how to love better

the path to deeper connection through growth, kindness and compassion

yung pueblo

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author

Praise for *How to Love Better*

'This book is a beautiful offering from the heart, to the heart. I read through it in one quiet sitting, feeling its wisdom fill my spirit with hope that – after all the difficulties that relationships can bring – love (when blended with grace) can and will prevail.'

—ELIZABETH GILBERT, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Eat, Pray, Love*

'I am a huge fan of Yung Pueblo. He has a unique ability to offer the perfect words to capture the feelings, insights and lessons we need to feel, see and hear. *How to Love Better* is no exception. In it, Yung Pueblo holds a mirror to the relationships we have and offers clear directions to the relationships we desire. I'm so glad this book exists!'

—SIMON SINEK, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Infinite Game* and host of the podcast *A Bit of Optimism*

'Get ready to underline and highlight so many passages of this beautiful book. In the time we are living in today, we are all on a growth journey. I always say the hardest part is showing up. *How to Love Better* serves as an unpretentious and pertinent guide for how to participate compassionately in your own growth, lean into your healing era and set yourself up to be of service to others.'

—ADRIENE MISHLER, creator of Yoga with Adriene, artist and actor

'*How to Love Better* is destined to change your life. Yung Pueblo is determined to help us understand that true love starts within. A lot of us are looking outside ourselves for our happily ever after. But this book reminds us that happiness is not the goal; peace is.'

—LENA WAITHE, Emmy Award-winning writer, producer and actor

'Each of us must understand our own needs and wants to build a healthy, loving relationship. Yung Pueblo challenges us to grow separately and alongside our partners. *How to Love Better* – with its focus on individual healing and shared contributions in relationships, along with Yung Pueblo's vulnerability in sharing his own story – is the guide we need as we navigate life and love.'

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—JILLIAN TURECKI, author of *It Begins with You* and host of the podcast *Jillian on Love*

BY YUNG PUEBLO

How to Love Better

Lighter

THE INWARD TRILOGY

Inward

Clarity & Connection

The Way Forward

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How to Love Better

the path to deeper connection through growth, kindness and compassion



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For Sara,
my wife and comrade in wisdom

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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.

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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.

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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

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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

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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.

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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.

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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

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locked into was in time revealed to be completely counter-productive. 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.

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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.

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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, nonreactiveness, 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

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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

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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*

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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.

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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.

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HOW TO LOVE BETTER

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chapter 1

How to Help Love Flow

Love is one of the clearest feelings a human being can experience, yet it is too enigmatic to place a concrete definition on. Like trying to grab water with your hand, the exact limits of love are rightfully elusive, but even so, we can get close to giving words to its depth.

Love is a powerful and liberating feeling—one that radiates throughout your body. Love is a light that can shine brightly from within you even when you are alone, and it is also a light that intensifies between two people when the magnetic feeling between them has proven to be undeniable. Love is an energy that motivates you into action. It helps the mind see clearly and selflessly. Love helps you come in contact with your strength and courage. It helps you say the things you were once afraid to voice. Love can help you say no, and, equally, it can help you full-heartedly say yes. It helps you clarify what is and is not important.

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In the pantheon of human emotions, love stands as the most prized experience. It is something we seek actively and passively. We may seek it in the form of self-love as a way to heal and free ourselves or in the form of a healthy and nourishing partnership. In either case, arriving at one of these forms of love provides a great level of rest, solace, and happiness to our being. All of the friendships and close relationships we pour energy and attention into are also included in the foundation of our lives. We are relational beings: We not only depend on others for survival but thrive in relationships with others.

Love is not something small. It is the energy of love that often changes lives and even history. Love has the power to break down walls and open doorways. It also has the power to preserve, create boundaries, and make tough calls. Love is deeply personal and highly situational. The way one person loves themselves can be totally different from how another activates self-love in their life. The way one couple expresses love can be miles away from the next. Even though love can look different for everyone, it always has that warm feeling of safety and freedom when it is brought to life.

The purpose of this book is to deeply explore how love manifests in partnerships and to answer the question, "How can I love better?"

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WHERE WE STRUGGLE AND HOW WE RISE

The deep truth is that most human beings do not arrive into a relationship unscathed from the ups and downs of life. From childhood to adulthood, life leaves its mark on your mind many times over, and these marks morph into patterns that are often coping mechanisms or defensive tactics you picked up while you were in survival mode. The hurt you have accumulated ultimately shapes the way you perceive reality and can even form walls that have to be broken down so you can fully love yourself and others.

To be able to love your partner well, a deep reckoning needs to happen where you realize that how you love and heal yourself has a direct connection to how you show up in your relationship. The relationship between you and yourself has a clear impact on the relationship between you and your partner. If you want to love your partner better, then you need to develop a two-pronged approach:

1. Improving your relationship with yourself by letting go of the heaviness that your mind carries

2. Working to outwardly shift your behaviors so they can be more conducive to a harmonious relationship

Love is not easy, and it is honestly a lot of work. Love is a powerful mirror where you cannot help but see yourself

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clearly; it will show you how you have grown, and it will show you in which direction you need to grow next. Being in a relationship is not about living in a constant stream of pleasure. Even the healthiest relationships will be full of ups and downs and unforeseen challenges. A relationship should certainly provide comfort, joy, and a sense of safety, but it should also become fuel for your evolution. Once you embrace your growth, the new harmony that starts flowing within you will help support the harmony in your relationship.

One of the biggest internal things to overcome so that love can flow better between two people is attachment. The human mind has a powerful drive to crave for things to exist in a manner that is to our liking, but sometimes this drive will turn an unproblematic desire into a strong attachment that has gathered so much mental tension that we feel upset when things diverge from what we initially imagined. The drive to set things up the way we like them can become controlling if it remains unchecked. Love is meant to support the feeling of freedom when in the presence of your partner, but attachment can squander that feeling when you demand things happen the way you want them to.

The key to harmony in a relationship is finding a balance between making sure that your genuine needs are met, and establishing clear and voluntary commitments that help support each other's happiness. You both know that you cannot directly make the other happy because happiness is

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something that emerges from your personal mindset, but together you can create the conditions and environment where it is easier to feel joy and fulfillment in each other's presence. A partnership can bring so much delight into your life, but only you can clarify your perspective so you can let joy in and experience happiness more often.

Establishing these commitments helps reduce attachment and confusion. Commitments are the application of honest and open communication so you both learn how to love each other well by voicing your needs. When you hear each other's needs, you can then check in with yourselves and see what feels good to commit to. This lets you both show up in your relationship in a way that feels driven by your desire to love your partner well as opposed to feeling pressured by your partner to behave in a certain way.

Forcing, controlling, possessiveness, manipulation—these are all variations of attachment. They are unmistakable blocks that stop love from flowing and they create pressure on a relationship in a way that eventually breaks the connection. Love is meant to uplift, a partnership is meant to nourish—attachment does the opposite. It is a self-centered approach to a relationship that can end something great before it even really begins.

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If you think a relationship
is meant to be an escape
or that it should only be blissful,
then you're missing the point.

Love is soft and nourishing,
but it is also hard and revealing.
It will show you the sides of
yourself that you need to work on.

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