

SHIVA REA

tending the heart fire

Living in Flow with the Pulse of Life

xi Foreword by Sally Kempton

1 Introduction

PART ONE

Tending the Heart Fire: Our Firekeeping Ancestors and the Evolution of Our Energetic Heart

13 Chapter One

Envisioning the Heart Fire: From Ancient Wisdom to Cutting-Edge Science

33 Chapter Two

Embodying the Cosmos: From the Primordial Fire to the Inner Heart Altar

51 Chapter Three

Embodying the Heart Fire:
The Science of the Energetic Heart

PART TWO

Meditations for Tending the Heart Fire

71 Chapter Four

Movement Meditation: Connecting to the Source of Movement

97 Chapter Five

Yoga Alchemy: Energetic
Vinyasa and the Flow of Rasa

115 Chapter Six

Heart Fire Meditations
and Life Practices

PART THREE

Living in Rhythm

149 Chapter Seven

Tending the Fire of Creation—
Ayurveda and Inner Firekeeping

167 Chapter Eight

Living Vinyasa: Cycles of Rhythm and Flow

191 Chapter Nine

Time out of Time: Sacred Retreats
for Energy Regeneration

PART FOUR

Living Vinyasa: The Solar-Lunar

Mandala of the Year

215 Chapter Ten

Winter Solstice: Rebirth of Light

233 Chapter Eleven

Spring Equinox: Reemergence of Life

243 Chapter Twelve

Summer Solstice: Peak of the Light

255 Chapter Thirteen

Fall Equinox: The Sacred Return

273 Expressions of Deep Gratitude

275 Notes

281 Resources

283 Art Credits

289 About the Author

PART ONE

tending the heart fire

Our Firekeeping
Ancestors and
the Evolution of Our
Energetic Heart

CHAPTER ONE



envisioning the heart fire

From Ancient Wisdom to Cutting-Edge Science



in our hearts there burns a fire . . .

That burns all veils to their root and foundation

When the veils have been burned away

Then the heart will understand completely.

Ancient love will unfold ever-fresh forms

In the heart of the Spirit,

in the core of the heart.

—RUMI¹

WE ARE CREATED IN RHYTHM, KEPT ALIVE IN RHYTHM,
AND EVOLVE THROUGH RHYTHM.

Tides, breath, and blood flow in rhythm. We are born into a universe of currents, and our heart is the great conductor of the body as it maintains the rhythmic pulse that oscillates to the flow of our lives.

Twenty billion years ago when the universe surged into being, a primordial fireball exploded in a colossal burst of light. Everything in existence today still pulses with original light—including our own bodies.

The Heart Fire within each of us connects us to the beginning of creation, to the *rtam* or cosmic rhythm generated by the blazing *tapas*—generating heat—of this original fire. From this original burst of light, Surya (the sun), Chandra (the moon), all the heavens, and the cycles of cosmic time emerged. Your heart's rhythm embodies the pulse of creation (*spanda*). In addition, our hearts vibrate as the innermost essence of consciousness (*hridaya*), the flow of love (*rasa*), and the light of the true self (*jyotir*). Each of us carries this enormous source of power and love in our bodies.

To live in ways that honor these natural currents, those within and those without, is to live vinyasa, in touch and in alignment with the flowing rhythms of our world.

If we drop into our feeling sensations of our body, we discern a subtle reverberation of this light in our chests as a deep, penetrating heat that ebbs and flows, expand and recedes, dims and intensifies. While we may not often pause to think about it, this intimate connection and truth in our hearts is reflected in our speech by how we counsel one another: “Listen to your heart.” “Trust your heart.” “Follow your heart.” Our heart feels “heavy,” or we are “lighthearted.” When we affirm the truth, we “swear upon” our heart, instinctively making the universal mudra of connecting hand to heart. When we open to our heart's deepest knowing, we have a “change of heart.”

While we can think of the heart as the extraordinary circulatory-system pump we learned about in school, we know in our bones that it is so much more than this. All of the world's spiritual traditions—and now recent scientific discoveries—have revealed the Heart Fire as a radiant field of connection and inner wisdom that transcends time, space, and culture.

the mystic heart fire across cultures

The mystical foundations of all the world's spiritual paths meet in a single, sacred place—the heart of the seeker. Whether the tradition is Sufi, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, or shamanic, all of our ancient paths recognize the universal pulse of the heart, the source fire within that connects us to the mystery of being.

Mystics of all traditions—those who seek their own direct communication with Source unimpeded by priests or other intermediaries—are drawn to the Heart Fire as to a bed of glowing embers in the night. They attune to the sacred pulse that helps them see through the veils of illusion, hear the truth, and feel unity present in the heart: a presence that transforms all differences, transmutes all poisons, and cultivates the nectar of unconditional love. That the heart is a reflection of the divine is a universal mystical understanding that has always threaded through disparate cultures around the world. From the Christian Sacred Heart to the Celtic vision of the heart as a cauldron, this wisdom is found in imagery and metaphor across traditions.

CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM— THE FLAMING HEART OF LOVE

The flaming heart of Jesus—sometimes shown disembodied and wrapped in thorns, at other times depicted blazing in Christ's chest—has been a source of mystical realization for countless saints and devotees, releasing the light of divine love that transmutes the pain of suffering. Also known as the Sacred Heart within Roman Catholic worship, it is the core transformation and realization of divine love that has sustained Christians for millennia.



Lie down in the fire
see and taste
the flowing One
through your whole being;
Feel the Holy Spirit
moving you within the flowing
fire of the One.

—MECHTILD OF MAGDEBURG²

The heart is like a candle

Longing to be lit.

Torn from the Beloved

It yearns to be whole again,

But you have to bear the pain.

You cannot learn about love.

Love appears on the wings of grace

—RUMI³

JUDAISM—KABBALAH—AISH: THE SACRED FIRE OF THE HEART

In the Hebrew tradition and in the Old Testament, the heart has its own power to see, and all prayers are generated by and held in the heart. In the Kabbalah, the mystic branch of Judaism, a name for the heart is *leve*—which sounds, when pronounced in Hebrew, like “love.” The Talmud Sotah teaches that the Hebrew words for man and woman both contain the word *Aish*, meaning “sacred fire.” The heart is viewed as an innermost altar where the Aish rises as the Heart Fire of eternal love.

SUFISM AND THE FIRE OF LOVE

In Sufism the heart is the sacred space within where we encounter God as the Beloved. Here the fire of love melts away any separation—the coverings or masks of the soul. Through meditations including chanting, movement, and prayer, a burning love that was lived by the great saints of the path such as Jelalluddin Rumi and Rabia— is stoked to realize the One.





TAOIST ALCHEMICAL FIRE

Taoists see the heart as an alchemical fire that is nourished by water. Together these two elements create the eternal quality of love. The Heart Fire is considered the natural “governor” or organizing intelligence that refines one’s eternal spirit. Taoist alchemical practices carried out in the heart center focus on regenerating energy through the combining of male and female essence, respectively symbolized as fire (sun) and water (moon).

When the inward and outward
are illuminated, and all is clear,
You are one with the light
of sun and moon.

— LIU I-MING,
AWAKENING TO THE TAO⁴



CELTIC CAULDRON OF THE HEART

In Celtic tradition, the heart is envisioned as a cauldron, an image that evokes the home hearth and the light of what is known as the *nwyvre*, or sacred fire. At eight sacred points on the wheel of the year, the community bonfire and the central fire in each home are reignited as an act of rekindling this Heart Fire to reconsecrate and bless land and family.

Fire in the head to quicken us.
Fire in the cauldron to heal us.
Fire in the forge of the heart
to temper us.

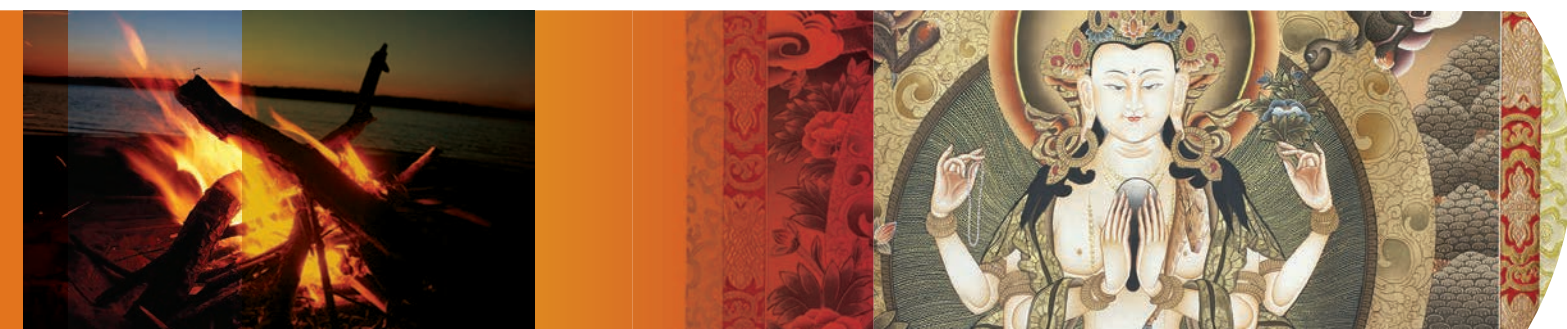
— CELTIC POEM
BY HEDGEWYTCH⁵

SHAMANIC AND INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS

Shamanism is a worldwide spiritual practice that transcends religions and schools of philosophy, one that has been adapted to modern life and is still practiced in ancient forms in indigenous communities today. The core pan-shamanic ritual is a fire ceremony that recognizes the fire within all beings drawn together from the fire of the earth-womb (mother) and the fire of the sun (father) into the fire of the heart.⁶

VAJRAYANA—TANTRIC BUDDHISM AND BODHICITTA

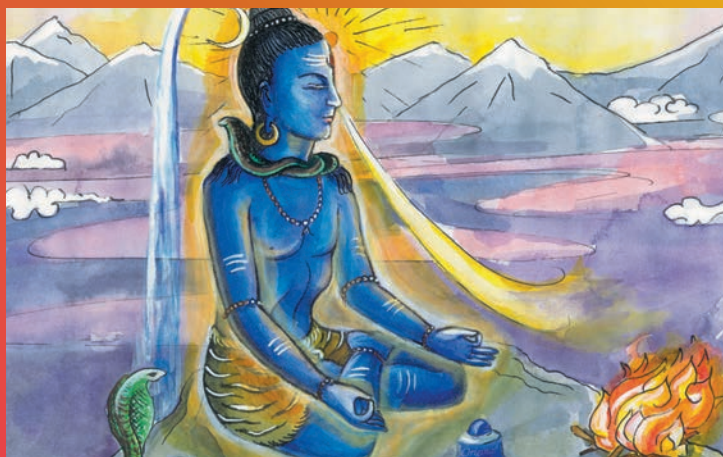
In the mystical practice of *vajrayana*, also known as Tantric Buddhism, clear seeing becomes possible when we cultivate *bodhicitta*, limitless love and compassion toward all beings. To develop bodhicitta we must nurture the most pristine expression of wisdom and compassion, and this lies in our heart center. In other words, the path to liberation begins in the heart—the original light of consciousness. In this tantric tradition, there is an alchemical meditation in which the yogi visualizes a glowing red sphere of feminine heat at the navel center; this point of heat bursts into flames and rises up



Your heart is your first teacher.

— CHEROKEE SAYING

the central channel toward the crown of the head. The crown holds a visualized seed syllable of the masculine, which begins to melt and drip downward. Thus these psychic energies are drawn toward one another and meet in the heart—where they join in an explosion of bliss and emptiness that radiates throughout the body, purifying it of toxins and activating bodhicitta, the “heartmind of awakening.”



THE HEART FIRE IN THE YOGA TRADITIONS OF INDIA

Within the ancient traditions of yoga, the heart has been known as *hridaya*, a source of universal light and human consciousness. Drawn from the root *hrd* meaning “center,” *hridaya* refers to the heart organ itself, as well as to the field of energetic consciousness that is present in every part of the body and in all creation. It is also connected with the heart chakra, *anahata*.

In this view, the microcosm of the heart is the central altar of the body and all macrocosmic bodies as well: the “heart” within the hearth of the home; the Heart Fire within the “body” as a fire pit—the inner sanctum of the temple; and the heart of the cosmos as the sun. All of these elements breathe and pulse together. When we bow to the outer fire, we bow to the fire within; and when we bow within, we are also connecting to the heart of creation. Yoga is the process that allows us to see and experience all of these different levels of extraordinary interconnectedness, a practical transmutation of the tensions that create separation and disconnectedness.

Hridaya—The Light of the Heart in the Vedas

It is the heart which enables a human being to penetrate into deep secrets and mysteries.

—VEDAS⁷

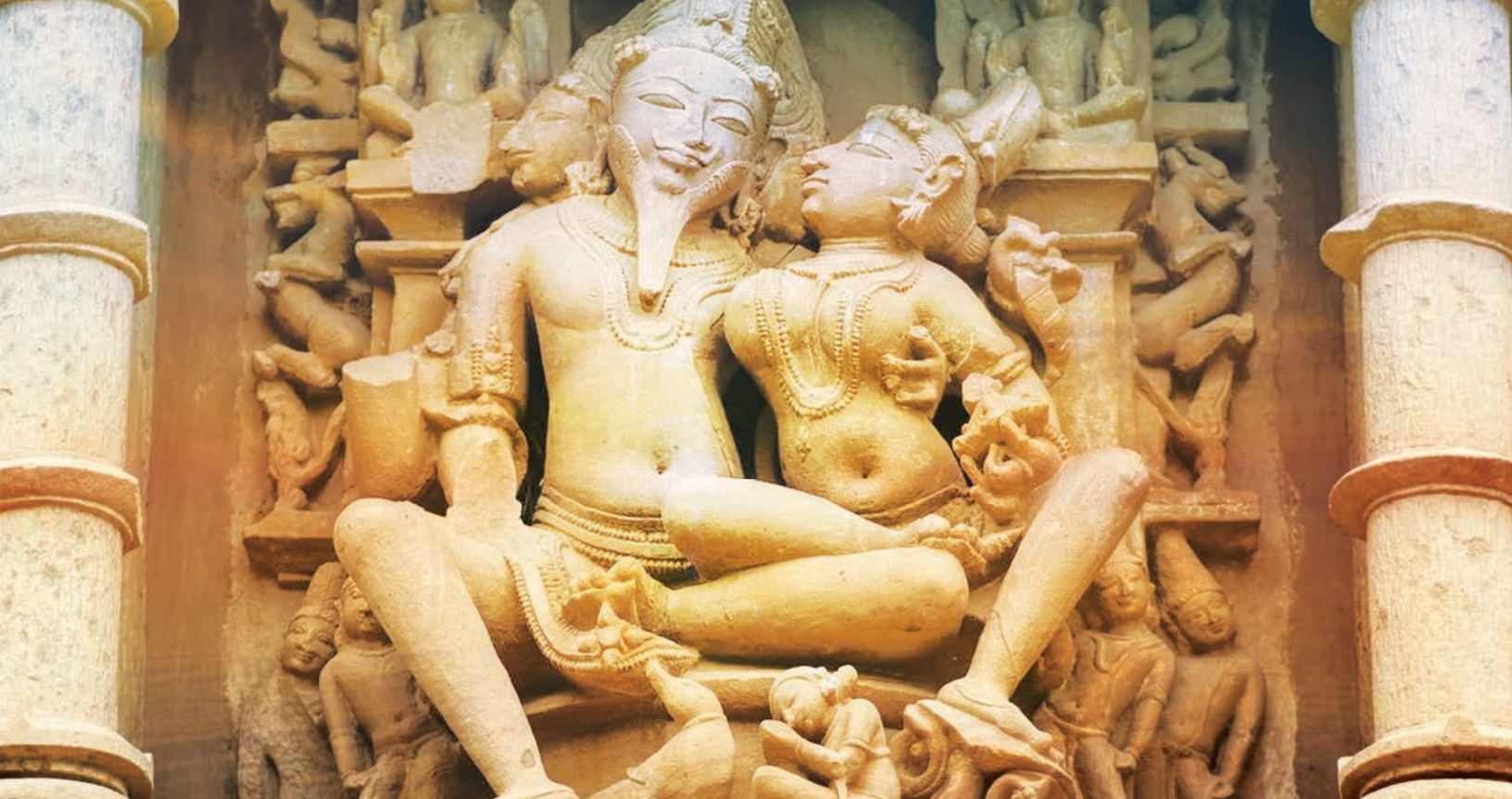
The Vedic texts, the oldest scriptures of Hinduism, offer our earliest glimpse into the extraordinary relationship between sacred fire and the cosmic body. The heart as *hrd* and *hridaya*—a light of consciousness—is prevalent throughout the Vedas, a means of deep insight (*dhi*) that leads one to become a *rsi* (seer). The Rig Veda correlates the sacrificial fire altar (*vedi*) to the human heart, considered the *axis mundi* between the microcosm and the macrocosm.

The Upanishads—Loosening the Knot in the Heart

The shining self dwells hidden in the heart.
Everything in the cosmos, great and small,
lives in the Self—the source of life.

—MUNDAKA UPANISHADS⁸

Within the foundational Hindu scriptures of the 108 Upanishads, the heart is continually invoked as the secret locale of the immortal soul or the Self (Atman), ultimately understood to be an expression of the Absolute (Brahman) in microcosm.⁹ The Upanishads prescribe that ignorance of one’s own immortal Self must be sacrificed to a transformative, subtle fire kindled within the altar of the heart. All yoga practice is described as a means to loosen the knot in the heart. Once the Self is revealed and experienced within the lotus of the heart through this internal fire ritual, the pure Self is liberated.



Tantric Shaivism and the Inner Heart Fire

One is to visualize the fire of the union
(*samghattam*) of the sun, moon, and fire as
a single-pointed focus in the heart.

— SRI ABHINAVAGUPTA¹⁰

The tantric tradition also teaches of the realization of the inner Heart Fire as a fire altar that can be experienced as the omnipresent source of divine consciousness in the union of Shiva and Shakti. Shiva (the Auspicious One) is seen as the ultimate ground of the dynamic universe.¹¹ The timeless rhythms of the universe, the limitless cycles of expansion and contraction, are the play of the Goddess, known as Shakti (energy/power). She is the continual pulsation of the universal heart, manifesting as the innumerable wavelike

expressions that arise and dissolve back into the “ocean” of Supreme Awareness (Shiva).

Tantra views the soul and the elemental body as expressions of the one divine consciousness that manifests itself into myriad infinite forms—only to dissolve these forms back into itself in a continual pulsation encapsulating the cycle of life and death.

The dance of Shiva and Shakti is known as the great *sphuratta*, the “pulse” or “heartthrob” of the Supreme Light that continuously delights in its own blissful radiance. The cyclical rhythms of the macrocosmic universe exist in the microcosm of the human being, experienced as the pulsating cycle of breath connected to the fire altar in the heart where Shiva and Shakti are united, or *yamala*.¹²

