

Living Love Excerpt #1

Living Love "Oh my heart! The Supreme Spirit, The great Master is near you: wake, oh wake! Run to the feet of your Beloved, For your Lord stands near to your head. You have slept for unnumbered ages; This morning will you not wake?" ~Songs of Kabir by Tagore.

There are times in every person's life when personal difficulties arise in one form or another. These difficulties can cause a person to feel despondent, even discouraged. If the issues are overwhelming, or the circumstances really difficult, a person may become extremely discouraged and experience much distress in the mind. In yogic practices, it is the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* that address these human struggles. In particular, the practices of *Niyama* are important in changing how we relate to ourselves.

When psychological issues arise, practicing the *Yamas* and the *Niyamas* helps to relieve despondency, stress, strain and mental difficulties because these practices address our attitudes, understanding, and behavior, empowering us to move forward to a healthier paradigm.

When *Shaoca* is practiced, a pure mind, a pure heart, devoid of complicated motivations begins to develop. When *Santosha* is practiced, contentment with life becomes a possibility, the potential of a positive sense of acceptance and peace with what is arises. When you accept yourself as you are and what life brings to you as it is, you are in a position to heal the mind and body because there is acceptance of the totality of your experience. There is beauty both in the storms of life and beauty in the sunny days. The storms are needed to bring the waters that sustain life and the sun is needed to bring the life energy and light that allows life to grow and expand. Both are necessary in the cycles of nature and of our lives.

In the cycles of human experience, sometimes it is a sunny day and sometimes it is a rainy day but both are a part of the growth, development and nurturing of life. Recognizing this through the daily practice of *Santosha*, cultivating acceptance, contentment, finding a sense of well-being and peace of mind with life as it is, opens up possibilities in your life.

Then incorporating the practice of *Tapas* allows you to open to the experience of selfless love. Not only is peace, harmony and acceptance a real possibility in life, allowing you to appreciate the beauty of even the smallest joys, but cultivating awareness of yourself as part of a network of life becomes possible through selfless acts.

Learning through the practice of *Tapas* to relate to the world around you with kind and selfless acts towards others, to care for others, assisting them even though you have your own needs, opens the heart. When you assist living beings you begin to realize how much need others have. You begin to see that you are not the only one with troubles in this world and to care about the suffering of others. By seeing the troubles that other people have and helping them, you become more able to help yourself. You become aware that you are part of an integrated whole of life and that your small existence is part of something more vast. Your identity changes and you begin to see yourself in all beings.

Then incorporating the practice of *Svadhya*, you not only read books of wisdom, attend talks, webinars, workshops and so forth on spiritual teachings, but you cultivate access to the wisdom that springs from within the deeper layers of your being. Accessing the wisdom of the true Self within, training the mind to right thinking avoids many problems. The mind, trailing off into distorted thinking gets confused, and difficult states of mind and emotions can arise from old patterns of thought. When you establish the mind in truth, in love divine, recognizing the truth of your own divine nature and the truth of love unconditional, then many of these disturbing thoughts and tendencies fade away.

Finally through *Ishvara Pranidhana*, meditation upon the eternal One, surrendering everything you have been holding onto, all thoughts, ideas and concepts to the Divine, peace, calm and realization of the eternal nature of the Self can ensue. The Divine can take away all the thoughts that arise out of your identity with your individual existence and the related struggles and bring unconditional love to you. When you surrender all of your conditioned thinking to God, only all compassionate Divine presence is left.

All practices help the mind to gain clarity and balance. When there is purity of mind and heart from the practice of *Shaoca*, purity of spirit follows and all distortions fly away. In this way the practices of the *Niyamas* bring the mind to a quiet and still state of self-surrender in which the true Self shines forth. The mind becomes balanced and in harmony with all life.

Living Love Excerpt #2

Within the span of each and every person's life, a wide variety of experiences arise, some pleasant, some unpleasant, some neutral. Yet in every person's life there are moments when there is a direct connection to the Soul, to one's essence. There are moments when you feel you have gone past your day-to-day engagements, your struggles and your difficulties, your joys, your relationships. You have gone deep within for a moment and touched something profound. Perhaps you feel expansiveness, a connection with nature, with all beings, perhaps with the stars in the heavens, perhaps with a loved one. For a moment, you transcend your ordinary way of looking at the world, the ordinary boundaries by which you define yourself and confine yourself and you become for a moment, free, unbound, alive, connected to your Soul, to your essence. Your heart goes out in connection to all the living beings in the world, all the people, all the plants, all the animals and even the sunset, the mountains, the ocean.

Have you ever felt yourself soar on the wings of an eagle, dive into the sea, rise with the sun, expand with the vastness of the universe? Have you ever contemplated all the planets and the multitude of living beings in the stars above? When you do you begin to realize how small is a human life, how fleeting and yet how precious each and every moment, because each and every moment is an opportunity to know the Infinite, to connect to the source of being. Each and every moment is an opportunity to expand your consciousness beyond the limits of your five senses and your physical body, to expand and become something more, something great, something amazing. Each and every moment is an opportunity to know your innermost Self and through knowing that divine Self, you come to know the vastness of this whole creation. For all truly lies within, in the depths of your Soul. In the deep inner recesses of your being lies the unstruck music from which stars are born, planets come to exist and endless living beings move, are being born, live for a time and fade from this world. Countless beings are coming and going, all abiding in the chords of eternity and known in the depths of your own being. There, the difference between I and thou dissolves. There, where light and sound are one, your experience is flooded with a shower of light. There, love abides, undefined.