

# how to love better

the path to deeper connection  
through growth,  
kindness, and compassion

yung  
pueblo

*#1 New York Times*

bestselling author of **LIGHTER**

BY YUNG PUEBLO

*How to Love Better*  
*Lighter*

THE INWARD TRILOGY

*Inward*  
*Clarity & Connection*  
*The Way Forward*

# How to Love Better

the path to deeper connection through  
growth, kindness, and compassion



Yung Pueblo



H A R M O N Y  
N E W Y O R K

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



The three biggest green flags are  
growth, kindness, and compassion.

If they are consistently kind,  
if they care about growing,  
and if they can see beyond  
their own perspective,  
then this is someone worth  
your time and energy.



Deep love is not easy because it contains so much.

It is full of disagreements, howling laughter,  
hard conversations, genuine care, plenty of tears,  
undeniable joy, and the feeling of being truly seen.

You don't get the good without the tough stuff  
that helps you both grow.

*For Sara,  
my wife and comrade in wisdom*



## introduction

# Our Story

We met quite young, both of us still finding our footing in college, but as soon as we were in each other's gravity, Sara and I felt an undeniable pull that kept bringing us even closer together. We became friends first, talking, connecting, enjoying the other's company late into the night, sharing stories and paying attention to each other as if it were the first time that someone was truly listening. We both felt a new sense of joy that was unlocked when we were together. We felt removed from everyone else, even removed from time, existing in a space that was just for the two of us. We loved being in our own world, a place where we could share our secrets and think about things together. It was enlivening and, at times, all-consuming. Soon, our feelings for each other grew and friendship alone could no longer encapsulate the depth of our connection. After just two weeks of officially being a couple, we told each other "I love you"—both of us were telling the truth, but neither of us realized yet that love is more than a feeling; it's a practice that needs intention, care, and skill.

As months went by, the gaps in our ability to love started revealing themselves in painful and tense ways. We fought often and we fought

bitterly, meeting anger with anger; we both did our best to win each tiny battle. Blame became a common mode of communication. We kept throwing our internal tension, stress, and irritation on each other, wanting to make it the other's fault when we didn't feel good inside. We couldn't take responsibility for our own bad mood and tried relentlessly to drag the other down into the heaviness we felt in our minds. These moments of intensity were quite frequent. We felt so strongly about each other, but we did not know how to care for our own emotions or how to support the other's happiness. Shouldn't the fact that we wanted to create a life together be enough? We both felt like something was wrong, but we couldn't get it right. Why were we always arguing? When would the other realize that they needed to act better?

In our first few years together, we were caught in a state of confusion. It felt like an emotional hurricane that would move at different levels of intensity. We barely made it through that period—we actually broke up a few times and took a few breaks because we didn't know if it was the right thing for us to be together. Each break and breakup was short-lived because we couldn't stand being apart, but the difficulty was that we also didn't know how to be together well. Ultimately, we decided that we wanted to struggle together rather than be apart. Even if disharmony was frequent, we decided to keep facing it and hopefully find a better way. We lived like this for six years, swimming between short-lived calmness and awful storms.

The connection was undeniable, but neither of us knew how to love well. We didn't know where to begin or what to aim for. We didn't know that the balance we were looking for and the peace we so desperately wanted could not come from one of us giving them to the other, but instead they had to come from within each of us. Cultivating peace and compassion within our own minds was the only way to create a bridge between the two of us that would be stable enough to support a more nourishing relationship. The beginning of our relationship was so stormy because we were completely unaware of our individual inner worlds and certainly did not know that what we felt inside was always impacting our perceptions and actions. Neither of

us realized that connection alone could not fill the vastness of love and that the undeniable pull we felt toward each other was not enough to create peace between us.

It's a total lie that relationships  
are supposed to be easy.

You have to learn how to love each other well  
while the relationship shines a mirror  
on the ways you each need to grow.

This is a big challenge to accept.

Our only experience of love was chaotic because neither of us understood how our own lack of personal emotional maturity and self-awareness created blocks that stopped us from engaging with each other in a wiser and more compassionate manner.

After years of struggle, the answer quietly came into our lives. A dear friend of ours started meditating and both Sara and I felt an instinctive pull to try meditating too. We were exhausted by our personal and relational tension and wanted to find an answer to the riddle of suffering and angst that was consistently making our days as individuals, and as a couple, heavier. We were tired of the struggle and open to trying something new.

At the time, we didn't realize that we had just flipped the page into a new era of our relationship. Who we were and how we acted gradually evolved as we kept attending silent meditation retreats, and eventually we each began a daily practice. Little bits of peace slowly started entering our lives, tiny beams of light started brightening the tumultuous darkness that we both carried inside of us. Meditating not only helped us be better versions of ourselves, but the self-awareness that we were both cultivating started encouraging us to treat each other more gently. The healing that we were going through on the deepest level was resulting in calmer minds, more presence, and more compassion for ourselves and each other. The blame game that we were locked into was in time revealed to be completely counterproductive. Each argument did not need to end with a clear winner and loser; the light of awareness revealed that what was really missing was sincere listening and understanding.

You know the connection is special  
when the person who wants to be  
with you also understands that they  
need to put energy into learning  
how to love you well.

They know that love is not automatic;  
instead it comes from deep listening  
and doing their best to meet your  
preferences in a way that feels genuine.



Meditating changed everything for us. It showed us how to love better, and it did so by helping us both cultivate mental qualities that we were missing, like awareness, non-reactiveness, and compassion. We were aware of these concepts and actions, but they were qualities of the mind that were woefully undeveloped. A lot of the misery that we shared came from our inability to hold space for our own difficult emotions. We both began meditating as a way to gain inner peace; we did not realize that this mental training was also the remedy that our relationship desperately needed. We lacked the awareness to see that our inner pain was intrinsically connected to our outer struggle and causing us to unconsciously react to each other with tension.

Meditating did not immediately fix everything. But the honest truth is that applying meditation to our daily lives over an extended period of time (many years) is what ultimately transformed our relationship for the better. As we each grew in the practice of meditation, as we accepted more responsibility for how we felt, and as we better understood what we genuinely needed from each other to thrive as a couple, peace started slowly entering our relationship.

Our relationship today is not perfect. We still argue and disagree from time to time, but now we have the inner fortitude to hold each other with compassion as we process what we feel. Arguments no longer turn into full-blown hurricanes, instead they become opportunities for both of us to take turns listening so that we can try to see beyond our own perspectives and get to the real root of what is upsetting us. We do not expect our relationship to be endlessly peaceful and joyous, but we do now have the tools to navigate the challenging moments more smoothly and quickly.

The power of meditation is not just in the fact that it helped us with deep personal healing and over time brought us together as a couple in a more harmonious way, but that it also clarifies certain universal truths that can be applied to individuals and relationships.

I've spent the last twelve years meditating seriously. During that time I have meditated over twelve thousand hours. In no way do I consider myself

an expert. In fact I benefit much more from seeing myself as a perpetual student, and I look forward to continuing to meditate in the future so that I can keep growing and learning. Even so, this dedication to inner practice has already transformed my life and helped me move confidently into the world of writing. Under the pen name Yung Pueblo, I have focused my writing at the intersection of personal growth and relationships. I take the attention you give my writing as a heartfelt responsibility. Your trust is something that I want to treat genuinely and gently. What I can offer you are the understandings and explorations that have brought peace into my own mind and life and more harmony into the connections that I cherish.

In this book I offer my reflections on love. The main focus of this book will be its exact title, *How to Love Better*. Though I will concentrate on the love between significant others, everything here can be applied to all important relationships in our lives. We all know something about love already because we are human beings. And we are all experts at knowing what different emotions feel like—we move through them on a daily basis, we struggle with them, we enjoy them, and we learn from them. The purpose of this book revolves around the fact that even though we are familiar with our own emotional ranges, we can benefit from improving our understanding of ourselves and how we relate to what we feel. In the act of knowing yourself better, you will be able to love your partner better and allow the vehicle of love to propel your personal growth. Love and growth need to go hand in hand for harmony to be a real possibility in a partnership.

Relationship, surely, is the mirror in which you discover yourself.... To be, is to  
be related; to be related is existence.

—Jiddu Krishnamurti

Love has the shape  
and feel of water.

It is simultaneously  
flexible and powerful.

It can adapt and roar;  
it can also be silently nourishing.

Instead of looking for  
someone who is “perfect,”  
look for someone  
who is not scared of growing.

The beginnings of relationships  
are not always smooth.

Even when the connection is strong  
you still have to intentionally learn  
how to love each other well.