

Meditative Story Transcript – Rohan Gunatillake (Valentine’s Day meditation)

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ROHAN GUNATILLAKE: So, Valentine’s Day.

There are a lot of things about this holiday that make me feel cynical: Overpriced restaurant menus, cliched cards, and a dozen red roses with the carbon footprint of a small town.

You could say that this particular saint’s day is not that big a thing for me.

But celebrating love, that I can get behind.

Today I want us to try and expand beyond the boundaries of romantic love to celebrate love in its varied forms. The kind of love that sustains our hearts and minds, no matter what date is on the calendar.

So regardless of what this holiday means to you, let’s take the time to settle in.

Dedicating this time to ourselves.

Gifting this meditation to ourselves.

Giving ourselves permission for the body to just breathe, nothing else.

Relaxing the body. Softening the body.

Balancing relaxation with openness. Love can be such a charged word, that the idea of getting into it for a whole meditation can feel a bit much. Recognizing that we move to openness, to curiosity.

The senses — bright and open to whatever comes their way, not missing anything.

The mind itself. Open.

To begin, let’s spend a moment on the love born out of companionship.

It can take many forms, be expressed in many ways. In my case, it’s canine.

Cat Stevens, now Yusuf Islam, is one of my and my wife’s favorite singer-songwriters. His first album from 1967 has this track on it: “I love my dog.”

I always used to think it was a bit silly with its opening refrain: “I love my dog more than I love you.”

Then I got a dog for the first time, and I understood what that song was talking about.

Nessie will be 11 in a couple of months time, and we've had her since she was 8 weeks old.

She's the sort of dog that makes people who don't like dogs end up liking dogs. She's gentle, never noisy.

With her curly black hair and her super chill vibe, she's a bit of a stealth dog. But she will be protective of us when she feels she needs to, especially looking out for the 2 members of the family younger than her.

Sophia, my 4 year old, is into her, feeding her her toast crusts at breakfast when she thinks we're not looking.

But Arne, my 7 year old, is obsessed, finding just the right spot behind her ears for a scratch, topping up her water bowl when he spots it's a bit low. He gets it.

Nessie's not been particularly well recently, and it's been hard. We love her very much. Her unwavering loyalty has brought a richness to our lives. And the new presence of her mortality makes our love I think even more acute.

You may have a pet that is like this for you. You may have had one in the past. You may never have had a pet. That doesn't matter.

The flavor of love I'm pointing to is really about companionship. Being with each other. Pets can open us up to this kind of love, as too can our friends, our family, or even our co-workers. It isn't defined by a particular type of relationship. It's defined by actions, and feelings.

Bring to mind the pet or person or friend in your life who is this for you.

Holding a memory of you together as you breathe.

Allowing whatever comes up to come up.

Paying particular attention to what it feels like here in the chest, here in the heart region.

Now, let's switch the love channel, and bring to mind an activity, hobby, or pursuit that we enjoy. The passion we feel for our interests is sometimes the most enriching form of love.

My most beloved hobby right now is reading modern fantasy novels. I love exploring the worlds they invent, exploring ideas through magical perspectives and unfamiliar contexts.

And now that there are so many more diverse writers breaking through, there is a new rich imagining of what fantasy writing can be. It's exciting, and I love it.

It's both an escape from the rest of my life and also a source of inspiration for it. I love the reading, and I love the discovery of new voices.

Just talking about it has me excited. My body is upright, alert, open. There is energy.

Love can foster that energy. It can create excitement for life and for the future. And that love doesn't need to be directed at a person.

Let's take some breaths together to reflect on the thing that you love, whether it's a recent endeavor or a lifelong pastime.

With it in mind, think about three things that you love about it and how it makes you feel.

Notice the energy in the body.

Again, notice what it feels like in the chest, in the heart region.

And if it has been a while since you've done this thing, how might you find a way to make some space in your life to do it again soon?

Now, let's expand our conception of love as far as we possibly can. Let's turn to the universal.

There is something about being human, where we see suffering in others, we are moved, moved to connect.

A person we see on the street who's having a difficult time of things.

Hearing a cry from a child in the park.

Countless people affected by a natural disaster.

While other thoughts or patterns might kick in shortly after, when we observe closely, our first reaction, our instinctual reaction, is often one of love.

We are compassionate, loving beings, even if we don't always think of ourselves as such.

Learning to see that reaction, that compassionate instinct is a wonderful way to not only recognize this quality in ourselves, but also to help it grow.

But sometimes it's hard to see the universal love that connects humanity. It can be subtle.

You may have heard me talk about before that the best way to notice subtle things is to ensure our awareness itself is subtle. Subtle minds notice subtle things. It's just how attention works.

So the first part of knowing and growing the love instinct we all have is to train the mind to notice quiet experiences.

The tingle of blood flow in your fingers.

The feeling of the breath on the lip just under our nostrils.

What the sensations are like where the eyelids meet the eyes when they are closed.

When we are attuned to this kind of subtlety, then we become interested when we encounter the suffering of others in our day to day lives and we learn how we react, how our heart reacts. Like all kinds of love, it's a training.

For the closing part of this sort-of Valentine's special, let's turn the camera around on ourselves.

Loving ourselves matters.

It's the wellspring for so much of our energy.

The mindfulness tradition likes using the metaphor of the wings of a bird.

And if I were to use it in the context of love, I'd say that one wing is loving ourselves and the other is loving others.

You have to have both, one without the other just doesn't work.

But for many of us, this idea of loving ourselves can be challenging.

For many of us, we feel like we're not deserving, unworthy.

The mind creating a whole host of very believable stories about why.

But remember: at the top of this meditation I spoke about how just listening to this meditation is like giving yourself a gift. It is evidence that you have love for yourself.

You have chosen our podcast as one of the things you do to support yourself, to care for yourself, and if that's not an expression of self-love then I don't know what is.

And the fact you've got to the close of the practice, then that's doubly true.

So, in this annual moment of heart-shaped chocolate boxes and all the rest, let's always remember that the best place to start when it comes to love is here.

Here.

If you like, you can place your hand on your heart as a way to orient towards yourself.

When it comes to self love, you'll have the things you do for yourself, your expressions of self-love.

Maybe it's making sure you have time to yourself. Maybe it's how you approach exercise. Maybe it's cooking yourself your favorite meal, or treating yourself to that thing you like.

What are your expressions of love to yourself?

Bring three of them to mind. Whatever they are.

Recognize them, celebrate them, cherish them.

Noticing any patterns of thought or storylines that they're self-indulgences and not important, and knowing those patterns and storylines just as that.

So to finish, let's breathe in, loving yourself, breathe out loving the world and everyone and everything in it.

Breathing in, loving self.

Breathing out, loving other.

Breathing in.

Breathing out.

Breathing in love.

Breathing out love.

Love.

Love.

Love.

Love.

Thank you.

There are so many more dimensions of love than those we've explored here.

So in this time when romantic love is given the full spotlight, commoditized and sold back to us.

Let's not fall for that game and play our own.

Knowing and celebrating the spectrum of loves that exist in our lives, from the big to the small, from the simple to the sacred.

Thank you again and see you again soon.

We'd love to hear more about which flavors of love matter most to you. You can find us on all your social media platforms through our handle @MeditativeStory. Or you can email us at: hello@meditativestory.com.