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# WORK

# SEX

Real Life on  
the Path of  
Mindfulness

# MONEY



**CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA**

*Edited by Carolyn Rose Gimian  
and Sherab Chödzin Kohn*



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WORK,  
SEX,  
MONEY

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SEX, REAL LIFE  
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Chögyam Trungpa

EDITED BY

*Carolyn Rose Gimian &*

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SHAMBHALA • Boston & London • 2011

Shambhala Publications, Inc.  
Horticultural Hall  
300 Massachusetts Avenue  
Boston, Massachusetts 02115  
www.shambhala.com

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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

Printed in the United States of America

♻️ This edition is printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39.48 Standard.

♻️ This book was printed on 30% postconsumer recycled paper. For more information please visit [www.shambhala.com](http://www.shambhala.com).

Distributed in the United States by Random House, Inc.,  
and in Canada by Random House of Canada Ltd

Designed by Lora Zerian

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Trungpa, Chogyam, 1939-1987.

*Work, sex, money: real life on the path of mindfulness* / Chogyam Trungpa;

edited by Carolyn Rose Gimian and Sherab Chödzin Kohn.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-59030-595-6 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Religious life—Buddhism. 2. Buddhism—Doctrines. I. Title.

BQ4302.T785 2011

294.3'4—dc22

2010036776

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## Editor's Preface

Each day, we deal with the challenges of ordinary life: mundane experiences that could be summarized by the title of this book: *Work, Sex, Money*. We all hope these aspects of life will be a source of fulfillment and pleasure, and they often are. Yet, at the same time, we all have problems with these areas of our lives, and we search for practical advice and solutions to these concerns.

There are thousands of books, articles, Web sites, radio shows, and television programs that provide advice or self-help on these topics. Concerned about work? Innumerable books and articles will give you career advice and tell you how to dress for the workplace, deal with bullies or bosses, ask for a raise, or be an effective manager. Television has a plethora of news features and shows dedicated to solving problems in your workplace and showing you how to deal with work as it relates to everyday tasks in the home—how to cook, how to dress, and how to decorate your living room. Television also makes the world of work highly entertaining, from boardroom competitions judged by Donald Trump to solving kitchen nightmares or laughing through popular comedies about life in the office.

Sex and the related areas of family and relationships in general fascinate us, preoccupy us, and cause us a great deal of trouble. Here, too, there is copious advice offered in the literature

of self-help, and our obsession with sex and relationships is titillated by film, television, the press, and the Internet, whether we prefer news, fiction, the tabloids, or "reality" TV.

For many of us who live in affluent societies around the world and for many others who are aspiring to affluence, materialism has become a virtue and a goal. Money has been viewed as glamorous, greed has been extolled as virtue, and wealth has been seen as the key to success and happiness. Lately, however, with global recession looming, money has become an increasing source of anxiety. How to save, how to spend wisely, how to make more money, how to do more with less, exhilaration when the stock market rises, panic when we lose our job: we have lots of issues with money.

Generally, if we associate spirituality at all with how we deal with the challenges of everyday life, we are hoping for a magic bullet or maybe a mantra that will solve our problems and relieve our anxieties. Like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, we'd like to be carried off to a magical land where enemies can be conquered by simply throwing water on them. We'd like our everyday problems, like wicked witches, to melt through prayer and meditation. And once having vanquished the villains, we would like to be able to click our red shoes together to return home to the loving embrace of family and, we hope, a secure job and a healthy bank balance.

What are the chances for this kind of happy-ever-after solution? Not so good. A nagging feeling tells us that we are stuck with our lives and with ourselves. In fact, to cope with the anxieties and challenges of modern life, what we need is not temporary escape, because eventually we find ourselves back in the "real world." The best prescription is a dose of reality and a dose of respect for ourselves and our world of work, sex, and money. Enter Chögyam Trungpa with a book that celebrates the sacredness of life and our ability to cope with its twists and turns with dignity, humor, and even joy.

His gift to the reader is an inclusive vision of life, one that encompasses the biggest issues and the smallest details of every day. There are, in fact, few definitive answers in these pages. There is, however, lots of authentic wisdom offered, rather than pseudo words of wisdom or dogma. Instead, the author is providing us with tools to work with the toughest stuff in our lives.

If we look at the most extreme situations—such as the plight of people in a war zone or dealing with the aftermath of a disaster, as in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina or Haiti following the devastating earthquake—it's obvious that words by themselves are not the solution. A soothing message that "everything is going to be all right" will not solve the day-to-day problems of survival faced by people whose society has collapsed. This is, in fact, also true in ordinary, everyday life—which we may often experience as a disaster on a much smaller scale.

The tools that people need to deal with their lives are also more than the things the material world can provide. We have to harness fearlessness to overcome anxiety and panic. To approach our lives sanely, we need to bring our intelligence or awareness to bear on situations. We also need a panoramic view, a way to see how the details fit into a larger pattern so that we can discover and organize order amid chaos. All of these tools are available in the pages of this book.

Here, too, you will find the key to unlock an attitude of loving-kindness or acceptance toward yourself and compassion for others, which is one of the most powerful tools that we can bring to ordinary life. Underlying all of these resources, people must have the confidence or the will to help themselves and others, the willingness to engage the tough stuff of life, and the ability to appreciate the raw and rugged qualities of life as things of beauty.

Chögyam Trungpa was not a big fan of hope, but he was a

fan of faith. By faith, he meant conviction in the sacredness of the moment, seeing that we can have faith in and commit to whatever is happening now in our lives. He contrasted this with hope, by which he referred to an attitude that looks for solutions in the future: we hope things will work out later, even if they seem hopeless now. It is faith in our direct, immediate experience that gives us the will, and the courage, to engage the most difficult moments and the most chaotic experiences.

*Work, Sex, Money* begins with several chapters that describe the general terrain of our discussion: problems in modern life with materialism on all levels—physical, psychological, and spiritual—and the need for formal meditation and a commitment to working with meditation in action, or applying meditative awareness to everyday life. Then Trungpa Rinpoche (Rinpoche is a title of respect that means “Precious One”) gets into the juicy details of work, sex, and money, with several chapters on each topic. The chapters on work are not just about the workplace and one’s career or profession. The author looks at general issues of conduct and discipline in everyday life as well as how the smallest action or everyday activity can be either an expression of simplicity and wakefulness or a source of chaos, pain, and confusion. The section on sex includes both a broad discussion on sexual energy and passion as well as discussion of relationships and relating sanely to family dynamics. In the section on money, Rinpoche looks generally at money as a form of energy. Chapters on the ethical approach to money and relating sanely to economics while being in business are included. The book concludes with two chapters on karma and panoramic awareness that tie together the whole discussion of a meditative or contemplative experience of everyday life.

Chögyam Trungpa witnessed and immersed himself in many vastly different human circumstances and lifestyles. In Tibet he was an incarnate lama and the abbot of an important monastery

in eastern Tibet. He was raised in the monastic tradition, which he fully embraced in his early years. Tibet was not a culture of luxury, but within that modest society, he lived a privileged life. With the increasing presence and dominance of the Chinese communists in the 1950s, he experienced the devastation and destruction of his culture, and he was forced to leave his monastery, his family, and his country behind, forever, in 1959. He became a poor refugee in India. He led a frugal life in England, and during his early days in North America he had very little money. In the 1970s, he married and started a family, and in his later years, he led a householder's life of material comfort and relative affluence. He was an artist, a playwright, and a poet. He was the president of a university and of a large association of spiritual groups, he sat on the board of many businesses and organizations, and he helped to start a number of nonprofit and for-profit enterprises. In all of the life situations Rinpoche encountered, he harmonized and demonstrated both nonattachment and engagement. He didn't shy away from life at all, yet he wasn't trapped in life either. He made many mistakes and had many transitions in his life, and he learned from his experiences. So when he speaks in this volume of the very human challenges of working in the world, being a sexual being, engaging in intimate relationships, and relating to wealth, poverty, and money, he speaks from a broad base of experience rather than preaching from afar.

Chögyam Trungpa had an enormous effect on the standard English vocabulary now used in connection with Buddhism, and on the practice of sitting meditation in the West. *Meditation in action* was one of the phrases he coined, and it was also the title of his first book of Buddhist teachings, published in 1969. If that title had not been used then, it could have been the title or subtitle for this book. In 1973 Trungpa Rinpoche replied to a letter (from someone he had never met) with these comments

about his personal life, in which he explains the meaning of meditation in action:

With regard to your inquiry about my lifestyle, you must understand that I regard myself as an ordinary person. I am a householder, who makes mortgage payments. I have a wife and three children whom I support. At the same time, my relationship with the teachings is inseparable from my whole being. I do not try to rise above the world. My vocation is working with the world. . . . There is a fundamental idea which refuses to divide things into this or that, sacred or profane, right or wrong. That is why I write and speak of meditation in action. It is much easier to appear holy than to be sane. So the idea is to separate spirituality from spiritual materialism. This requires a practice and some courage.\*

Rinpoche found life earthy, rugged, and grounding. At the same time, he found it inspiring, fascinating, and full of energy and magic. He helped others to experience life as he himself did: as totally real, not lacking in anything, and worthy of celebration. More than twenty years after his death, this book still speaks to our experience in an immediate and compelling manner. I hope that it will help many readers to find a path through life, one that blends spiritual and secular experience in a way that respects and actually enhances both. For like a bird with two wings, modern life must integrate the spiritual life with the life of every day.

In the 1970s, when the talks that form the basis of this book were given, Buddhism and the sitting practice of meditation were largely viewed, particularly in the West, as activities outside of the mainstream of everyday life. The idea of integrating

\* Excerpt from a letter to Steven Morrow, May 10, 1973. Used by permission.

mindfulness and awareness into ordinary activities was somewhat radical. Today, the application of mindfulness is being widely accepted as a helpful discipline in the management of pain; stress reduction; the treatment of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other psychological problems; and in education, developing creativity—pretty much anywhere you look. In this volume, Trungpa Rinpoche talks extensively about why and how meditation and spirituality apply to work, sex, and money. Some of this may seem commonplace now, but at the time, it was an eye-opener for many in his audience. Today, people may think of the application of mindfulness to a specific problem as important, without necessarily wanting to adopt the bigger view represented by a tradition like Buddhism. Without proselytizing whatsoever or putting labels like “Buddhist” on the insights he offers, Chögyam Trungpa nevertheless presents the big view, the vast view, a view that transforms every moment and the whole of life.

The world needs our help. But in order to help, we need to unlock and harness the spiritual wakefulness and inner resources we all possess. *Work, Sex, Money* can help us to bring the spiritual and the profane elements in our life together so that we can work with situations with cheerfulness, skill, and delight. I am personally grateful to the author for the insight he offers in this volume, and I pray that it may help many others, who in turn may help this world.

CAROLYN GIMIAN  
*February 2010*





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WORK,  
SEX,  
MONEY



## THE SACRED SOCIETY

The discussion of work, sex, and money is quite a big undertaking. Usually people see these subjects as very private. Nevertheless, we have decided to discuss them. However, the subject matter is not purely work, sex, and money but something behind those things, another dimension that is connected with how we relate with life altogether.

As Buddhist practitioners or practitioners of meditation, we are supposed to be immersed in the contemplative tradition and spiritual practice. Why would we discuss work, sex, and money? If you are involved in spirituality, you may think you should transcend work, sex, and money. Perhaps you think you should live the contemplative life, a life in which those things don't apply because you spend the whole day meditating. You should have nothing to do with those things. You shouldn't have to think about work. Nobody should be involved with sex, because people shouldn't have such lustful

thoughts at all while living the contemplative life of meditation. And money—you should be involved with that least of all! What money? Who has any anyhow? Money—that's the last thing we should think about. Spirituality, you may think, is not concerned with green energy.\* Forget about money—we should have transcended that.

On the other hand, you may find that in spite of your spiritual intentions, your life is involved with work, sex, and money anyway. In that case, maybe there is something to be said about those subjects after all. On the whole, we are not strictly spiritual or religious at all. People have to look for work. They have to find a j-o-b. We work for money. We may find that we are building our lives around sex and more generally on relationships.

Then the question is, are we really working on spirituality or not? If so, there is something that we might not have thought about: that spirituality isn't really "spirituality" in an idealized sense. Do you think spirituality is something purely transcendent? It's questionable. Real spirituality might have something to do with ordinary life.

If spirituality *does* have something to do with everyday life situations, then relating to spirituality means contributing something to society as a whole. We have to associate with society in order to offer something to society. For some people, that is not an easy thing to accept or do at all.

Society, as we tend to experience it in the West, functions largely on the basis of give and take. That is to say, we tend to think about our role in society in terms of what is demanded of us, or what we have to give, and what we can get out of the situation, which is the taking part. We could call this view materialism. Materialism can be physical, psychological, or spiritual.

\* Chögyam Trungpa used the term green energy to refer to money. Today it has a much different meaning, connected with the use of renewable resources and energy that does not have a negative impact on the environment. —Eds.

Physical materialism is quite straightforward. You measure your life, your worth, or your experiences in terms of physical gain, or literally how much money or how many nice things you can get out of something, or how much something will cost you. Psychological materialism is more subtle. It is based on competition and psychological one-upmanship. Finally, spiritual materialism is using the spiritual path to gain spiritual self-centered power or bliss. All of these approaches are based on propping up or reinforcing the ego. If we see society purely from these materialistic viewpoints, we might conclude that it has nothing much to offer us on the spiritual path.

However, from the genuine spiritual point of view, as opposed to an idealized viewpoint, society is an extremely potent arena, full of vibrant qualities of energy. That practical approach of working with the energy of the situation is the only access point we can find. Otherwise, on an abstract level, society may seem like an autonomous process without any cracks in it, no faults in its surface, no entrances and no exits. But if we see society in terms of the practicality of work, sex, and money, we can find ways of working with it. Sex is an aspect or attribute of society. Money is an aspect of society. Work is an aspect of society. From that point of view, we can see something relevant to us in society. We can see how we might contribute something to society, or at least how we could work along with it. If we look at it in the concrete terms of work, sex, and money, society is not entirely dry and sterile; it is not insignificant for us.

The whole question boils down to whether we regard society as sacred. Society does contain profundity and sacredness. The sacredness of society is potent and powerful. I'm sure many ordinary people would not accept such an idea. They would think that we are trying to infiltrate; we are trying to sneak something into the idea of society, to impose some foreign element or idea on it. However, it seems genuinely important to see the spiritual aspect, the visionary, almost psychedelic, aspect

of society.\* We have to see not only the basic happenings but also their basic quality of energy, the energy that they contain. That is what we are looking into here.

Work, sex, and money are actually the energy outlet of society, its energy radiation, the expression of its sacredness. So we should try to see the spiritual implications of society, the spirituality even within Madison Avenue or Wall Street. What is the spirituality of a place like Wall Street? What is its healthier aspect? For that matter, what does America altogether mean? What does landing on the moon mean?†† What does producing supersonic aircraft mean? What does all this mean in terms of spirituality?

You might feel that if we are discussing a spiritual approach to society, the discussion should be peaceful and have a lovely sense of equilibrium. You might think we should approach the subject matter in a detached, spiritual way, according to the picture that many people have of the Eastern tradition of spirituality as peaceful, nonviolent, gentle, genteel.

Should we approach it from that point of view, where everything is good and everybody loves each other, all is peaceful, and everything is going to be okay? Or should we take another approach, where there is energy happening, there is something to work on, and things are dynamic and provocative? There are flashes of negative energy, flashes of positive energy, flashes of destruction, flashes of hatred and love. All of this is happening within the big perspective of a mandala, a sense of totality or wholeness, a pattern and a structure that unify and contain all the parts. Can we approach our discussion from that angle as well? Can we approach spirituality and our relationship to society from that engaged perspective?

\* In today's parlance, the term *psychoidic* implies distorted perception and hallucination. At the time, however, Rinpoche was using this term to refer to genuine visionary insight into the energy of a situation.—Eds.

†† The first manned moon landing (Apollo 11, July 1969) was still a fresh and hot topic at the time of this seminar.—Eds.

You are part of society. Otherwise you wouldn't be here reading this, and we couldn't communicate. If you were not included in society, you wouldn't breathe the same air as others; you wouldn't eat the same food. The main issue is whether you are genuinely open to relating with society as part of your personal journey of spirituality. Does society mean anything to you in your personal search, or do you purely want to attain liberation by yourself, without society? Do you really want to abandon all the others? Do you care how society suffers or how it might gain bliss?

Some of us find it almost impossible to appreciate the sacred aspect of living in a big urban center. We might want to escape and live in the country, where we can just laugh at the whole city phenomenon. How funny life is in the city, we think, how terrible, how ironical, but at the same time funny. We would like to step out of city life, have nothing to do with it.

In that situation, the whole city could become your guinea pig colony. Your guinea pigs are living everywhere, running around the city. Your relationship to the city is the same as that of scientists relating to their guinea pigs. They inject things into the guinea pigs and the guinea pigs have some reaction. That's the kind of attitude that some people involved in the spiritual scene have toward the city dwellers.

That's a very uncompassionate attitude. The city just reminds us of a big display of irony—irony in the negative sense rather than in the sense of natural self-irony. We are laughing at other people rather than seeing the contradictory and humorous aspects of our own lives. If that approach becomes part of a spiritual view, it's rather sickening, because that view regards normal citizens as terrible, as a failure of humanity, as embarrassing. That approach comes from preconceived ideas about life in the city, and we are not willing to communicate with those preconceptions.

More generally, preconceptions come up in people's relationship to money, their relationship to work, their relationship

to sex, even their relationship to their parents. We find it difficult to relate to these things, especially as they manifest in urban life. That doesn't mean, however, that we should run away from these issues. Because there is something difficult and destructive involved, there must be something creative involved as well. Relating to that creative aspect is the point here. You don't have to abandon things because there is something destructive in them.

There is the Buddhist story of the arhat, one of the Buddha's disciples with self-realization, who goes to the charnel ground, a burial ground in India. There he picks up one human bone, and he ponders that. He sees that a bone comes from death, and death comes from birth, and birth comes from desire, and so on and so on. Finally he works out the whole chain of causality from this one bone. He realizes that desire comes from grasping, and eventually everything comes from ignorance. Just from this one bone, he is able to see the chain reaction of the twelve links of interdependent causality, known as the *nidanas*. *Nidana* is a Sanskrit word that means "cause" or "source." The twelve *nidanas* refer to twelve aspects of *samsara*, or the cycle of birth and death, often compared to twelve spokes of a wheel. In *thangkas*, or traditional Tibetan paintings, or the wheel of life, the twelve *nidanas* are shown as the outer circle of the wheel. Here in this story, the arhat is able to see the whole chain of causality of the twelve *nidanas* by just contemplating one bone. We could work in the same way in our own situation. We don't have to reject or abandon anything. We could work on the creative aspect of situations.

New York City might represent death to you, at times. I can see that. People on the street might look to you like walking corpses with no expressions on their faces. And there are urban jackals, which might manifest as cars with sirens blaring and policemen inside. The dry air of death is in your nose all the time and in your mouth. As an occasional way of cheering up, you come back to the deathlike displays in store windows with their



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