



LOVING YOUR WORK

Article by Lindsey Goodwin



Last month, I talked a bit about Love. My article had to do with the second of the two house rules here at Tea Sage Hut: Be in Love. There was pontification on loving your higher self, loving a romantic partner, loving friends, loving family and community, and loving a spiritual teacher.

I also promised that this month I'd talk about other expressions of Love, such as loving your work, loving tea and loving the Divine. So now I continue my talk of Love in a few of its other forms, ones which are not so much about loving 'individual' entities as they are about loving something greater. In each of the sections below, I've shared what little I know.

Loving Your Work

I remember going to "Take Your Daughter to Work Day" with my dad when I was little. Within ten minutes of being in his office, I asked, "Dad, do you hate your job?" He laughed, gave me a quizzical look and said yes. He spent more than 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, from when I was a baby until I was in my 20s at that particular job. When I was 20, my father was diagnosed with cancer, and eventually he died from it. In the years between his diagnosis and his death, he gained a lot of insight into how he had lived and how he could choose to live. He said his cancer was from hating his job. Over time, he found that he could experience great joy and growth from doing work he loved instead of work he loathed. He took up photography (and got his work exhibited in several galleries). He penned plays and screenplays (one of which was staged in a local theater). He also started writing about his peculiar-yet-fascinating hobby of collecting gourmet hot sauces (and got published in more magazines than you'd guess).

I learned some important lessons from his journey into loving his work. The main one is that doing work that you hate (or even dislike), day in and day out, is madness. Sure, it's a quotidian kind of madness, one which most people accept, but it's madness nonetheless. Despite any rationalization to the contrary, there is no reason to be complaisant about hating your work.

However, there's something else I've learned since then, something that my father's journey led me to understand through a circuitous route: Not being in a work situ-

ation you loathe isn't all about quitting a job you hate and finding a job you love. While a positive environment helps, the love and hate are all in you. If you quit a job you hate and start an exciting, wonderful new job, you may well hate it in a year or two. But if you can find a reasonably healthy work situation and learn to love it despite its limitations, you've figured out something magical—you've discovered a way to benefit the world and your growth, both on the physical and the spiritual levels.

As an aside, doing household work, running errands and the like can also take on a certain power when they are approached as enjoyable activities. I love to play music and sing while I clean, and often find myself dancing around as I fold laundry or do the dishes. Similarly, once I learned to accept that the post office line will always take longer than seems necessary (exponentially so in some countries!), then waiting in the queue got so much lighter for me, and I recently found that there can even be a kind of love and joy in it. (After all, how do I know what's necessary for the post office, and why would I assume that learning to wait in a post office line joyfully isn't an important part of my soul's journey?)

"I have found the paradox: that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love."

—Mother Theresa





善
行
急
げ

Loving Your Spiritual Work

There are three main kinds of spiritual work that I've experienced firsthand. One is personal growth. One is *seva*, or selfless service. And the third is *dana*, or giving donations. I'll start with the one that's connected to loving your monetary work: *dana*.

Giving *dana* out of Love is a wonderful way to learn to love your work more. It reminds you that you are

not just working for the benefit of yourself, but for many, and for a greater cause. It's also a great way to let go of monetary attachment. And as difficult as it can seem to give freely when you're feeling financially constricted, it is so much more rewarding in the long run. This is because it liberates you from the feeling that you need to have money to have status or financial security or anything else (or that you even need to have status or financial security!). It is something that many people need to ease

Loving Your Work

into, but something that you can learn to love with a little awareness surrounding it...

And then we have *seva*: Giving work to a spiritual teacher or spiritual community out of Love has many levels of personal benefits. These range from the physical (e.g., you helped clean the kitchen, so now you and others can enjoy a clean kitchen) to subtle (e.g., you gave a lot of mental work and energy to a project, so you were able to improve your skill in this area, reap the benefits of the project and, most importantly, learn to do work for the joy of doing work). But these are not yet *seva*. *Seva* is selfless service, and its benefits have much more to do with helping others in recognition that they are you, just as you are them. This starts with and leads deeper into a place of recognition of oneness; it comes from and feeds into being in a state of Love.

Finally, there's personal growth—working on your own stuff! Some of us have a lot of stuff to work through, and it can be difficult and painful to do sometimes. I can't really offer much advice or wisdom except to say that being present through the difficulties and pain makes a world of difference, as does having a spiritual teacher who can skillfully nudge (or, sometimes, shove) you in the right direction for your work. Beyond that, I can only say about personal work the same thing I say about sitting a ten-day Vipassana course: Is it challenging? Heck, yes! Is it worth it? More than I could have ever imagined it would be. And what's not to love about that?

Loving Tea

Loving Tea is a vast topic, one which we've devoted many a page to in these newsletters and in *The Leaf*. While loving Tea may seem, on the surface, like a limited scope for Love, it is anything but. Loving Tea means loving Nature. It means loving Goddess. It means loving the soul of each and every person who sits down for tea with you. It means loving each moment as a unique and beautiful expression of the Divine.

But I don't need to tell you these things. Instead, I'll simply say this: *Have a cup of tea!*

Loving Your Spiritual Tradition

While tea can be an excellent accompaniment to many types of spiritual work, it is also a path in and of itself. For this reason, tea appeals to a broad range of spiritual people. For some, it is a calling, a way, a Dao. Maybe it's that way for you, or maybe it isn't.

Love to serve tea? Wonderful! Follow that Love. Love to practice yoga and pranayama, or to be guided by crystals and tarot? Great, "follow your bliss!" But differentiate between what you're doing out of some surface level of "love" (like thinking something is cool or interesting)

and what you're doing as an expression of the Love that is the Divine energy of the universe, an emanation of Love from your higher self. If it's the latter, then that may very well be your path.

If serving tea is your path, then I welcome you to this tradition as my sister or brother. And if it isn't, then I welcome you as a beloved guest, and I offer one small piece of advice: If you are on your path already, stay on it and do not veer off course. If you haven't found your path yet, seek it as though your life depends on it. And when you find the path that calls to you, stick with it through the serene highs and the rockier times.

I'm not saying that you should go join some abusive cult. What I'm saying is that it's easy for the ego to make up excuses about why a certain tradition isn't the right one for you, or why now is the wrong time for spiritual work, or whatever. Forget all that. Let it fall away and let Love guide you. When you do this, you will likely find that your Love of your tradition grows and grows, and expands outward into all else in your life.

If your tradition is tea, you may find that your daily routines, your diet, your speech, your meditation practice, your taste in music and many other seemingly unrelated areas of your life are all greatly shifted by this Love of your tradition. Over time, as you surrender to your path, all of your life becomes Tea and the Love of Tea. And what more could you ask for, really, than to be consumed by that which you Love?

Loving Life's Flow

Each of these forms of Love I've discussed so far contains within it a Love of life's flow. Loving life's flow means loving the swirl of energies, the cosmic dance of *anicca* (impermanence), no matter what it brings. It means allowing energy to flow through you; rather than actively seeking and avoiding things, it involves being an observer and, when needed, taking action. This is loving life's flow on the scale of one human life, and it is a high state of being in Love.

Loving life's flow can also occur on a scale much larger than that of a single life. It can mean giving yourself over to something greater, something which encompasses numerous people's lives or innumerable lifetimes. This flow may appear continuous or discontinuous on the small scale, but it is part of a greater pattern that is visible when you step back and look at it.

For many people, whether they are spiritual or not, it can involve passing on something gifted to you. For example, a wonderful woman mentored me in my teens and twenties, and much of the good I do today honors her by passing that on. Or it could be a discontinuous passing on of a material object that was gifted to you, and which you later give to someone else.



Loving Your Work

For those on a spiritual path, loving life's flow beyond this lifetime often means being part of a tradition, and surrendering to it as your greater purpose. Through this, you can release your ego in service of your tradition and the many people it benefits.

Either way, this surrender to the larger flow of life leads to a deep state of acceptance and Love for each of its little moments: each tiny, infinite Now.

Loving Reality

Sometimes, accepting life's overall ebb and flow is easier to swallow than actually accepting the difficult moments when they arise. When this happens, loving reality becomes crucial.

Loving reality means embracing the constant change and flow of all things and energies, from the surface level (such as the flow of money) to the spiritual (such as the flow of energy within a spiritual tradition). It means that no matter how difficult a situation is, you can trust in yourself and in the universe that you are completely and fully equipped to deal with it by simply being present for it and accepting it as it is (and, if taking action, by acting in symphony with the present moment rather than reacting to it out of non-acceptance).

On a deeper level, loving reality means accepting each moment as a lesson for your soul to learn on its cosmic journey. It means experientially knowing that "what you resist persists", so you might as well go ahead and get over the fact that something is the way it is and learn to love it for what it is (even if the only thing you can find to love about it is that it's a lesson in acceptance and Love!).

I've only begun to tiptoe into loving reality, and already I've found that my level of stress and suffering has plummeted as a result. And, more importantly, I've found an ability to Love the situations, people and events in my life much more steadily and deeply.

Being Love

Being Love is a very high spiritual state. It's something I've only tasted a few times. From what I can convey of these glimmers of being Love, it is a state without self expressing Love without any borders, and without any particular person/place/event/object to Love. It is completely independent of external circumstances. When people are in a state of Love, they are letting Love flow through them and become them.

This state is so powerful that it feels like a little sink faucet was turned on and it started pumping out as much water as a fire hose on full blast. It's like the antithesis of all those movies where the villain gets some kind of superpower and says something silly like, "Bwahahaaa! Now I can control the world with my awesome power!"

The thinking mind and its machinations have no place in this; it's all heart. And there's no "I" to take action (much less control anything); it's all part of the infinite. The end result is what appears to be a person doing something completely normal (say, serving tea), but the individual is not there. While there physically, he or she has been replaced on an energetic/spiritual level by something much more powerful and beautiful than any one person could dream to be.

Tea has a magnificent way of bringing people closer to this state. It opens the heart, dissolves the ego and fosters connections so deep that the borders we perceive between all kinds of things (individual people, likes and dislikes, etc.) all begin to fade away. It is no coincidence that "guest and host become one" when drinking tea! I wish that all of you may be in Love and be Love through Tea. May you lose yourself in the bottom of your tea bowl, in the eyes of your guests and in the Goddess Spirit of Tea... and may you find your "self" replaced with something much greater as you surrender to this Love.

"The most important aspect of love is not in giving or the receiving: it's in the being. When I need love from others, or need to give love to others, I'm caught in an unstable situation. Being in love, rather than giving or taking love, is the only thing that provides stability. Being in love means seeing the Beloved all around me."

—*Ram Dass*



