriving as enemies

When Israeli & Palestinian participants first arrived at the retreats, they looked at each other with suspicion, anger, and even hatred.

It was from this place of enmity and animosity that participants began the long process of finding peace.

Peace begins within ourselves

Knowing that empathy and compassion stem from communication and understanding, it may have been tempting to put participants into “mindful discussion” groups and have them talk things out.

But Thầy did not kick off these retreats with words. Instead, the first five or six days were dedicated to silent, introspective meditation. Mindfulness of breathing and mindful walking were practiced by all participants, to calm down and to recognize the emotions that they were carrying inside of themselves.



Only after this phase of silent meditation and reflection were participants clear, calm, and conscious enough to move into the next phase:

Compassionate communication

After several days of silent meditation, participants practiced *loving speech* and *compassionate listening*.

“We try to speak of our suffering without blaming the other side. We speak without bitterness, blame, or anger. This helps others understand our situation and our suffering.”

While each participant spoke, others practiced *compassionate listening*.

“If you don’t have compassion,” Thầy wrote, “you cannot listen, because what the other person is saying may water the seeds of irritation and anger in you.” It was only through intentional, mindful, compassionate listening that participants were able to truly hear each other, and understand each others’ suffering.

“When we see that another person also cries,” Thầy concludes, “we see him or her as a human being, and suddenly the level of hate, fear, and suspicion in us decreases. We feel better. Now we can look at the other person with more understanding and compassion.”

Let’s take a moment to reflect. If this salve of meditation, loving speech & compassionate listening is potent enough to heal animosity between Israelis and Palestinians, where else can it be applied? Can you use it in conflicts or arguments in your own life? ●



FOR MORE ABOUT THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN RETREATS, READ THE WRITEUP ON PLUMVILLAGE.ORG BY SCANNING THIS QR CODE! OR READ THẦY’S BOOK ON THE SUBJECT: *PEACE BEGINS HERE*.

PHOTO: PROVENANCE UNKNOWN

“We’re all living beings.

We need to come together, support each other, and be here with one another, sharing kindness and peace, and just being mindful that we’re all One.

Humans, animals, everything. We’re all one. We’re all connected.

If we show up in a way that supports each other, and lift each other up, we’re all going to benefit. We’re all going to live happier.”

Tabay Atkins, 17 years old, America’s youngest 500-hour Vinyasa Certified Yoga Teacher, vegan chef, founder of Tabay’s Mindful Kitchen.



PHOTO: RAY MOHEET



SCAN THIS QR CODE TO WATCH MEDITATION MAGAZINES INTERVIEW WITH TABAY!

Meditation + Love =



Kevin's closing thoughts on The Love Issue

While making this issue, I spent hundreds of hours diving deeply into Love. I meditated on Love. I read about Love. I wrote about Love. I interviewed gurus about Love.

In order to focus on these things, I often had to ignore my beautiful, loving wife and daughter. Even as I write these words, Sky is running around the house looking for me, saying “Dada? Dada?” as she pokes her sweet little head into each room.

If that's not ironic, I don't know what is.

As I meditate upon this Love Issue of Meditation Magazine, I have five conclusions to express:

1. Balance is key.

We do our best to be “love and light,” but we can't be one thing all the time. Love can manifest as hugs and kisses... but sometimes it manifests as distance and work. As human beings, we do our best with the time we have, finding Balance in The Middle Way.

2. Meditation without Love is selfish.

In my youth, I left my loved ones behind to meditate in a monastery (Wat Suan Mokkh) in Thailand.

I had a powerful awakening experience there; I was filled with bliss and ecstasy for days. After some time, I remembered that billions of people around the world are still suffering. I was struck in that moment by the realization that sitting silently in bliss was a fundamentally self-centered pursuit.

In that moment, I realized that I needed to share the bliss and happiness that had blossomed inside of myself, to help people who are still suffering. That one moment changed the course of my life, and eventually led to the creation of Meditation Magazine.

3. Happiness is the heart of Love.

The monks at Wat Suan Mokkh taught me that we must practice Breath-Meditation before Loving-Kindness Meditation, because we must fill our own cups with peace and happiness before we can share with others.

In Pauline Müller's article, *Let The Sunshine In*, the Rinpoches asserted the same thing: we must cultivate happiness within ourselves in order to generate true unconditional love for others, because happiness is the foundation of Love.

4. Sadness is the heart of Love...?

Sadness has a bad rap. When it arises, we tend to be unhappy about it. We resist it. We push it away. We judge it as “bad.” We try to get back to feeling “happy.”

But while proofreading this Love Issue, I noticed that the theme of sadness kept popping up, over and over again.

For Stephanie Adam, sadness for a dead kitten became the catalyst for Love. Tim and Elanies' time in the NICU, Amma's sadness for her sick & hungry neighbors as a child, Thich Nhat Hanh's exposure to suffering & death in the Vietnam War, The Dalai Lama's persecution in Tibet – sadness and suffering cracked all their hearts open with boundless empathy, compassion, and love.

But how can happiness and sadness both be the heart of Love?

I meditated upon this question for weeks, when suddenly it hit me like a blinding flash of kundalini:

5. Love flows like electricity, from Happiness to Sadness.

Electricity can only flow between positive and negative poles. Without a difference in charge - polar opposites, yin and yang - electricity would not exist.

Love seems to work in a similar way. It flows like electricity, but instead of flowing from negative to positive, it flows from happiness to sadness. Both happiness and sadness are needed for love to flow.

When we are full of happiness, Love can flow like the light of the sun – in all directions, to all who need it – like the unconditional love that Krishna Das described in Maharaji.

So when meditation is combined with love, it is no longer a selfish act. When awakening and enlightenment include the awareness of *dukkha* (suffering), and the sincere wish for all beings to be happy, they are no longer self-centered pursuits.

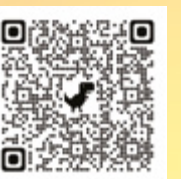
Meditation filled me with bliss and ecstasy... but it wasn't until I remembered the suffering of others that Love began to flow.

When combined with Love, meditation becomes a supercharger. It charges up our own happiness, so that Love can flow out to all the beings, in all the worlds. That is our mission here at Meditation Magazine.

May all beings be happy and free! ♥

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*In our practice, we say Chan is everything, the universal life force.
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