

the Promise

You can have what you *really* want.



mark whitwell

“In his book, Mark shares the importance of breathing to energize ourselves.
Breathe and let go. Read this book.” — *Deepak Chopra*



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urban family

**“IF YOU HAVE THE COURAGE
TO TOUCH LIFE FOR THE FIRST TIME,
YOU WON’T KNOW WHAT HIT YOU.”**

U.G. KRISHNAMURTI



INTRODUCTION

You can have what you *really* want. Really. And that is my promise to you. The Promise Practice will give you sublime connection to life in new and interesting ways that the usual lifestyle does not touch. And it is easy. You will feel an intimacy with life in every way including your potential to love and be loved with strength and receptivity. This I promise.

The unprecedented and rapid change of the last two centuries has opened the world — and led us to a place where we need some help, perhaps some ancient wisdom, to feel that we belong in our own reality. Our lives are less isolated yet more disconnected than ever. It is the worst and the best of times because real help is being communicated worldwide as we reach out amidst dreadful uncertainties. There are more illusions and more pain than ever in our way. Having seen through the myth of the materialistic dream, the investigation of other ways of looking at the world has become an appealing option. In the process, so-called “enlightenment” has been presented as a convincing antidote to the dissatisfaction of lives subjected to society’s preoccupation with productivity and acquisition. The popular fascination with yoga, meditation and other spiritual practices indicates a genuine desire for personal development and victory over life difficulties. Yet the mass marketing of inner peace is

not always benign and can be another form of consumerism in a marketplace of shoddy spiritual goods. This seduction of enlightenment creates a sense of emptiness and hunger for fulfillment no less illusive as any other addiction. Often in this search to find a solution to the ills of modern life, we get caught in a compulsive cycle not dissimilar to the very thing from which we were trying to break free. We are desperate consumers either waiting for a miracle savior to return or waiting for enlightenment to arrive. But have we learned to embrace our own wonder?

The truth is that most of us aren't actually looking to transcend life, but to fully enjoy the life we have. And here's the rub: the merchandising of inner peace has started yet another war raging within and without. The goals of the great wisdom teachings have been presented as impossible ideals for those of us leading "normal" lives. Shadowy concepts like enlightenment and samadhi stand in stark contrast to the lives we are actually living; we hear that a world of spiritual joy awaits us — somewhere between the Buddha's knowing smile and the abundant lifestyles of a beautiful few who trained at the feet of mysterious masters — but meanwhile we are bound to the routines of working, studying, having relationships, raising children, and washing the dishes. No matter how hard you try to be the unattached observer, to stand outside the stream of daily life and view it objectively, the demands of domesticity require involvement in this material world. Dinner does not cook itself. Yet popular spiritual teachers have presented

everyday aspects of life — sex, food, family, work and relationships — as merely the content of your awareness training or, worse, an obstruction to it. This is a mistake. These seemingly mundane activities are themselves the all-powerful means to enjoy your reality.

As for me, I come from a long line of teachers. My mother and father were schoolteachers, and teachers of teachers. It was to this that they devoted their lives. My grandfather, too, worked a lifetime in education, providing programs in state prisons. He saw that all suffering and human mistakes happen when we are not given life's tools. He helped thousands of people to rehabilitate, to enter their lives and get out of prison. I follow in my grandfather's footsteps and I too am going to give you some essential life tools.

I was raised in the suburbs and had the usual adolescence and early life. I went dutifully through the school system, readying myself to be a productive citizen prepared to work in the universities or the factories, depending on whatever my abilities would turn out to be. Still, I sensed there had to be something more — something beyond work, duty and citizenship — for our human lives; and I became fascinated to know what made people happy or miserable. I saw that it was intimacy that was needed; and I saw that we were deprived of it by the priorities of the usual life being dished up by society. Then suddenly came the Sixties with a wild message of hope blasting through the radio *Across the Universe*, a world that has never been the same since. *Come Together and Let it Be*, we realized that *All You Need is Love!* And then

The Beatles went to India to study with a yogi — a fact that caught my keen attention — and they generously made their personal spiritual quest public. They poured their hearts, their hunger, questions and dreams, into rhythms and words that became our own. So, by twenty, I was in India at the feet of known and unknown masters, realizers, holders of the traditions, charlatans and the real deal. We yogis intermingled then between East and West and further brought down walls, weaving our own heavy sounds and hopes for humanity into worldwide awareness.

These people like The Beatles leveled the playing field for humanity. They directed their light onto the insidious hierarchies that had enslaved people to power structures. They remained ordinary people amidst super fame; and they treasured their own humanity, telling the world that money and stardom had not been an answer to their own suffering, that the need for love and partnership and the demands of family were no different for them than for anyone else. They robustly communicated that it meant everything to be an ordinary person, that a Working Class Hero is something to be, that you do not need to climb a social ladder to be an acceptable human being, and that no one need give you or can take away from you what you already are — a fully empowered individual and the perfect beauty of life. What I saw was that all this was really a contemporary outburst of the great spiritual traditions that had gone before. Wisdom has always been delivered on wings of music, and popular culture deserves as much attention as the great traditions of the

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past. Now in the overarching worldview we have of our vast history we can celebrate the entire wisdom tradition of humanity and all its unique appearances of culture, geography and time. Our modern conclusion is that we all share the one true life.

Whether the prison is real or metaphorical, whether the walls are built of stone or self-doubt, the lesson is about getting free with life's tools in your hands. It is my work to help people get out of the prison of society's dysfunction and denial, to claim your God-given life. It is your birthright. I will help you know what you really want and show you how to get it. Sometimes it is hard to sort out our real desires from those contrived by society. Because we are sold everything from celibacy to sex, to God or Buddhahood, beauty as asserted by Vogue or Yoga Journal. From sugar and fat to slim and green, and we don't know what we really need anymore. I will get you there.

My contention is this: What we all really want is an intimate connection to life, continuity of a loving relationship with life and sex, the power and regenerative healing force of life. And guess what? Everyone actually

wants the same as you. So if you set an intention and carry out the practical means you will certainly be met by someone who needs the same thing as much as you. If you know what you really want, no power in this world can stop you from having it. The universe is conspiring to see that you get it. But if you don't know what you want or want too many things, you cannot get anything and the world will trip you up all the way!

In the conventional spiritual process of trying to attain some heightened sense of being, you can end up feeling hungrier than ever, especially when you fail to achieve or sustain some idealized state of happiness. Feeling inadequate, instead of enlightened, is the inevitable result of striving for enlightenment. Paradoxically, the very search for the idea of enlightenment creates the opposite. By implying that enlightenment is not already present you come to believe that you are lacking something you need to be truly happy and at peace. You believe that you are not good enough. You believe that you are not working hard enough. The battle for approval rages on because we've simply replaced our chains of iron for chains of gold, which are harder to get off because we are enamored by the gold: where you once questioned the measure of your bank-account, you now question the measure of your spirituality.

Seeking anything implies that you don't have it. It is only unhappiness that looks for happiness. The very action of looking for truth denies the intrinsic reality that you are the truth. You are the power of this cosmos arising as pure intelligence and beauty. So the looking is

the problem. Looking implies the absence. There is no absence of truth. Your search seems to negate the truth that is you, as you already are, the present embodiment of life's wonder — a living, breathing expression of reality itself. So stop looking, start living.

We need to understand that this attitude, this impoverishment of the intrinsic integrity that is always already our own, is not necessarily true to the origins of spiritual practices. Deeply embedded in the cultures of the ancient and indigenous world is the idea of a primordial source, a power or principle lying behind absolutely everything, that takes form as the universe — as life itself — in all its detail. With no division between religion and society, sacred and secular, or creator and creation, all of life's activities were electrically charged with the immediate presence of the source. All it takes for life's activities to express and embody this truth is deep participation in the source as it manifests in all ordinary conditions. And as such, the source can be directly experienced in every way. Participation in life, not seeking in life is the secret.

This vision of the world is simple, but subtle; yet doctrines were invented that persuaded followers to search for the source, as if it were not already present in the sheer fact of existence and the very substance of everything. The outcome of this was to deny the world of our experiences and the reality of our selves in an attempt to get back to the idea of source. This has been going on for millennia; it's encapsulated in the belief that God is up there in heaven, while we struggle on down here on Earth, utterly polluted by our animal nature and needing

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to change our identity through the sternest purifications of mind and body before we stand a chance of getting anywhere near the divine. Today, this idea of having to search for truth is so deeply ingrained that it has become an uninspected habit, a cosmic game of hide-and-seek that we are all supposed to play.

Instead, let’s look back at the original understanding that appearance and reality, source and seen, are really one. There is no difference between spirit and matter, for they are intimately related. It’s like trying to separate day and night—without one, the other ceases to exist. If you think of spirit as energy, the invisible life force that flows through us all, and then consider that Einstein, Neils Bohr and others have long since proven that matter and energy are essentially different manifestations of the same thing, then you may get a clearer idea of what I’m talking about. And this idea might encourage you to re-evaluate the whole notion of seeking truth. When you stop seeking, you create an opportunity to become inti-

mate with that truth. Intimate with the divine. Intimate with all of life and life's conditions. Intimate with your self. They are all one and the same; and they are as readily available as your body, breath, and relationship. The habit of discontent, of obsessively looking and waiting for something to happen, can be discarded altogether. When you do this, you will be free to start living in truth, living in what is. For me, that means the reality that is always upon us in every breath, every heartbeat, and in every relationship: to ourselves and to others, whether sexual or not sexual, and to all of life in all its forms. To put it simply: God is the Earth, not elsewhere.

For many generations, men have been unwilling to be with women in mutuality: mutual education, wealth, energy, social roles or sexuality. For as long as this goes on, men and women will never know themselves or touch the stars. I have observed that in every way, including sex, mutuality heals generational pain and the dysfunction inherited from our ancestors. And love allows everything that is not love to be seen and understood. So, we have no choice but to get started and continue our bodily loving. Through equal and opposite respect and absorption in each other the pain leaves us. The male-female union is the very form of the universe, reality itself. The union of opposites reveals the source of opposites, the great cosmic dynamo that powers us. We can do this for ourselves, for all future generations and even retroactively for our ancestors. By embracing our own life and sexual character, we end the pain of the past and the chain of events that must be broken.



Nature Goddess
India, Uttar Pradesh, Mathura, circa 200
Ceramaneek Collection. Museum Associates Purchase
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, www.lacma.org

Yogini Marilyn and the Denial of the Feminine

Not long ago I posted on Facebook a photograph taken in 1948 that shows Marilyn Monroe (aka Norma Jean Mortenson, later Baker) doing yoga asanas that she learned from Indra Devi, who learned them from T. Krishnamacharya, the great Indian yogi known as “the teacher of teachers”. The photo of Marilyn received an overwhelming response that acknowledged not only the fun connection, but also the significance of that connection. Marilyn was and is perceived as a life-sign, a deity, a Christlike sacrifice for the sins of man. She revealed the problem and the changes we must make in our own life and in society. Many women have told me that Marilyn’s experience is essentially their own. Born fresh and free, wild and sexual, they became inappropriately sexualized, objectified, abused, manipulated, feared, threatened. Some, having been sexually exploited, learned to turn the tables and went on to exploit. Others were depressed or even suicidal, usually living in compromised situations pacified by media and legal or illegal drugs.

Either way, all had to go through a life crisis to claim their own life, free themselves of the sexual dysfunction of society and the predatory male, and learn how to be in relationships of mutuality, the cooperation of autonomous equals. “You lived your life like a candle in the wind. Never knowing who to cling to when the pain set in,” as Bernie Taupin wrote of Norma Jean in

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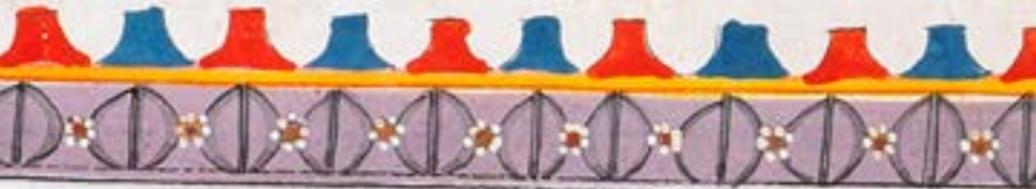
the song made famous by Elton John, who sang it at the funeral of Princess Diana. I would like to have known Norma Jean too. I would like to have given yoga to her — strength receiving, inhalation exhalation — intimacy with the power of her own life. I would like to have given Marilyn intimacy with her own life prior to potential intimate connection to others. I would like to have taught yoga to her potential intimates too, so that they could learn to love their life. So that they would have known how to receive her, the wild power and beauty of the natural life, instead of needing to control, manipulate, objectify, or penetrate the feminine for some brief consoling moment.

The insidious manipulation and degrading of the feminine is universal and must be corrected in our time. It is not a simple equation, like male is wrong, female is abused. It is a vast cultural mistake based on the doctrines that have created civilization. That God or truth is “other,” elsewhere” and not in the earth, not in the miracle of appearance, not in sex, not in woman, not in man. This vast mistake is, of course, the cause and fuel of fundamentalist terrorism we are suffering. The only long-term cure is education. God is in the earth,

God is in sex, the miracle of life arising. We can correct the imbalance. We can create collaboration, cooperation between the sexes. It is not about one teaching the other but just a matter of receiving the power of the other for the mutual empowerment of both — to reside in and as the source of both for the benefit of both and for the benefit of all creation. Please help me deliver this into the world on behalf of Marilyn, all women and all men.

Dear Yogini Marilyn manifested the power and vulnerability of the wild feminine that men had no idea what to do with. It finally destroyed her bodily existence. I visited her grave to pay my respects. In fear of death man attempts to create eternity and glory for himself through religious institution, property, rape of Mother Earth, and control of women. He does not come to peace with bodily existence or participate peacefully in the mystery power of the body or its passing. He therefore does not surrender to Earth and the great powers of Earth, the sublime regenerative force that is 100 percent given and constant. He does not surrender or support the wild feminine. She is enjoyed through the great nurturing polarity of male-female union within and without and is everyone's birthright. This is the primordial religious practice before man invented doctrine that dissociated him from the feminine. Man has not yet been taught to access this power of his own reality. Instead he is afraid, has vilified sex and struggles simultaneously to control it and get it. When all along it is freely given.

Dear Marilyn, long may you live and thrive on Earth.



Lovers Embracing, Folio from an Erotic Manuscript
India, Madhya Pradesh, Malwa, circa 1600
Gift of Dhandra and Michael Douglas
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, www.lacma.org

Yab-Yum: The Ancient Accord, Cooperation, and Mutual Empowerment of Man and Woman

Ancient Tibet had a shamanic culture called Bön before Buddhism became its dominant culture. The indigenous people had been worshiping the powers of nature for centuries. After Buddhism began to percolate into the South Tibetan region around the third and fourth centuries, the county's cultural history was increasingly affected by the meeting, confusion, and integration of these two great cultural expressions. In the early days there were bands of wild women who had no regard for the culture and formality of the male Buddhist idealists, leading to a kind of standoff. Orthodox Buddhism considered the women to be uncouth, deranged, and dangerous with their suspicious practices and strange shamanic powers. But something happened after King Trisong Detsen invited the legendary Indian yogi known as Padmasambhava to come to Tibet in the late eighth century. Padmasambhava, whose name means "Lotus-born," came from Oddiyana in Ancient India, an area today identified with the Swat Valley of present-day Pakistan. He grew fond of the wild feminine and a relationship of cooperation developed that was of mutual benefit. It was not a question of one controlling the other but rather of autonomous beings in support of each other. Padmasambhava did not try to impose a superior doctrinal point of view on these indigenous

women, but they and he both found advantages in each other's company.

To this day the image of a couple in open sexual embrace is part of the spiritual iconography of Tibet that has profound meaning and purpose. From a Western perspective, it may seem surprising that images of a male and female in face-to-face sexual union, often fully naked, are commonplace and are viewed with both cultural importance and profound respect. The image is known as Yab-Yum (literally, "Father-Mother"), which represents the primordial union of wisdom and compassion. The male figure is usually linked to *karuna*, compassion, and *upaya*, or skillful means, while the female partner relates to *prajña*, or insight. It would be naïve to imagine that this is some kind of symbolism and not about the actual practice of sexual intimacy of mutual-ity in which these truths are found. It is also about the representation of an actual yoga of strength receiving, of inhalation-exhalation, that is required to find and embody one's male and female qualities, to go beyond the common sexual dysfunctions that society has otherwise imposed on us.

I find it disturbing, not to mention outright weird, that society in general and especially many religions still seek to control or harness the feminine. Even in so-called Tantra or Yoga teachings this misogyny is present. The only reason for this can be fear and suspicion of the wild power that is inherent in the feminine in her natural state. How much more constructive would it be to understand and embrace the obvious truth that God or

Reality is found in life's natural form, namely, the union and cooperation of both male and female power.

My friend the birthing expert Crescence Krueger recently wrote on this subject from her own experience:

“Shakti cannot be controlled, so the only thing the masculine can do is to surrender to the feminine. Then Yoga happens! Turning it around is the cause of a deep misogyny that distorts understanding of who we are, causing so much suffering in this world. You can become “intimate” with the feminine in the way much of current Tantra promotes, but that doesn’t in itself allow yoga to take place either. Penetration of the feminine is not Tantra, even when it is with the mind. What is Tantra then? It is interpenetration and mutual receptivity. The Goddess is autonomous; she is already the fusion of masculine and feminine, consciousness and its movement; as we are. When two autonomous individuals come into the vulnerability that allows them to receive each other, love explodes. This is yoga. And this is the only constructive form of relationship in yoga. Our pedagogical structures and institutions create obstacles to the heart, in their effort to correct or control things. We need each other in mutual exchange. The enlightened teacher U.G. Krishnamurti was adamant that the mind must immerse itself in the body, not control it (as much spiritual doctrine insists) and I am just trying to

find my own way to express that verbally here: Shakti is consciousness, so she doesn't need the limited consciousness that the mind encompasses. Its penetration of her is irrelevant. She needs nothing. What the mind needs, however, is to integrate into the vast intelligence of the body, or Shakti, the whole/hrid/heart. Healing and regeneration is the result. Enlightenment too, if you want to use that word."

The Promise Practice is an ancient spiritual tool. It is to participate in the inherent union of male and female qualities on the inside, in our own embodiment. It creates a visceral, actual change that allows us to participate in that exquisite union in the outer polarity, male to female, whether in same-sex or opposite-sex intimacy. We can do it now in this generation!

What we truly need is not secret knowledge but a realistic practice that will help us navigate through the chaos of daily life and the confusing debris of past wounds, and guide us to this source of peace and power that resides in each of us. Happiness arises when we relax into the reality of our natural condition. We can stop trying to "be here now"—we are here now. This means an intimate participation in our own lives; and it is the greatest gift we can give ourselves and everyone around us, the best model for living we can offer our children and our communities. From here, you are open and free enough to deal with whatever presents itself to you, supported by the knowledge that this intimate connection with your

source of strength and truth is all that is required to feel safe and at peace.

This book is a practical, sincere guide to living that explores how and why real intimacy is as close and necessary to us as our breath is to the body, and provides not only the essential knowledge but the actual steps to embracing your real needs and desires.

Everything in these pages is established on direct personal experience:

- *the way that institutionalized culture has had a destructive impact on our sense of self and our ability to relate to others in meaningful ways;*
- *the way that these same influences have perpetuated a negative relationship to our own sexuality that has left us shying away from love;*
- *the observation that mutuality in every way, including love-making, heals the pain inherited from our ancestors;*
- *and, ultimately, the experience that the union of masculine and feminine within our own bodies and with one another is the very form of the universe that reveals the source inside us all.*

Here is the practicum, the all-purpose “how-to” manual to actualize everything that has ever inspired you or will inspire you. This is a soft message for hard times. The spiritual life is one of participation only in what already is — not an endless search. It is utter intimacy with life,

here and now, with body and breath and all relationships. And you are already all of this. Now you can feel it. From this starting point, this intimacy with yourself, every other relationship is easily within your grasp. What is unimportant will naturally fall away. You will feel yourself step into your peace, power, passion and purpose, in quiet grace and certainty.

I promise.





Krishna's Dance of Delight (Rasa Lila)
India, Rajasthan, Bundi, circa 1675-1700. www.lacma.org

**THERE IS
NO MANUAL
REQUIRED,
NOTHING TO
WORRY ABOUT.**

**JUST DO
YOUR YOGA.
DO YOUR LIFE.
DO YOUR
LOVING.**



About the Author

Mark Whitwell is interested in developing an authentic yoga practice for the individual, based on the teachings of T. Krishnamacharya and his son TKV Desikachar, with whom he enjoyed a relationship for more than twenty years. Mark's teachings clarify the profound passion and relevance of ancient wisdom to contemporary life.

For the past twenty-five years, Mark has travelled the globe teaching yoga to thousands of people. He was the editor and contributor to TKV Desikachar's book *The Heart of Yoga*, and is the author of *The Yoga of Heart* and *The Promise of Love, Sex and Intimacy*.

For more information and events, visit
www.heartofyoga.org

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