

Loving Your Way to Awakening Week 1

Welcome to our first week's homework! I'm so happy to be back in satsang with all of you.

Please listen once more to Wednesday's lecture.

We've also included a link to the Spotify playlist at the end of this document I've made for the course. My suggestion is that you spend a few minutes a day chanting along with one of these kirtan chants or another of your choice. You can chant on a walk, in the car, while doing housework.

I know many of you are familiar with this practice and its power to open the heart.

For the best experience of the power of chant, station your attention in the heart, behind the breastbone, and see if you can listen and sing with heart-based awareness.

Please carefully read the material below. I know there is a lot here, and you don't have to do all of it. One reason I like to offer a lot of homework is so that you can pick which questions and open-eyed practices you want to engage.

That said, I deeply encourage you to engage the meditation protocol here. Please meditate for at least 20 minutes a day, whether in the morning or at a convenient time.

The meditation practices, including the preliminary asanas and pranayama, are crucial to the alchemical process of the course. If you have your own usual meditation practice, of course it's fine to do that, but I would suggest that you work with the "I am loved" or "I am love" affirmation/mantra for at least a few minutes during a meditation session.

The contemplation questions and sutra contemplations become very powerful if you do them right after meditation, but it's also fine if you do the contemplations at a different time during the day. Just take a few minutes before you begin the contemplations to sit and center yourself in the awareness of the breath and the intention to open to love.

In these exercises and contemplations, it's important to use the words for "love" and "spirit" that feel true and real to you. If the word "love" feels too big or too freighted with baggage, you can substitute the word "acceptance" or "tenderness" or "sweetness" or "kindness." Or use the word "spirit" or "Presence" or "allowing" or "God." But also realize that sometimes it is useful to step outside your verbal comfort zone, and experiment with using different words for the formless undying Presence that we are calling love.

Meditation Practice

Please begin with ten minutes of Hatha Yoga postures or light stretching to wake up your body. Then do five minutes of Nadi Shodhana breathing.

Offer your meditation, asking that it be of benefit to all beings, or to a particular person (or animal or place).

Chant the opening mantras that we chanted on Wednesday, or the mantras of your choosing

Preparatory Grounding

For a minute or two, practice whole body attention with the following four steps. This will both ground you and expand your awareness of yourself as a unified physical entity.

1. Inhale and exhale, feeling the air flowing in and out of your nostrils.
2. Expand your awareness to include the movements that the chest and abdomen make when you breathe.
3. Allow yourself to be aware of your heartbeat or pulse in your body.
4. Include in your awareness the sense of your muscles holding your body in a balanced posture.

Core Practice

Begin by asking, "Let me feel the presence of love, in whatever form she appears now."

With your attention on the breath, become aware of the presence around you of a benign, loving energy, the energy of grace and love.

Have the feeling of welcoming or allowing the energy to breathe you, even to hold you.

Feel or sense that your breath is arising and subsiding on its own, drawn by the power of love, which is breathing you.

Have the sense that your heart center opens like the shutter of a camera. Have the sense that love (tenderness, acceptance) is flowing in and out through the heart.

With gentle attention, breathe in the thought "I am loved." If the word "love" feels uncomfortable, think, "I am accepted" or "I am welcomed" or "I am embraced" or "I am held."

You might also prefer to practice with the thought "I am love." You may find that at a certain point, the thought stops being words and becomes a feeling. Or you may practice with it like a mantra, silently dropping it into your heart either with the inhalation, or simply at intervals.

As thoughts arise, notice the thought with the feeling that the thought is actually made of particles of love. Love in the form of thought. And let it flow out with the breath.

Contemplation and Writing Practice

Set aside at least half-an-hour this week to sit with a notebook or journal and contemplate these questions. You might find that you have a lot to say about some of them, and not as much about others, but try to answer them all if only in a line or two. You might want to re-visit or re-read your answers later in the week and add to them.

These questions can also be the basis of a partner discussion.

What are the signals by which I normally recognize the presence of love? Do you agree with Welwood's definition of love as a feeling of openness and warmth?

What is my relationship with spirit?

Is there a difference for me between "personal love" and "spiritual" or "universal"? In what ways do they feel different and in what ways similar?

Have you experienced love (affection, tenderness, warmth) arising as a "messenger from the mystery"?

What kind of love do I long for that I am not currently experiencing?

Are there things I feel I need to do or be in order to deserve love?

How have I currently or in the past ignored, rejected, or denied love?

What are the ways that I give love? In what ways am I a vehicle for the love or tenderness of spirit?

Walking Around Practices

Begin and end your day by offering your day to love, spirit, God, Presence. Notice the effect this has on your experience. This is one of the simplest of devotional practices, but it can be radical in shifting your experience, especially in times of stress. (Try using different words for that Presence and notice whether the experience of it differs according to the words you use.)

From time to time, in the course of the day, ask yourself, "Am I in touch with the presence of love?" If the answer is "No," ask yourself, "What can I do (or think) now to be aware of the presence of love?"

Suggestions:

Ask: Is there any love present?

Have the thought, "I am loved" or "No matter how I feel or what I think, love is inside and around me." Or have the thought, "I accept this situation and myself."

Breathe with the thought that you are breathing in particles of love.

Don't forget that the feeling of not being in touch with love might mean that you are hungry, thirsty, sleepy or need to meditate!

Sutras for Week 1

Here are the first four sutras, with commentary and questions. Spend a few minutes reading them, and if you are working with one of the commentaries, such as Narada's Way of Divine Love, read through the commentary on each sutra from that book.

As you read through these, repeat the Sanskrit three times out loud. (This helps you feel the energy in the sutras, which is considerable.) You can also sing it, draw it, or take it into a Hatha Yoga asana.

As Sutra 1 is basically an invocation, I'd suggest that in contemplating the sutras, you start with Sutra 2.

Here is a contemplation process to use:

- Say the English to yourself (or sing it!)
- Close your eyes, breathe into the heart, and hold the sutra in awareness for a minute or two.
- Open your eyes and write down any insights, experiences, questions, or conclusions about the meaning of the sutra and your relationship to it.

You can also do this process a partner discussion. Feel free to be as creative with this as you are inspired to be

Sutra 1

अथातो भक्तिं व्याख्यास्यामः ॥

athāto bhaktim vyākhyāsyāmaḥ

Now, therefore, we will speak of bhakti (devotion).

atha: now

athah: commence

bhaktim: devotion

Sutra 2

सा त्वस्मिन् परमप्रेमरूपा ॥

sā tvasmin paramapremarūpā

It (Bhakti), truly, is of the nature of the highest form of love in this.

saa: That (bhakti)

tvasmin: This (meaning, the Absolute Reality, the inner Self, the light of Awareness, God)

parama: supreme

prema: love

rupa: nature of

Question: Consider why Narada has referred to the object of supreme love as “This” rather than “God” or Ishwara. What does that say about the goal of the spiritual path?

Question: From your experience or understanding, what is supreme love? What distinguishes “supreme love” from what we might call “ordinary” love?

Commentary

As you consider supreme love and how it compares with “ordinary” love, consider how the flavors of love (tenderness, compassion, acceptance, warmth) can be experienced conditionally (I love you when you’re nice to me) or unconditionally (love flows no matter what).

Also, consider the meaning of the word “this” as it might apply to the others in your life. What it is you love in the other people in your life? Along with their unique traits or lovable personal qualities, are there relationships or moments in relationships when you looked into their eyes or felt their energy and sensed the presence of their inner light, their inner Self? In other words, have you had the experience of feeling love for “this,” the sacred suchness, through another person, an animal, or through nature?

Question: In your experience, how and when can “ordinary” love (for a person, place, or other form) become a doorway into supreme love?

Question: Are there relationships in your life where love feels unconditional?

Question: What do you feel blocks your full experience of love? (We’ll return to this in later classes!)

Sutra 3

अमृतस्वरूपा च ॥

amṛtasvarūpā ca

And its essence is the nectar of immortality.

amṛta: nectar of immortality

svarupa: essence

ca: and

Commentary

Amrita is the substance that the gods drink in order to be immortal. In a more down to earth sense, amrita is the inner flavor of bliss and happiness, which is the felt experience of loving. In another sense, this sutra is pointing out that love is alchemical: as amrita makes the gods immortal, the sweetness of love directed at the Spirit or source has an alchemical effect on the psyche.

Another way to interpret this sutra is to realize that it is pointing towards a particular form of enlightenment, or awakening, in which the primary experience is of undying,

unconditional love for others and the world. Part of the power of the bhakti path is that when you become immersed in the practices (chanting, storytelling, the company of others who are on the path) you begin to experience trickles of this loving feeling that the sutra calls nectar.

It's said that this path is "good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end". The goal and the means are the same.

Question: Describe, if you can, what it means to you to taste the "nectar" inside love. Where do you feel love when you feel it in your body? (Remember, all feelings of love count!)

Question: How have you felt (at various moments in your life) a positive loving feeling that changed your inner state or sense of self? How has being around a loving person had an alchemical effect on you?

Sutra 4

यल्लब्ध्वा पुमान् सिद्धो भवत्यमृतो भवति तृप्तो भवति ॥

yal-labdhvā pumān siddho bhavatyamṛto bhavati tṛpto bhavati

Obtaining spiritual devotion, a person becomes a siddha, a perfected one, beyond death and fully satisfied.

yal: that (spiritual devotion)

labdhvā: obtaining

puman: a person

siddho: a perfected or accomplished being

amṛto: nectar of immortality (in this context, beyond death)

bhavati: becomes

tṛpto: fully satisfied

Commentary

This sutra is pointing towards the outcome of the journey: a type of enlightenment that is also described in the tantric texts of Kashmir Shaivism and in Tibetan Buddhism. A siddha in this context is one who has completed the journey of soul-evolution, has gone beyond death (meaning that s/he doesn't have to be reborn). Traditionally, such a siddha also has powers that he or she employs for the benefit of others.

In this sutra, Narada is saying that the path of devotion leads to the accomplishment of the ultimate goal of life, which is to realize your nature as pure Awareness/Love, and to live in that state. This state is also called "jivan mukti", or liberation while in a body, because even while you are perceiving through the senses and mind, you now identify entirely you're your true Self, and with the divine. In the Vedanta path, the realization is that "I am That" as pure awareness (Truth) filled with bliss. In the Bhakti Path, the realization is "I am That" as pure love filled with knowledge of Truth. The goal is the

same, but the flavor is different. One who has reached this state of siddha hood through the path of love will be happy no matter what, and will be able to live in the world and maintain their state of supreme love, which then becomes contagious. In a recent book of memories of Neem Karoli Baba, a group of devotees recalled how being around him not only made them love him, but also love each other. One of the hallmarks of the bhakti path is that as you mature in it you can see the divine in others and love them.

The word *trptaha*, meaning “fully satisfied” points to the fact that when bhakti matures, you become completely fulfilled. All issues, all karmic situations, all worldly ambitions and dissatisfactions are resolved. The result is overwhelming satisfaction and bliss.

The Taittiriya Upanishad describes this bliss by comparing it to the levels of happiness that different people enjoy: the happiness of a king with everything he wants, the happiness of a god who can manifest whatever he desires, and so on through various possibilities, each of which is described as one hundred times greater than the one before. It ends by saying “All these forms of bliss are but a hundredth part of the bliss experienced by a knower of the Absolute.”

Question: If you have ever met someone who seemed to be in this state, what did you notice about them? If you have ever felt yourself approaching this state (even for a moment) what did you feel?

Question: Can you imagine yourself as a Siddha, a person who is utterly complete? Try it. How would you be in the world? How would you relate to others?

Partner Practice:

If you are new to the partner practices of this community, please read the instructions on the handout about Partner Practice on the course page.

Some of you might want to make the entire discussion about your experience of love, personal, spiritual, and universal, perhaps using the questions above as prompts. Others might want to do this in the context of analysis of the sutras. If you are using the commentaries in Narada’s Way of Divine Love or another text, read these as well when you consider the sutras.

Spotify playlist: Sally’s Bhakti Playlist

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1jtSowNjErcFRtKbAb22Cf?si=5cbea801dd674ef0>