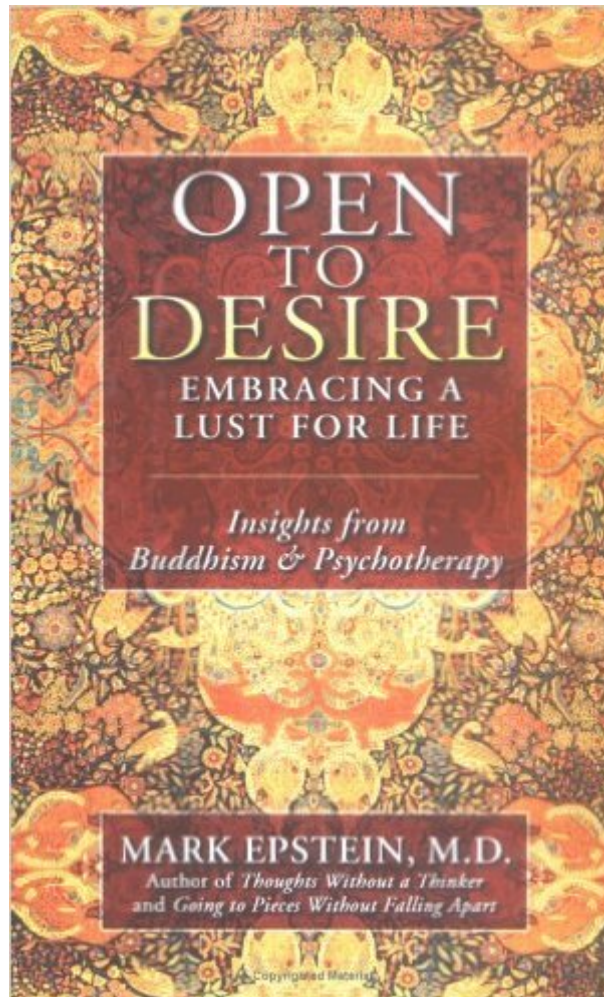


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Open To Desire: Embracing A Lust For Life Insights From Buddhism And Psychotherapy



Synopsis

Bringing wisdom to a fresh and compelling topic, Mark Epstein shows how desire can be a teacher in its own right, helping us to reconcile our conflicting thoughts about it from both a Buddhist and a psychological point of view. It is common in both Buddhism and Freudian psychoanalysis to treat desire as the root of all suffering and problems, but psychiatrist Mark Epstein believes this to be a grave misunderstanding. In his defense of desire, he makes clear that it is the key to deepening intimacy with ourselves, one another, and our world. An enlightening tapestry of psychotherapeutic practice, contemporary case studies, Buddhist insight, and narratives as diverse as the Ramayana and Sufi parables, *Open to Desire* brings a refreshing new perspective to humanity's most paradoxical emotion. Proposing that spiritual attainment does not have to be detached from intimacy or eroticism, *Open to Desire* begins with an exploration of the dissatisfaction that causes us to both cling to, and fear, desire. Offering a new path for traversing this ambivalence, Dr. Epstein shows us how we can overcome these obstacles, not by indulgence or suppression, but by learning a new way to be with desire. Full of practical advice, this is a lasting guide for finding peace both in ourselves and in our most highly charged interactions.

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Customer Reviews

As a western buddhist, I have been intrigued about how Buddhism works with or teaches us how to understand our pruriant desires. However, aside from Tantra, there is a very limited amount of Buddhist material concerning how the mind deals with sexuality and our desires. Mark Epstein has

done an amazing job in bringing these two areas together. The book uses the Buddha's Four Noble Truths as a vehicle to explain in detail how our desires and cravings become toxic to our relationships, and the ways to end this pattern. Written from a therapeutic and spiritual point of view, the book is neither dogmatic, nor self-help. As a lazy reader, I know when I found an enjoyable book and an easy read when I spend more time reading than usual. This book fits the bill as easy to read, chock full of important insights, and truly a gift. I hope there will be a workbook of exercises or meditations that will follow.

I am a meditation teacher (since 1968), and I am really enjoying this book. It is brave of Mark to go against the doctrine of Buddhists to complain bitterly and mindlessly against desire. I find his writing enriching, for he is speaking as a meditator, a lover, a father, an analyst, and a wonderer - someone who is willing to just LOOK at what is going on. And opening to desire makes meditation juicier and more electrifying. Since the late 60's, most of my friends have been Buddhists or Yogis, and in the early 70's I noticed how deadened many of them were becoming, as they worked inwardly to kill their desires. You can watch over the years as meditators lose vitality as they cultivate a detached, dissociated, suspicious attitude toward the flow of life. Then they become fascinated by and dependent upon authoritarian "masters" to tell them what to do. Lorin Roche, author of *Meditation Secrets for Women and Meditation* 24/7.

I was really impressed by this book. Epstein explains the possibility of feeling desire but not succumbing to cravings. He draws on Buddhist principles to explain the difference between desire and craving. Desire is acknowledgement of something you want, without clinging, while craving involves seeking satisfaction (which is rarely, if ever achieved). I found the various examples he used to be instructive in learning how desire can become an obsession, and ways for being mindfully aware of desire and still enjoying it in your everyday life. The lesson here isn't that you need to get rid of desire, but rather acknowledge it in such a way that understand its effects on you. I highly recommend the book. It will help you see how you treat others and yourself and recognize the impact desire has on you.

This book was recommended by Gestalt practitioners and was used as the basis of a workshop on Desire and Passion. Epstein uses examples from his own life to illustrate a central Buddhist myth throughout the text. The main point: clinging causes all suffering and the practice of non-clinging is the path to creating and deepening relationships of all sorts. When one is open to his/her own

desires without expectations of others to fulfill them, our own desires become our teachers.

Not as "user-friendly" as some of his other books I've read. The first two-thirds of it felt like a text book, like kind of an academic stretch to sew together some dissimilar fabrics that kept wanting to fray. I read it in tandem with a friend who is a Buddhist, a long time psychologist and PhD, then we discussed it. She liked it and thought it brought her some knowledge she could use in her practice. Although I understand the concept and I don't disagree, I don't feel I gained much from the read overall. Maybe too academic for my artist soul.

This one is so great because we realize that "detachment" from emotion and desire, does not mean suppression of them. We can embrace our lust for life without being clinging, egotistical or controlling.

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