

THE RED ISSUE: AMERICAN HEART HEALTH

heart & soul

MIND, BODY & SOUL

THE SOFTER
SIDE OF
KENYA

CELEBRATE
**BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH**

ACTRESS
**SHARON
LEAL** IN
WHITE
WATER

**VALENTINE'S
DINNER**
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G. GARVIN**
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THE FIGHT
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4
STEPS TO
STAYING
FINANCIALLY
FIT

THE
**POSITIVE
SIDE TO
MENOPAUSE**

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2015



Cultivating Unconditional Love: Yoga Devotion

By Sherry Sidoti



If you want to meet your soul mate, take a look in the mirror. I used to speak of love as giving and receiving, an energy or exchange between myself and someone else; something we feel, give and expect in return. It's easy to speak of love when I'm in love, because when love is in "currency-mode", the back and forth yumminess feels so great, I want to shout it out to the world. Yet how can we source this same deliciousness even if we are not currently in love? Or an even harder question, how do we access pure love amidst a heartbreak?

What does it mean to love unconditionally? To love, even if, or just because? This does not mean enabling unhealthy patterns or staying in relationships full of conditions. Lord knows, we've all clung onto situations that have not served us well in the name of love. Unconditional love does, however, source from a deep place of loving Self enough to sometimes make the choice to be alone or to set someone free from us—yet ever thankful

for the love that existed at all, and for future love that will return again in another way, someday. Sometimes the fiercest love comes in the form of leaving. Because the greater truth is that other person simply served as a reminder of the love that already exists inside. That person helped us access it, so we can be grateful. When we realize this, we can relax around needing them, and well, this is a form of pure love.

Loving purely requires us to honor and welcome that all things change, even our experience and interpretation of love. Just as the love a mother feels for her child is different than the love between lovers, it is an energy that likes to move. Lustlove hits us out of the blue, long term love transmutes into friendship, and so on. To love the experience of love with or without another person to love, this is pure love.

So how can we cultivate pure love at any given moment, especially in times of challenges within our relationships, or when we are alone? First and

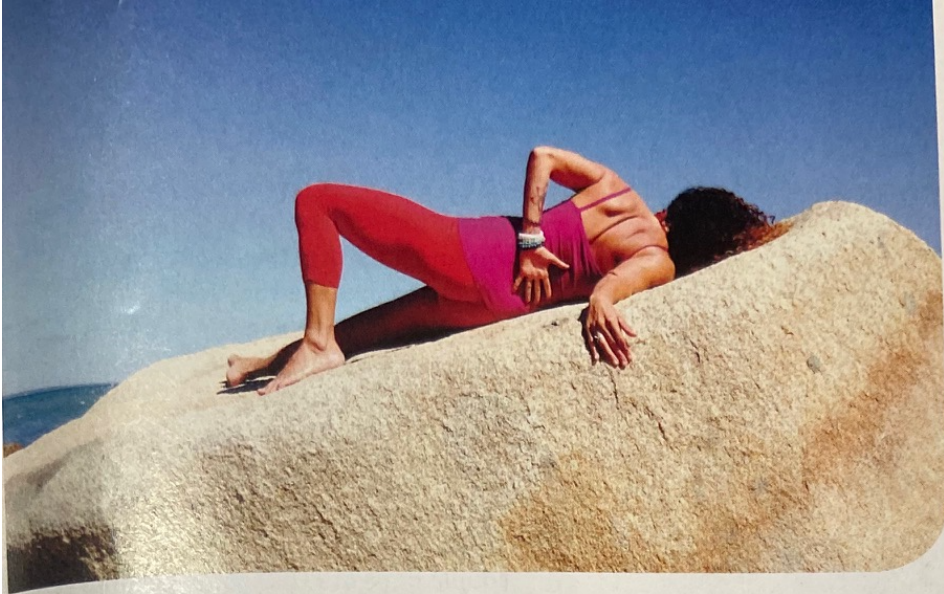
foremost, we must appreciate what is, knowing that our life circumstances do not happen to us, but for us. The yoga practice reminds us that love is devoting ourselves to the fierceness of everyday life AS IS, and finding the golden nuggets of the heart in the space of NOW, even if the circumstances of our life feel chaotic, lonely or loveless.

In Bhakti, or Devotional Yoga, we connect to pure love in all its forms. The practice does not ask of us that we transcend the day to day disappointments or heartbreaks, but instead that we utilize them to ignite a certain mood, called Bhavana, or a love without strings. So we sing, dance, meditate or take postures in the spirit of devotion, and when we do, it trickles into the cells of our being, reminding us that underneath it all lies a strength of the warrior that is ever-present, called intention. And when the intention is to access pure love towards ourselves and others, we open our hearts fully to what resides inside and respect and appreciate all others. By our very birthright, the bhaktis say, we ARE love. Once we remember that, loving unconditionally comes naturally. However, sometimes we forget this and so we use our yoga as a reminder. Below is a short yoga practice of chest opening poses using some of the bhakti meditations that help us to tap the never-ending well of the heart.

In love & light,
Sherry

POSE 1: SHOULDER OPENERS WITH VATSALYA BHAV MEDITATION

Begin by laying down on the mat with your belly to the earth and your arms stretched out to sides from your shoulders. Inhale, "I know love" and exhale, repeating the same. Bend your right elbow and bring that hand under your right shoulder. Press into the right hand to roll your body over the left arm, move slowly and with care so as to not put too much weight on your arm too quickly.



Continue to breathe with the “I know love” mantra. Once the body is rolled over the left arm, bend your right knee and place the foot behind your left leg, knee towards the sky and wrap the back of your right hand to the lower back. Now bring your attention to your chest and begin to meditate on the love you have for a child, a parent, pet or a dear friend. Breathe into this feeling for a full minute, coming back to it each time the mind wants to drift. Place an image of his/her face into your chest and breathe, repeating “I know love” on inhale, “I know love” on exhale. Stay here for 10-15 breaths, and very slowly back out of the pose onto the belly again. Pause for 5 breaths, with “I am love” as your mantra. Switch sides.

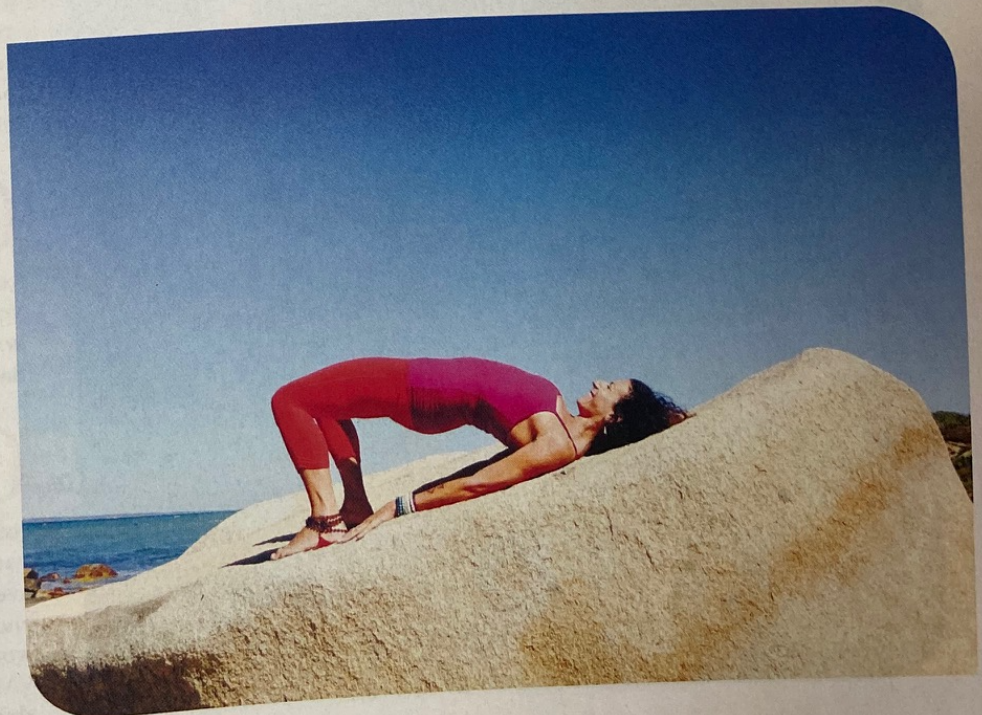
POSE 2: COBRA POSE WITH DASYA BHAV MEDITATION

Come back to lay on the belly, this time with palms under the shoulders and the elbows hugging in towards the sides of the rib cage. Relax the seat and stretch each leg back and up and then place the tops of both feet on the ground, heels slightly opening away from the big toes. On an inhale, press down with your hands and use the muscles of your back to lift the head, shoulders and chest off the ground. Without straining your neck, look upward. As you do, meditate on the love you have received from a mentor or great teacher in your life. Recount the ways this person had guided you with deep reverence and gratitude. Picture his/her face in the center of your chest, recalling a direct experience you had under his/her tutelage and lift yourself towards this feeling. Breathe into the gratitude and respect for having received this form of guidance. Stay here for 5 breaths. Each inhale, repeat the mantra, “thank you”, and each exhale, the same. On the fifth exhale, bring your body down to the ground, make a little pillow for your head

to rest on with your hands for 3 breaths, with “I am grateful” as your mantra.

POSE 3: BRIDGE POSE WITH VIRAHA BHAV MEDITATION.

Lay on your back with knees bent and feet on floor directly under your knees, arms alongside your body, palms down on earth. Press into your feet, the back of the skull, and your arms and lift your hips up towards the sky, seat off the floor. Make sure to un grip the butt and puff out the chest, breathing the rib cage wide open. In this position, meditate on a love lost, the feeling of desire, longing and missing someone you once “had”. Picture his/her face in your chest and remember the love you once shared. Meditate on this image. Stay here for 7 breaths, each inhale repeating the mantra, “thank you for leaving me”, each exhale the same.



Allow yourself to feel the bridge between you and this person, what rests between, the yearning. Remind yourself that heartache is its own special form of love, it's what inspires all the great poems, songs, and works of art. Allow yourself to feel grateful in the empty space of longing. After all, it's the cracks that let the light in. On the seventh exhale, slowly begin to roll the spine down to the ground, one vertebrae at a time. When the seat lands, rest here for three breaths, with “I am true love and true love lies within” as your mantra.

THE PLAYLIST

- This Little Light of Mine
ELIZABETH MITCHELL
- Love & Happiness
AL GREEN
- The Maha Mantra
C.C. WHITE
- Love's in Need of Love Today
STEVIE WONDER
- Sita Ram
SRIKALOGY
- Love Is
COMMON
- This Train (Acoustic Melody)
BOB MARLEY
- Embrace (feat. Morely)
EARTHRISE SOUNDSYSTEM
- Love is My Religion (Acoustic)
ZIGGY MARLEY
- Ka Ipo Lei Manu
BROTHER NOLAND