

love is all around

JOHN MAKRANSKY encourages us to recognize the unconditional love in our lives.

MY ROOT SPIRITUAL teacher, Nyoshul Khenpo, once said that a moment of enlightenment is a moment when we realize “the blessings that are always pouring forth.” We are, by nature, endowed with qualities of absolute goodness—purest love, compassion, wisdom, and tranquility. Those radiant qualities are intrinsic to our being. They are among the “blessings” to which Khenpo refers. A moment of enlightenment is a moment in which we newly notice such “blessings” as having been all around us, and within us, from the beginning. Whenever we are ready to notice, we can sense their healing, liberating energy pouring forth right here, right now.

One such radiant quality is unconditional love, the kind of love that doesn’t care what someone has thought or done but simply wishes him or her deep well-being and joy. It’s like the unconditional and unreserved love that a wise, devoted parent has for a child. That capacity for love is within each of us and has been active all around

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us, pervading our world from the moment we were born.

The claim that love pervades this world may not sound real to you but that doesn’t mean it isn’t true.

Most of us just haven’t learned to pay much attention to the countless moments of love, kindness, and care that surround us each day: a child at the store reaching for her mother’s hand, an elderly stranger at the park who smiles upon a young family, a grocery clerk who beams at you as she hands you your change.

The “blessings that are always pouring forth” include the love that has permeated our lives, peeking at us through many eyes. Think, for example, of someone you loved to be near when you were a child: a parent or grandparent, a special aunt or uncle, a family friend or teacher—someone it felt wonderful to be with. Why did you like to be near that person so much? Probably because she radiated a wish of love to you through the quality of her presence, her words, her play with you, or simply through her smiling eyes when you came near. Try to remember someone like that from your childhood right now. Hold that person in your mind for a moment and recall how it felt to be near her. That’s what it is like to receive the love that simply wishes for your happiness. We like to be near people like that because we have a deep need to receive their unspoken love, to drink up its life-giving goodness.

That radiant blessing of love has been coming to us from the start, not just from a few people close to us, but also from many not personally known to us or people long forgotten. So many have offered themselves to us quietly, unnoticed and unremarked upon, such as those who served in our school, who coached sports for us as small children, who taught us music and clapped for us, who watched over us with kindness and care wherever we ran and played. Then there are all the adults who put loving care into their work, as our teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, craftsmen, bakers, librarians, and waitresses. Yet we may never have noticed the extent of such care and consideration. No one actually verbalizes: “Out of *(continued on page 32)*

Border Crossing, Alex Webb, Nogales, Mexico, 1979



Guided Meditation #1: Commune with Spiritual Benefactors

It is important to learn to recognize deeply spiritual people in your world, past or present, who function as spiritual benefactors. These are persons that you feel embody great goodness, a force of love and compassion that extends to all without partiality, including yourself. These may be people in your life whose fundamental goodness and way of being profoundly influenced you. If you have a mentor or teacher who inspires your spiritual practice, he or she would be included here. You could also include the teachers of your own spiritual teacher. People most profoundly holy to you, such as Shakyamuni Buddha or Jesus, would fall into this category. Try to identify ones you feel to be such sacred beings and trust your own maturing sense of that, without trying merely to conform to others' assumptions.

You can keep a picture of a spiritual benefactor near you to help you relate to this person. One meditator I know keeps a picture of Mr. Rogers,

the fatherly television personality and minister who helped generations of American children feel at home in this world. Because spiritually weighty beings have communed so deeply with the very source of love and compassion we share in that ground when we open to their wish of love. It blesses our life. This is part of the reason that images of the Buddha, the Dalai Lama, and other revered spiritual teachers are so important to Tibetan Buddhists—such figures are sources of spiritual energy and inspiration for those who regularly commune with them. Try to bring to mind one or more spiritual benefactors now, whether personally known to you or admired from a distance, and imagine their smiling presence before you. Relax and gently open to receive their wish of love that radiates to you and many others. Commune with them in that way for a little while, and enjoy.

(continued from page 30) loving concern for all the children in this neighborhood, including you, I am helping to build this playground,” or “I am now sending you the wish of love; that’s why you like to be near me.” And the child doesn’t think “I am now receiving the wish of love.” So we may never become conscious of how much loving care pervades our world.

As we grow older, we learn to pay attention to things that society considers more real and significant than the loving care of all those people. According to the social discourse around us, it seems much more important to identify those whom we should hate, fear, or compete with for affirmation, power, and wealth. Meanwhile, television news and magazines focus our communal attention each day on the horrible things that some people have done to others, as if that is all that happened in the world that day.

Much of our discourse is spent propping up this negative worldview: “Oh, yes, I know what you mean, my relatives are horrible too.” “I can’t stand that politician either.” “Can you believe how stupid those people are?” We have become so smug in our cultural cynicism we don’t notice that even the people we generally look down upon have had moments of integrity and kindness.

In addition, there are people in the world and throughout history who have benefited many people beyond their personal lives, people whose way of being embodies such powerful concern for others and for the world that they epitomize our greatest human potential: Shakyamuni Buddha and Jesus, St. Francis, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, Mother Theresa, the Dalai Lama. Such potent spiritual beings have radiated their love to all of us without discrimination. But with our modern, secular worldview, many of us have forgotten how to acknowledge and to receive the liberating power of such love. Instead, we’ve learned to ignore it.

Our society provides no curriculum or schooling on how to notice love or to recognize the many people who have transmitted its life-giving power. Most of us haven’t been taught that to receive love deeply and transmit it wholeheartedly is a real human possibility, that it can be learned, and that to do so is the key to our deepest well-being, our spiritual life, and our capacity to bring more goodness into this world.

So as adults, we need to become newly aware of the love that has infused our lives all along, to turn our attention to it afresh with the eyes of a child. To do so is to become con-

Guided Meditation #2: Discover the Benefactors in Your Life

We discover love’s transformative and liberating power first by receiving love more fully, then by offering it more inclusively, and finally by reflecting it from the ground of our being. To enter into this process, we need to identify benefactors who have been emissaries of love in our lives.

“Benefactor” here means someone who has sent us the wish of love, the simple wish for us to be well and happy. Once we start to notice such beings, we find, actually, that there have been many that have radiated such love to us, but we had mostly overlooked or forgotten them.

A benefactor is someone you perceive as such in your own experience, not just someone you assume you should pick as benefactor. Your benefactors may be living or not. The power of love transcends how we think of time.

Benefactors need not be infallible or perfect people. Just allow yourself to become newly aware of

moments when someone’s unreserved love came to you—through a kind word, a gesture, a smile, or a comforting presence. It could be someone well known to you or a seeming stranger.

Try to recall someone like that from your childhood right now. Envision his or her smiling presence before you. Recall how good it felt to be near that person. That is what it is like to receive love. Hold that person in mind for a little while, communing with him or her in the simple goodness of their wish of love for you, their wish for your happiness and joy. Take a few minutes just to relax and receive that wish from him or her. Right now.

When you feel ready, try to think of a few other people you adored being near as a child. An uncle or aunt, perhaps? A schoolteacher that you loved to be with? A friend of your parents whom you looked forward to seeing? When I began to do this exercise, my second-grade teacher suddenly appeared in my

scious of the tremendous capacity for love that even now permeates our being—to open to it, to be healed by its life-giving energy, and to participate in its power to renew our world. We can awaken to the deepest goodness in ourselves and others. We can learn to recognize and commune with the blessings that have always been pouring forth.

The first step is to learn to pay new attention to what has been ignored. Many people are extending love, the simple wish for us to be happy—and have been since the day we were born. What is remarkable to me is what

goodness of being, the intrinsic goodness of experience itself, the joy of being alive. It brings out the natural wisdom that was hidden in our minds—a purer vision that knows the beings and things all around us to be utterly holy, as if they were all messengers of the Buddha.

To receive love in this way is to become conscious of a fresh, sacred world that was somehow obscured by our tired, socially constructed worlds of self-centered worry and cynicism. When someone awakens in a moment of receptivity to the “blessings that are always

To receive love deeply and transmit it wholeheartedly is a real human possibility.

happens when we are willing to *notice* it. And even more remarkable is what happens when we are willing to *receive* it. The simple act of accepting a stranger’s wish for our happiness empowers us to experience the world in a completely different way.

To receive such a simple wish of love quietly opens our minds to an innate wisdom that recognizes the essential

pouring forth,” the fresh, sacred world that was long ignored suddenly unveils itself. It is self-revealed as one’s true home. ▼

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mind’s eye—Mrs. Kirchner, whom I liked so much that I accidentally called her “Mom” at school. She wasn’t just teaching; she was expressing her love for her students through her teaching. Then there was my Uncle Morton, who expressed his love with silly jokes and by snatching some of my french fries when I wasn’t looking—while making sure I would catch him in the act. When you have thought of a few such benefactors in your life, imagine them before you one by one or all together. Mentally hold the smiling faces of those benefactors before you; then relax and just accept the simple goodness of their wish for your well-being and happiness, their wish of love for you. Take time for this right now, accepting, receiving, and enjoying the power of their wish. There is nothing more important to do.

If you do this exercise repeatedly, you will recognize more benefactors not only from your early life but also from other periods. Even now there are

people you have probably overlooked who make a wish for your happiness, but you haven’t realized yet how important and life-giving it is to pay attention to them.

As your practice progresses, you may find yourself widening your range of benefactors by spontaneously recalling instances when you were the recipient of unconditional love, even from people that you long characterized as unloving. One meditator who had a particularly difficult relationship with his mother told me how during a meditation session he found himself recalling a scene from his early childhood. He had been in a fever, foggy with delirium, when his mother came to soothe him by placing her hand on his stomach—a gentle, healing touch. The memory of that simple, loving gesture suddenly reawakened. Again, we are not looking for infallible people; just moments when genuine, unreserved care came through.