

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: DEEPAK CHOPRA

A candid conversation with the leading New Age thinker about living in the present, reversing aging, battling with skeptics and who's really twisted on Fox News

The proverbial mountaintop looks a lot like a suburban golf resort. On the lush grounds of La Costa Resort and Spa in Carlsbad, California guys in Dockers and windbreakers practice their chip shots, oblivious to the procession of starry-eyed minions heading toward the Chopra Center for Wellbeing. Today is the final session of a weeklong Seduction of Spirit workshop full of meditation instruction, grinning silences and cosmic conversations with the man whose inspiration and words have brought the faithful together. Attendees paid \$2,775 each for the privilege of sitting at his feet.

Deepak Chopra has arguably been the most public face of the New Age movement in America. A physician, public speaker and spiritual advisor to celebrities like Michael Jackson, he is the author of 57 books, including the number one best-sellers *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* and *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, which have sold more than 30 million copies. Drawing on elements of Eastern and Western spirituality, metaphysics, medicine and science, with dashes of self-help and happiness psychology, Chopra has become a sort of Lao-tzu for the iPod generation. His "simple yet powerful" principles mostly involve ridding oneself of negative emotions to transcend the obstacles that afflict body and mind. Strip away selfish conditioning, he says, and we can discover our

true purpose in life. Skeptics scoff at his fuzzy language and poke holes in the quantum theories he invokes, yet Chopra's message of hope spreads like galactic dust via book, blog, e-mail and Twitter feed.

Born 64 years ago in New Delhi, India to a prominent heart surgeon, Chopra thought he might write novels (as he now does) but ended up in medical school instead. Like so many ambitious Indians of his generation, he sought his fortune in America and was soon chief of staff at a prominent Boston hospital. Working too much, he numbed himself with cigarettes, coffee and alcohol but couldn't ignore the feeling that Big Medicine was only making patients sicker. His early writings on incorporating age-old practices such as ayurvedic medicine and meditation caught fire with readers looking for fresh answers on everything from insomnia and cancer to aging. Celebrities liked him, too: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Jackie Onassis, George Harrison, Oprah Winfrey and Barack Obama all came calling.

These days Chopra, married to Rita, his wife of more than 40 years, has two grown children and roams the globe as a highly paid ambassador for wellness and mindful living. Yet the first impression he made on Contributing Editor David Hochman, who last interviewed Cornel West and Michael Savage for PLAYBOY, was as

"a little man with a bit of a paunch who didn't look up from his BlackBerry." But he soon had Chopra's unwavering attention, in a wide-ranging chat in the Chopra Center offices that touched on life's biggest questions. Says Hochman, "Once he put down his phone, Deepak got down to business. 'What is life? What are its secrets and mysteries?' It was riveting."

PLAYBOY: People have looked to you for guidance on spirituality, health and happiness for 40 years. Don't you get tired of having to have all the answers?

CHOPRA: First of all, I don't think I have all the answers, but I enjoy contemplating and living the questions. I live, breathe and even think in my sleep about these ideas: the connection between mind, body and spirit, the true meaning of consciousness. I'm not alone in thinking about these concepts. I see a great longing in the world for self-knowledge and self-awareness. The only way to deepen understanding and deepen one's self-identity is to engage in reflective self-inquiry. Ask yourself, Who am I really? What is my true purpose? How can I live the best life imaginable? That type of self-reflection is the key to global transformation.



"Drugs are not part of my life, but I have tried them all. I've done LSD. I've done mushrooms...everything. But all at a young age. I certainly don't regret it. I'd go so far as to say that drugs were a source of great joy to me."



"I don't invest and I don't save. I carry maybe \$200 and a credit card in my pocket. If you ask me to read a bank statement, I can't. I believe that when I die there won't be anything for anyone. I don't have that kind of mind."



"India is getting a false sense of pride because it made a nuclear bomb. Globally yes, it's an economic superpower, but Indians are totally ignoring the fact that 30 percent of their children go to bed hungry—starving."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIZUNO

PLAYBOY: Isn't that New Age mind-set just a recipe for narcissism? Every town in America now has a yoga studio and a place to buy scented candles for meditation. But has any of that actually made us more compassionate or more peaceful as a society?

CHOPRA: Our culture has become self-absorbed, and meditation, yoga and all that have played a part. To have perfect bodies and peaceful minds requires a good deal of self-focus. For the most part, people who follow this type of lifestyle are idealists. They want to bring peace to the world, they want to make war obsolete, they are committed to repairing the ecology and supporting racial equality, feminism and gay rights. The roots of that idealism surfaced in the 1960s with us baby boomers, of course, but it always had a shadow of narcissism.

I think we're always evolving, not just as individuals but as a society, as a human species. My sincere hope is that at some point we'll go beyond personal gratification and realize the true value of quieting the mind, of being good to the body, of relieving ourselves of stress and of paying attention to others and recognizing our inseparability from the rest of the world. We're in a time when half the world's population lives in radical poverty, which means less than \$2 a day, when conflict, war and terrorism abound everywhere in the world, when there is extreme social injustice and extreme economic disparities. If we're truly mindful we can begin to recognize and address these inequities.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about that for a moment. These are uncertain times for many people and industries—for America itself. Is it a worthy goal to simply stay mindful of the present? In many ways not thinking carefully enough about the future is what got us into the financial crisis, the real estate mess and two agonizing wars.

CHOPRA: That's something people get confused about. Being mindful and being in the moment means not being distracted and not being overwhelmed by the melodrama and hysteria around you. It may be difficult to believe this, but present-moment awareness allows intuitive and creative solutions to emerge even in the midst of crisis. No crisis can be addressed at the level of consciousness in which it was created. What's happening in the country now is the result of our not being present to what is happening around us. Unfortunately it's also the weakness of our president. If he had been totally present to the immediate needs of the American people, we wouldn't have this crisis. Our president is an idealist and thinks long term. I totally support that. But people want short-term gratification.

PLAYBOY: So it's fair to say you're disappointed with President Obama?

CHOPRA: It's a sad state of affairs. I loved President Obama. I've met with him, I voted for him and I supported him, but

I think he's ineffective at the moment. I mean, with all the support and the majority in Congress that he had, he couldn't get the health care bill passed comfortably! It's that way with all the things he said he would do. He can't get rolling, he can't get the support. I think Obama should be just a one-term president.

PLAYBOY: Is there anything Obama can do to save himself?

CHOPRA: Well, I was with President Clinton at a private function a little while ago. He mentioned there are more job postings in the postrecession era in America today than at any other time in the history of the United States. But our workers don't have the skills. The jobs are in technology and other fields that require a high degree of education and training. One of the saddest commentaries on our time is that Americans have lost the kind of skills they had because we became complacent about everything. We no longer manufacture anything significant, notwithstanding GM's recent recovery. America's two biggest exports right now are Hollywood and weapons of mass destruction. Obama would do well

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to focus on creating different kinds of jobs that don't require advanced degrees. In the meantime, all the service jobs and information-technology jobs are going outside the country.

PLAYBOY: Our losses are India's gain, in other words. Do you think you would have left India to come to the United States if you were starting out today?

CHOPRA: Probably not. In fact, Indians are now returning to India. It's become fashionable. Even though I'm an American citizen and I relate more to being here than anywhere else, I think of myself as a citizen of the globe with an American passport. But I'm very intrigued by what has happened in India over the past few decades. It's exciting, but India also faces enormous challenges.

PLAYBOY: What are India's biggest challenges right now?

CHOPRA: Overcoming hubris is a big one. India is getting a false sense of pride because it made a nuclear bomb. India is getting a false sense of pride because the middle class is expanding dramatically. Globally yes, it's an economic superpower, but Indians are totally ignoring the fact

that 30 percent of their children go to bed hungry—*starving*. They are ignoring the fact that 300 million people still live in abysmal poverty and there's still a lot of communal tension and violence. India has huge problems.

PLAYBOY: Let's come back to America for a minute. Why do you think there are so many broken, psychologically damaged people out there? Many of them pick up your books for comfort and guidance. In that way, is your success somehow a sign we've failed as a society?

CHOPRA: I've wondered about that so much. It's something that has bothered me all these years. Why are there so many unhappy people? As I said, America has everything to offer. There's so much opportunity. It's still the land everybody criticizes but wants to come to, and I believe the American dream still exists. But unless you're lucky, maybe like I lucked out, people are set up for disappointment because we are a dysfunctional society. I've wondered about this a lot and I have a radical theory about it. My theory is that for more than a century, America has been at war. First it was the Civil War, then World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam war, the Iraq war and then the Afghanistan war. We are a country at war with the world and at war with itself. People will say, "Oh, that was the great American thing, to save the whole world." The actual results are a lot of absent men, dysfunctional families and children growing up with insecurities. When you grow up in a society at war with itself, you come of age with uncertainties and fears, and the result is that many people are lost.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever feel guilty that you've made so much money selling your books, DVDs and workshops to these lost souls? Isn't enlightenment supposed to be free?

CHOPRA: We live in a society where making a huge income from selling cigarettes or alcohol or even drugs, pornography and weapons is totally legit. But selling knowledge, which helps people, is somehow considered not legitimate. I hope the day will come when this will be the most enlightened way of making money. In America you never apologize about being successful. I'm never going to apologize about being successful. Having written 57 books—18 that hit *The New York Times* best-seller list—why should I apologize? Because they're popular books? There must be a need for them, right? Unless I'm fooling all the people all the time. I do the work I do with a great passion and a great sense of responsibility, so I'll never apologize for being successful. Having said that, we have 65 people working here at the Chopra Center. At times, when we're doing a course, we have 100 people working here. They get salaries, benefits, insurance and unemployment benefits. What I earn from the center covers one third of my overhead, so I subsidize two thirds of what happens here.

PLAYBOY: Are you suggesting you're not making any money?

CHOPRA: No, there's enormous revenue from the books. I've hit the jackpot as far as selling books is concerned. That's where my income comes from. But I put it back into the business, and what's left I put into my foundation. I don't have any saved money.

PLAYBOY: You have no savings? What about investments?

CHOPRA: I don't have that kind of mind. I don't invest and I don't save. I carry maybe \$200 and a credit card in my pocket. If you ask me to read a bank statement, I can't. I believe that when I die there won't be anything for anyone. In the meanwhile, until I'm dead, my wife is totally taken care of from my royalties. My children are self-sufficient, so I don't need to give them any money. I keep about \$30,000 in my account and the rest goes to keeping the operation running.

PLAYBOY: What motivated you to go into the guru business?

CHOPRA: [Laughs] My initial motivation as a doctor was to try to figure out what was going on with the body. I would see patients who had the same illness, saw the same physician and got the same treatment, yet had completely different outcomes. Why? What was going on? Some of those patients thought differently about their illness, some had different expectations or outlooks. I started recording their stories and soon realized that every patient's story and outlook influences his or her biological response. The mind has an influence on the body, something nobody was talking about at that time. I collected these stories, sent them to about 30 medical journals and was roundly rejected. They didn't want anecdotes; they wanted authentic research. So I sent the stories to publishers but didn't get anywhere in publishing, either. I didn't have an agent. I found a little ad in *The New York Times* one day that said I could get 100 self-published books from Vantage Books for \$5,000. I sent off the stories and a check, and my first book was born. It was called *Creating Health: The Psychophysiological Connection* and it was published in 1985.

PLAYBOY: Instant success?

CHOPRA: Not exactly. I was in Boston at that time, doing my residency and other things. I knew a woman who was intrigued by the book's ideas: how meditating can help people, the importance of eating right, developing a sense of equanimity and compassion. She was doing her Ph.D. in divinity at the Harvard Divinity School and persuaded the manager at the Harvard bookstore, which was called the Harvard Coop, to put the book in the window. Some agent picked it up, called me two days later and said, "Why don't you have a publisher?" I said, "Nobody would publish it." She said, "How much did you spend publishing this?" I said, "\$5,000." She said, "I'll

get you \$5,000 from Houghton Mifflin." Next thing you know, it's a national best-seller called *Creating Health*.

PLAYBOY: What were people responding to?

CHOPRA: Readers intuitively felt that there was an answer they couldn't find in traditional medicine—that our mind, our emotions, our behavior, our social interactions and our relationships affect our biology. People may have understood that on some level, but they wanted to know more. I was suddenly inundated with requests to do speeches, workshops, more books.

PLAYBOY: You've also faced criticism. The medical and scientific community has slammed you from the beginning for being soft on evidence and heavy on vague promises and pseudoscience.

CHOPRA: There's been huge criticism. Huge. But that's because I've gone out on a limb, whereas other people have played it safe. In 1989 I wrote the book *Quantum Healing*, in which I began speculating on the healing power of the body. My idea was that intelligence exists everywhere in our bodies, in each of our cells, and as such, each cell knows how to heal itself. By

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using methods like meditation, we have the potential to defeat cancer and heart disease and even slow the aging process. We can think ourselves sick and think ourselves well again. I really believe that, but again, because much of the book was anecdotal, the science and medical people took me to task.

PLAYBOY: Have advances in science proven your early speculations correct?

CHOPRA: In many instances, yes. Since I started down this road I've been amazed by what we've discovered. The EEGs of people in meditative states repeatedly show increases in alpha waves [indicating wakeful relaxation], which proves we have the power to change our bodies with our minds. More recently it's been proved that prolonged periods of meditation, like you see with monks in monasteries, can change the brain permanently. The fight-or-flight centers in the brain that normally light up to trigger alarm and anxiety are quieted. In a normal waking state our brain waves are at a level of 13 to 30 cycles per second, but these monks were able to slow their brain waves to between four and eight

cycles. That doesn't mean they're duller to the world. It means they're more quietly alert in a way that's permanently hardwired in their consciousness. What that means to me is that all our thoughts have an effect on our biology, and that's reflected in our state of consciousness, our blood pressure, our hormone levels and our body temperature. If we teach patients in hospitals how to relax—to breathe properly, to meditate, to do some passive movements or even bedside yoga—we can get rid of what most drugs are prescribed for, which is insomnia, nausea, constipation, anxiety and pain. That's 80 percent of what's prescribed in a hospital, and it's unnecessary.

That said, I'm less of a fundamentalist than I used to be. I'm not so fanatically attached to every interpretation I may have espoused years ago. My books have matured. But nothing I said about aging or biological markers of aging or the fact that there is such a thing as spontaneous healing, that the body has self-repair mechanisms, has been disproved. In fact, if anything, we know more about it.

PLAYBOY: You've had a public flap recently with Michael Shermer of the Skeptics Society and physicist Leonard Mlodinow, who accuse you of misusing terms from quantum physics, such as describing consciousness as being "nonlocal." They say your terms are fuzzy and contend there's no evidence for God, the soul, consciousness or human love that can't be explained by citing brain chemicals such as oxytocin and adrenaline.

CHOPRA: Oxytocin is not love or spirituality. It's the measure of love and spirituality. But that's not the point here. The skeptics are all angry people. They're mostly high school teachers with old science behind them. And now they have a few champions such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens. Leonard Mlodinow is co-author with Stephen Hawking of a recent book that refutes the existence of God. They all love to call me the woo-woo master, or Dr. Woo, and I admit, they did anger me. But I decided to reach out to them and engage with these issues. I wrote to Leonard and said, "It seems like you know your mathematics, but conceptually you and I have a lot of disagreements. You definitely don't understand consciousness. So why don't we get together and hang out, and you teach me physics and I'll teach you consciousness?"

PLAYBOY: Have you done it?

CHOPRA: Yes! We're doing a book together. It's about the things that physics and spirituality can agree on and what physics and spirituality cannot agree on. It's called *War of the Worlds*. It's a big book. We've got a multimillion-dollar contract for it. It's going to be huge.

PLAYBOY: Do your differences just come down to faith? In other words, is it that you have faith and they don't?

CHOPRA: No, it's not a faith issue at all. It's about consciousness. The fact is,

without consciousness you and I couldn't have this conversation, right? Consciousness is what makes perception, thinking and emotions possible, and conversation, cognition, personal relationships. In the absence of consciousness you're dead. They don't even acknowledge consciousness. They believe consciousness is an emergent property of evolution and a product of the brain—just as acid is a product of your stomach or bile is a product of your gallbladder.

I believe there's a lot of evidence that consciousness itself is what drives evolution. Consciousness is what creates our biology. Consciousness is responsible for our perception. It's not just my idiosyncratic way of thinking. The fact is, this is part of the perennial philosophies of the wisdom traditions. It's what Emerson, Thoreau, Buddha and Confucius believed and what many modern scientists believe. A physicist named Henry Stapp at Berkeley says that every choice we make influences the future evolution of the universe. These are major concepts that these guys who work in academic institutions are waiting to publish. The problem is, they need to secure their next grant and want to get tenure, so they don't have time for metaphysics or philosophy.

But the debates on these big questions continue. Do we have the ability to influence the future evolution of the cosmos? How does our understanding of consciousness as pure potentiality enhance our capacity for intuition, creativity, conscious choice making, healing and the awakening of dormant potentials such as nonlocal communication and non-local sensory experience? Major scientists from Stanford, Yale and other places are working from a rigorous research angle to get answers to these uncertainties. I'm talking every day with Stuart Hameroff, a physician who studies the mechanics of consciousness. He's a collaborator with Roger Penrose, who shared the Wolf Prize in physics with Stephen Hawking. All these people are taking the study of consciousness very seriously. Ten years ago it would have been called pseudoscience. Some mainstream researchers who have not kept up may still call it that, but in my opinion those people are frozen in an obsolete worldview.

PLAYBOY: What if the skeptics turn out to be right? Are you genuinely open to that possibility?

CHOPRA: I'm not sure we'll ever have firm answers to these questions, frankly. But the skeptics are entitled to their views and I'm entitled to disagree with them. I'm learning a lot from Mlodinow. He's a smart guy with a particular interpretation of quantum mechanics that has many adherents. Ultimately, though, we may need to agree to disagree.

PLAYBOY: Let's change course. Is it true you used to party with George Harrison?

CHOPRA: George was a sweet person. And yes, we did some stuff together, like bhang.

You know what bhang is? It's ganja. It's similar to cannabis. We drank it together in India. He was a lovely man. We listened to music together. We would discuss everything from creativity to spirituality to the divine. He had his own visions of other realms of existence and was more of a literalist than I was, but he was a lot of fun to be with.

PLAYBOY: Are you still a cannabis fan?

CHOPRA: Drugs are not part of my life, but I have tried them all. I've done LSD. At 17 it led me to my first spiritual awakening. I've done mushrooms...everything. But all at a young age. I certainly don't regret it. It gave me a glimpse into a different reality. I recognized that I can actually navigate these realms in my consciousness. I'd go so far as to say that drugs were a source of great joy to me, great nourishment and the source of all my writing. So much of what I've written comes from my being able to go into other states of consciousness.

PLAYBOY: Have you tried ayahuasca?

CHOPRA: [Hesitates] I have.

PLAYBOY: How was it?

CHOPRA: [Laughs] Fantastic. Ayahuasca

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in Peru is part of a ritual with shamans. What happens is there's a very clear-cut dissociation of your consciousness from your body and from your mind, and very gradually you lose the well-defined edges of your body. It all seems to merge into one wholeness. It can be very scary because you start to lose the boundaries of yourself and they start to extend. But as you stay in it, you become extremely joyful and euphoric because you feel you're literally unbounded. This was many years ago. Fortunately, now I can go there through intention and meditation—and without drugs.

PLAYBOY: We notice you've been glancing at your BlackBerry and iPad throughout this interview. What's up with that? Are you addicted?

CHOPRA: I admit it's a problem. If I get an e-mail, I feel the need to respond immediately. I'm working on it, but I have to say it's definitely something I struggle with. I'm a bit of a compulsive personality.

PLAYBOY: You also blog obsessively and post frequently on Twitter and Facebook. What's all this distraction doing on a meta-level to consciousness in our society?

CHOPRA: First of all, I love blogging. I love the immediacy. I love the reach. I love the instant connection with so many people. It's vast and it's fast. But the impact remains to be seen. If it blunts our emotional intelligence or our face-to-face, eye-to-eye, body-to-body contact—and we're certainly heading in that direction—it will be extremely detrimental. On the other hand, if you can integrate with it, it's an amazing technology to reach a critical mass of consciousness. I personally love participating in it.

PLAYBOY: Let's get practical for a moment. If someone has never meditated before and wants to try it, give us a quick primer on what to do.

CHOPRA: Sit down, close your eyes, put your attention in your heart and slowly ask yourself a few questions. Who am I? What do I want? Do I have a purpose? How do I want to make a contribution? What's a meaningful relationship? What do I look for in my good friends? Do I have any mentors, heroes in history, in mythology? What inspires me? What's a joyful moment for me? What's a peak experience? I think it's very important to do that kind of contemplative inquiry. But then after you've done that, let it all go and either observe your breath—the simplest kind of meditation is just observing your breath—or mentally observe the sensations in your body for about 15, 20 minutes. You might get distracted. Come back to the breath or the sensations. Your mind will quiet down. Occasionally you'll experience silence within, and those are moments of extreme peace and joy.

That said, don't stress too much about whether you're doing it correctly or not. Assume you're doing it correctly and don't look forward to any flashy experiences in meditation. If Jesus Christ shows up or suddenly the heavens explode, just come back to observing the breath and your thoughts. That's the best thing you can do because every experience we have is just another thought. There's nothing more to it. But there are benefits in terms of the gradual expansion of consciousness.

PLAYBOY: What's the best way to ensure a good night's sleep?

CHOPRA: Make sure you're busy during the day, not only physically but mentally. If you are dynamic and active during the day, your sleep will be restful. It's that simple. When people say they haven't slept for a long time or have chronic insomnia and have tried everything, I force them to stay awake for 48 hours, even 56 hours. That completely resets their biological clock.

PLAYBOY: Did you say 56 hours?

CHOPRA: It's a very unusual way of getting people to sleep. But in fact it forcibly resets the circadian rhythm. I've never seen it fail. You see, whatever you struggle against, it's worth considering the opposite approach. If you battle insomnia by trying to go to sleep, you'll still be an insomniac. But if you don't struggle against

insomnia and just stay awake, you'll go to sleep. It's the same with dieting. If you force yourself to diet, you'll never lose weight.

PLAYBOY: So what is the key to a healthy diet?

CHOPRA: Try to avoid things that come in a can or have a label. Don't adjust your diet because you think something's good for you. That won't work for lasting changes. Instead, listen to your body and be easy about it. If you fight your food vices, they'll spin around and destroy you.

PLAYBOY: What are your food demons?

CHOPRA: I don't really have any.

PLAYBOY: Nothing? Come on! Don't you ever sneak a Snickers bar?

CHOPRA: No, I don't. Not because I think it's unhealthy; I just don't have a taste for it.

PLAYBOY: Ice cream?

CHOPRA: I don't have a taste for it.

PLAYBOY: Chocolate?

CHOPRA: I don't have a taste for it.

PLAYBOY: Pizza?

CHOPRA: I don't have a taste for it.

PLAYBOY: Wow, you're really good.

CHOPRA: I have two or three cups of coffee a day. That's my vice. But I'm a vegetarian and I eat healthy foods.

PLAYBOY: Now, don't be offended, but you do have a bit of a paunch.

CHOPRA: [*Sighs*] Yes, I do.

PLAYBOY: Do you exercise?

CHOPRA: I exercise like crazy! I mean, today I exercised one-and-a-half hours. But sometimes I am in a hotel and haven't eaten all day, so at night, if I have a sandwich or bread of any kind, I will gobble it up. [*puts hands on his gut*] But this is going to go, for sure, very soon.

PLAYBOY: Gut or no gut, you certainly attract beautiful, fit, healthy women to your lectures and events. Has it been hard to resist the temptation of gorgeous women throwing themselves at you?

CHOPRA: There's an interesting mind-set for dealing with this. If you want to keep women interested and exuberant and lively, the worst thing you can do is have sex with them. There's nothing more interesting than manifesting a different type of energy. That doesn't mean suppression. You can be aware of your sexuality, but it's interesting to keep it in reserve. Once people have sex the whole dimension changes.

PLAYBOY: Have you been a good husband?

CHOPRA: It depends on your cultural conditioning.

PLAYBOY: [*Laughs*]

CHOPRA: My wife thinks I'm a good husband. But in America and in the West, marriage can be a self-indulgent partnership. Very selfish—a lot is expected. You know, you can't be talking to another person. There's a lot of jealousy. We have none of that drama. In our marriage we are both extremely secure and mature. That means there's a sense of complete caring but complete detachment at the same time. I'm not constantly trying to be in surveillance of where my wife is or what she's doing, and neither is she. But when we are together we have the best time in the world. I think the secret to a good marriage is it's better to be friends than lovers.

PLAYBOY: We were intrigued by your provocative update of the Kama Sutra, the

thousand-year-old Indian sex manual. What inspired you to publish that?

CHOPRA: First let me say that more than anyone, PLAYBOY has understood the mind-body connection. Its entire business model is based on the knowledge that images in consciousness arouse biological responses. Many people avoid the topic of sex in our culture. Over the years people have asked me every question imaginable about life and beyond but very few questions are about sex. I thought it was time to focus on what is really the most powerful of human forces. Anything that's alive has sexual energy. But in the West, sex and spirit have been tragically divorced. The flesh is sinful and profane, and the spirit is sacred and divine.

PLAYBOY: You write that "sex is freedom." What do you mean by that?

CHOPRA: Sex is transcendence as meditation is transcendence. If you're really alive to your sexuality, if you let go during the sexual experience, you lose track of time. Your ego is not there. There is a sense of vulnerability, surrender, mystery, joy. It is freedom in that sense. It also influences your biology. For instance, pornography may be one of the best ways to keep your hormones going—better than taking testosterone, for sure. Miss March will get the hormones marching and ordering organs to stand tall and erect. Why is consciousness such a mystery? Every state is reflected in the body—anger, fear, love, compassion, the thrill of adventure, the excitement of discovery. Look what happens when you suppress sexuality. There's so much of that, particularly around religion. As soon as you suppress it, you create disasters.

PLAYBOY: We've certainly seen that with the Catholic church. Do you think the church will ultimately survive its endless sex scandals?

CHOPRA: It's the hypocrisy I worry about. If they were just saying that sexuality or homosexuality is fine, there would be no problems. But by condemning certain types of sexuality as sinful while its own clergy is hiding pedophiles, that's the height of hypocrisy.

PLAYBOY: Eastern religions are no more tolerant of homosexuality and premarital sex.

CHOPRA: All religions are hypocritical.

PLAYBOY: Do we need organized religion?

CHOPRA: [*Waves hand dismissively*] No. Organized religion is all corrupt. It's just a cult with a large following. Get a large enough following and you can call yourself a religion, and then it becomes all about control and power mongering, corruption and money. We don't need mediators to experience God.

PLAYBOY: So you do believe in God?

CHOPRA: I do not believe in God as a dead white male or as God in the sky. In fact, I used to be an atheist until I discovered I was God. I think of God as the creative and evolutionary principle and impulse in the universe that becomes self-aware in the human nervous system. Chemicals and hormones are the mechanisms through which this principle expresses itself in a biological system. However, I do believe in the divine as a feminine energy rather than a predatory, masculine energy. For evolutionary reasons, men have been predators and women have

been nurturers, and I think of God as more of a nurturing force. For every single egg there are 250 million sperm. Unlike God, men are dispensable. Unlike divine energy, men are promiscuous, whereas women are not. You need nine months in the womb to come out. Patience and acceptance—that's God. When you understand the biology of relationships you also are more tolerant and forgiving of the behaviors people indulge in. Divine intelligence is nurturing, affectionate, tender, intuitive, sensitive, loving and compassionate.

PLAYBOY: You're a pretty earnest fellow. What makes you laugh?

CHOPRA: Jon Stewart, definitely. Stephen Colbert. Conan O'Brien is fantastic.

PLAYBOY: I'm guessing you're not a Fox News fan then?

CHOPRA: Fox News caters to the most base instincts of our collective consciousness. In Eastern terms I'd say it's stuck at the first chakra, which is the fight-or-flight response and everything that goes with it—you know, fear mongering, influence pedaling, cynicism among the extreme right wing. I've been on Bill O'Reilly's show a few times. He's always respectful to me. The first time I went on his show I said, "If you interrupt me or raise your voice, I'm going to walk out." And he didn't. I think he's smart and pretends to be a bigot, but he's not so much of a bigot. On the other hand, Sean Hannity is a bigot and is not smart. And I totally can't take Rush Limbaugh.

PLAYBOY: When you look at the bookshelves today, you see dozens of books on seeking happiness and the science of happiness. You wrote one called *The Happiness Prescription*. Is being happy all the time a worthy goal?

CHOPRA: Yes, it's better to be happy than to be miserable. Of course it's also important to understand the true nature of happiness, to realize that personal pleasure brings only transient happiness. Only meaning and contribution and purpose can give you lasting fulfillment.

PLAYBOY: What's the secret to a happy life?

CHOPRA: The secret to a happy life is relationships, nurturing relationships—people you can share a love with and people you can help grow in one way or another. Now as I'm getting older, I find myself most joyful when I'm with my grandkids. It's interesting. I never thought I was that kind of person. But with a child, I can go see *The Lion King* for the seventh time or go to the Museum of Natural History for the 50th time and never get bored.

PLAYBOY: Who's the happiest person you know?

CHOPRA: The Dalai Lama is the real deal. He loves everything. He's authentically who he is. He never gets upset. He's not even mad at the Chinese. If you ask him he says, "No. What they do is very upsetting, but I'm not mad at them."

PLAYBOY: Are you sure he's human?

CHOPRA: He's definitely human. I remember we were with him in London and he ordered bacon and eggs for breakfast and everybody went crazy because they don't realize that Tibetans are not vegetarians. He looked around because he knew he was being a bit provocative, but we all just started to laugh.

PLAYBOY: Who does Deepak Chopra call when he's feeling down? Dr. Phil? Tony Robbins? Oprah?

CHOPRA: [*Laughs*] I don't feel down, honestly. I can say that.

PLAYBOY: Oh please! There's never been a moment when you thought, Woe is me, my last book didn't sell so well?

CHOPRA: No. I just do what I do.

PLAYBOY: If someone is facing a daunting medical diagnosis, what questions should they be asking?

CHOPRA: We're in a privileged situation because of the internet. As soon as you get a diagnosis, google all the information you can about it and see what treatments are necessary and what ones are not. Because there will be a lot of unnecessary treatments, tests and procedures if you simply put yourself at the mercy of the medical system. You have a little chest pain and the next thing you know you've had an EKG, a 24-hour heart monitor, a stress test and, if you're really unlucky, an unnecessary angiogram or angioplasty and maybe even surgery. Doctors are not bad people, but never forget that the medical industry is a business motivated by profit, and just like with anything else you pay for, you have choices. The only way to make smart choices is by educating yourself first and not being passive with your care.

PLAYBOY: Can alternative medicines such as ayurveda cure cancer?

CHOPRA: What ayurvedic medicine or any form of holistic medicine does is help restore self-repair mechanisms. You fall down, you injure yourself, you have a clotting response—otherwise you'd bleed to death. The body knows how to cure itself. And what we learn from the wisdom traditions, whether it's ayurveda or something else, is they restore self-repair, or homeostasis, as we call it. Is that enough to cure cancer or infection? I would say it's enough in many cases to make you less susceptible to these illnesses. Are there cures? Well, you talk to any physician, there are what they call spontaneous remissions. They don't know what happens. Spontaneous remissions occur in all kinds of illnesses, including cancer. Prostate cancer, for example, can go into remission. Through exercise, diet, meditation, and healthy relationships you can change the genes' behavior. For heart disease there are 500 genes you can change through behavior. For coronary artery disease, with four months of exercise, meditation, a good diet, good sleep and healthy relationships, you can make changes. These studies are not published, but the news is encouraging.

PLAYBOY: Do you still feel you have an ageless body and a timeless mind?

CHOPRA: Absolutely. The biological markers of aging are extremely flexible. I bet if you took my blood pressure, examined my immune system and my hormone levels, I'm biologically not over 35. And I feel that. Just this morning I've already been to the gym, I've done my basic yoga, I've done my meditation and I'm all set for the day. I'm a happy camper. I have no anxiety. I enjoy what I'm doing. I think this is possible for anyone. But we live in a society that perpetuates anxiety, stress and fear and even

motivates behavior change through fear. If you don't lower your cholesterol you're going to get a heart attack! If you don't get a colonoscopy you might have cancer! If you motivate people through fear, they're going to die faster. Even if they change—if they stop smoking, lose weight and lower their cholesterol—they're probably still going to die faster because fear creates adrenaline and cortisol and has its own biology.

PLAYBOY: What happens to us after we die? Will Deepak Chopra still exist somehow?

CHOPRA: There is no such thing as Deepak Chopra. What I am is a constantly transforming bundle of memories, impulses, desires, imagination and creativity. But there's no permanence to me, even now. I mean, if I look back at the Deepak who was a teenager, he was a different person. In fact, I have very little to do with that person. When I look at Deepak the resident and intern who was smoking two packs of cigarettes a day and getting sloshed on weekends, I can't relate to that person. The fact that you think you are a person is a socially induced hallucination.

PLAYBOY: Say that one more time.

CHOPRA: A person's identity is a socially induced hallucination. There's no such thing as a person. There's only a bundle of consciousness that's constantly in flux. That's the value of what I do and what I teach and what I honestly know and believe. Once you get rid of the person, you realize there's a deeper identity that's inseparable from all that exists and that can't be destroyed. Once you go to that deeper identity, which is more transpersonal and even transcendent, then you tap into the spontaneous expression of what I'll call platonic values—truth, goodness, beauty, harmony, love, compassion, joy, understanding, forgiveness. These spiritual values are not commands or rules of morality; they're expressions of your true identity.

PLAYBOY: How do you know your true identity when you see it?

CHOPRA: You just know. There is much more peace and detachment from trivial and mundane things. There is more compassion. There is more love. There's a greater desire to help. There's loss of fear. There's a complete understanding of death. You're easy.

PLAYBOY: So you're not scared of dying?

CHOPRA: Not at all. I've worked hard on eliminating fear from my life. As I've gotten older I've lost the fear of death. What could be bigger? If you lose the fear of death, then you lose all fears, because all fear is the fear of death in disguise. It's the fear of letting go. It's the fear of stepping into the unknown.

PLAYBOY: What do you hope your legacy will be?

CHOPRA: Easy come, easy go. I honestly mean that.

PLAYBOY: Easy come, easy go?

CHOPRA: That's where I am in my present stage of development. We take ourselves so seriously and yet we're gone in the blink of an eye. I recently took my son to the place in India where I'd like my ashes to be scattered. It's a place called Haridwar, and it's where I scattered the ashes of my own father recently. When you go there you open the registry and see that your grandfather had

visited and your great-grandfather and your great-great-grandfather. In three generations, it's as if you never existed.

And yet we are timeless. It can be mathematically proven that right now you have in your body a million atoms that were once the body of Jesus Christ, the Buddha and Genghis Khan. In just the past three weeks, a quadrillion atoms have gone through your body that have gone through the body of every other living species on this planet. We are not our body and mind. There's a spiritual essence that transcends the activity of the present moment. Part of you never dies, because it was never born. It's outside time, outside space. That's very comforting. It's a kind of universal identity.

In the meantime, the highest form of intelligence you can have is to observe yourself. Let it go at that. You don't need to judge, you don't need to analyze, you don't even need to change. This is the key to life: the ability to reflect, the ability to know yourself, the ability to pause for a second before reacting automatically. If you can truly know yourself, you will begin the journey of transformation.

As human beings we have unlimited potential and imagination. The worst thing you can do is be a conformist and buy into conformity. It's the worst possible thing. It's better to be outrageous. It's better to hang out with the sages, the people open to possibilities, even the psychotics. You never know where you'll find the geniuses of our society.

