



J U S T B E

*A Search for Self-Love
in India*



M E R E D I T H R O M



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To you, dear reader:

May you be happy.

May you be well.

May you be full of peace.

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Introduction

We all have access to an infinite source of wisdom that lies in our bodies.

The first time I set foot on a yoga mat and began to really let myself feel the intensity of sensations and emotions that were lying beneath the surface, I wanted to run away. At first I avoided going back to yoga class, hoping that distractions like sugar or prescription pills from my doctor would take away my suffering instead.

Fortunately, I soon realized that repressing or distracting myself from my emotions and sensations caused just as much and often *even more* suffering. It was then I knew running away was no longer an option.

Through allowing myself to *just be* with my sensations and my breath, my journey began, and this book emerged. When I found that space of stillness, of silence, a space of no desires, no attachments, of pure witnessing presence without any need to change myself or my life, I formed a connection with the one place I can always rely on: my body, my breath, and my own innate wisdom.

From that place, I began to listen deeply and to take action. I found the courage to take bigger leaps, follow my callings, and love myself through my challenges. It was then that the magic of life—a realization that the universe was conspiring in my favor to give me the exact experiences I needed to

heal—helped me discover a deep, pervasive connectedness to everything and everyone around me, and a trust in a force greater than myself.

My hope for you is to connect to a place of stillness and love within. A place where there is nothing you need to change. A place where you can love yourself no matter what thoughts, challenges, or situations arise. And from that place, to take steps forward, to follow your own inner callings, and to know that whatever happens in life, you'll be able to come back to this stillness and self-love.

Sometimes, life gets hard. It's inevitable. But if there's one thing I've learned through the years, it's that if I can sit with the intensity of any emotion, any difficult sensation, and remain equanimous, calm, and composed, everything will be okay. The nature of these sensations—indeed all challenges of life—is to be impermanent, *arising and passing away*.

This insight was confirmed during a conversation with my friend Karen at the end of our ten-day silent meditation retreat taught by S. N. Goenka. She had asked one of the teachers a question about the pain she was experiencing in her body, hoping that through feeling her pain, she would find relief, and that one day, just maybe, her pain would go away and never come back. The teacher looked her right in the eye and said, "Billions and billions of times better than your pain suddenly going away would be you continuing to have pain for the rest of your life and no longer suffering through your reaction to it."

The point is not to push away our pain but rather allow ourselves to *just be* through whatever arises.

I chose to retain the real names of the saints and sages in

this book. If you decide to further study their teachings, I ask that you do so with the purest intentions and utmost respect. In a similar vein, if you visit places that are mentioned in this book, know that every experience is unique, and your own journey will unfold, most likely, very differently from my own. We are each on a distinct and remarkable path to liberation, and no one person's journey can ever be recreated, and that is part of the beauty of it.

I write of my time in India not to speak on behalf of an organization or teacher, or to encourage others to follow my footsteps, but rather to authentically share the magical events and synchronicities I experienced when I tuned into my body's wisdom and listened to the guidance I found there. Most of the names in this book have been changed out of respect for the privacy of the people I met on my path, except for Shankara, who gave his blessing and now travels the world under one of his many other names.

Each chapter begins with a mantra, a short phrase with a sacred vibration that you can repeat in your mind to bring yourself back to the present moment. I discovered these mantras through my travels, and you'll learn their meanings throughout the stories. The chapter titles are written in Sanskrit, except for the last chapter title, which is written in Pali, the language spoken during the time Buddha walked the earth. I invite you to use these mantras in your life as little seeds of wisdom, leading you to your own discoveries.