

## Life is Divine Play: My Life and Training with Enlightened Masters

**Mark Johnson**

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*Life is Divine Play* is the real account of a living Daoist teacher Mark Johnson. After a few years of discontent and wanderlust in his youth Johnson decided that what he really truly wanted is to live the life of an artist in a warm beautiful environment like Tahiti. He began to make his way west to California where he would take a ferry to Tahiti. Yet while stopping in Florida he encounters a spiritual teacher who tells him that unless he first finds the Tahiti within himself the trip would be a waste of time. The message is clear enough to stop Johnson in his tracks. A healthy dose of skepticism—coupled with a paradoxical notion that there is more to life than most experience—leads him to spiritual centers and apprenticeships with masters in the United States and Asia for the next forty-five years. *Life is Divine Play* is a memoir that chronicles his experience training under masters who have reached a state of being that very few can achieve.

Johnson is a retired Tai Jai and Chi Gung instructor who interestingly was once employed by Francis Ford Coppola to teach Tai Jai to actors like Tom Cruise Rob Lowe and Matt Dillon on the set of *The Outsiders*.

Johnson skillfully uses his bizarre life stories to deliver a profound spiritual message: “Play is knowing the instant-by-instant delight of pure being.” And according to him one can experience Play regardless of whether you are doing your taxes or have just lost a loved one. His map to enlightenment involves enjoying chaos and confusion while holding on to your sense of lightness and centeredness. He likens the search for enlightenment to a wave trying to grasp its wetness and its place in the ocean. Johnson believes that so many seekers have trouble with the idea of this wetness or enlightenment because individuals are already wet. For him joy does not come from the pursuit of the idea of wetness but from simply enjoying being wet.

Out of the many paths he studied Johnson favors Daoism for the way in which it effortlessly embraces the “Play” of this physical reality more practically and deeply than any other school of thought. He holds that while Buddhists strive to transcend suffering “[Daoists] maintain that if you live right—integrally authentically moderately and selflessly—you won’t have much pain to transcend.”

*Life is Divine Play* is an entertaining humorous read about a subject that is very often treated too seriously. Johnson successfully shows that all Eastern philosophies are not the same and often lead to completely different spiritual experiences. While the writing is humorous and well crafted Johnson’s partly tongue-in-cheek mask of arrogance (he says he was born enlightened) will irritate some readers. Ultimately this assumed mask is another form of Play since this is the same Johnson who was kicked out of a handful of spiritual centers for his unscrupulous misbehavior.

(August 21, 2009)

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