

The love of yoga

Through the practice of yoga we can experience true love. Not the romantic love shared by two people committed to each other; but the true acceptance and genuine compassion for oneself, for others, for the nature surrounding us and for the very planet on which we live.

Often we go through our life, consumed by our daily tasks without considering the importance of each breath, each movement or interaction, until, suddenly, we are in the midst of a life changing event; this may be a happy occasion such as the completion of a significant accomplishment or the celebration of a marriage or a birth. More often, the life changing event is a sad occasion such as the loss of a dear friend or family member, or the diagnosis of a debilitating condition. Until then, we tend to be self-involved and isolated from the grandeur and importance of all life.

With each yoga practice, we can remind ourselves of the value of breath, the way in which we respond to and welcome each breath. How, in *Tadasana*, our breath has a stabilizing effect, we stand up a little straighter to open our chest and accommodate the natural intake of the air around us; perhaps we activate the moola bandha to increase the steadiness of our stance and calm our mind in preparation for the pending practice. In a similar way, as we enter *Uttanasana*, the exhalation has a cleansing affect, pushing out the stale breath and preparing the tissues and organs for the next fresh, revitalizing breath.

Practiced with *ahimsa*, the notion of non-violence, the movement between poses and counter poses becomes the mode of interaction between our intent and the purpose through which we can express our love of Life. The thoughtful movement welcoming each breath becomes an act of love which is naturally extended to the very air we breathe, for inherent in the value we give to our breath is the quality of the air that sustains us.

We value the pure cleanliness of the air as it is an integral part of us; we become aware of the unsavory nature of polluted air, the dust, smoke and industrial debris that is now a common condition of urban living.

As our love and consideration grow for ourselves, so does it grow for that with which we nurture ourselves, not just the air, but, by extension, the foods we select as nourishment, where the food comes from, the conditions in which it is produced and the effects on nature of its production.

Our love is further extended to the natural surroundings and all the life that can be found in that nature. We consider how the contaminated air affects how plants and trees, and animals, insects and birds find survival a little more difficult in adverse conditions. We notice the natural evolution of the planet, the health of its water ways, the effects of industrialization and other forms of 'progress' such as the growth of multi-national companies with economic policies that effect the livelihood of people everywhere.

Our perspective shifts from that which is good for me to that which is good for all.

We learn to think a little more critically about how our actions might impact the health and welfare of those around us, whether of people or of nature. We are encouraged to honestly identify and accept limitations, whether personal or collective, and genuinely, with compassion and thoughtfulness, pursue alternatives and innovative solutions to make our world a better place. As yoga teachers we can teach the collective unity through which the love of yoga will grow.