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INTRODUCTION

There are many books that tell us how to find God. But the truth is that God is not lost or hiding. In fact, it is the actual, continuous, omnipresence of God that is so hard for the human mind to fathom.

We always look in the wrong direction: toward someplace else, toward something mysterious and far away. We try to recapture something that we believe we had years ago in childhood or something that we read about in spiritual books. We try to improve our hunting skills so that we can capture an elusive God, a God who does not want to be found.

But God is *not* missing or elusive or invisible. It is *we* who need to make ourselves ready to receive God, who is always knocking at the door of our hearts, whose Voice is always speaking, whose Heart makes our hearts beat, and whose Breath is the world.

“Receive God.” We are the only thing that stands in the way of this ultimate action, this greatest desire, this end point that is also our beginning.

Why do we stand in the way? What you will find on the pages of this book is an exploration of the trail of our resistance to seeing things as they are, which includes

the fact that God is always present and accessible to us. It is a step-by-step, sequenced walk through the territory of the human heart, with its great longings and its great limitations. It seeks to show how these limitations—through the grace of God—are always less than the power of the Truth itself. God, Jesus, Amida Buddha, Allah, enlightenment—whatever we call this Calling that calls to us from within our very body and from the world outside ourselves as well, always stands at the crossroads of every moment of life and death, offering us the answers to the great puzzle of being alive.

The Instruction Manual for Receiving God is for everyone. You can be Jewish or Christian, Muslim or Buddhist. You can even be an agnostic or an atheist, because the proof of the holiness of life is in the day-to-day encounters we all have with what is now, what went before, and what will be. It doesn't matter what we call this holiness or what we consider its source to be. It is a felt and real thing.

This book is for all humans who want to become more human. It is for all beings who want to better understand the intrinsic happiness that existence itself offers. To find this intrinsic happiness, we must understand what seems to stand in the way.

Scientists now know that each snowflake is actually a combination of several ice crystals, each formed around a tiny particle of soil. Without their microscopic bits of earth, these celestial creations could not come raining down on us to cover the landscape in quiet and white.

The human ego is like that particle of earth, a condensation of the particular within the great expanse of

the universe. It is what the beauty of this world is made from. Without it, the entire journey from separateness to oneness would not be possible. The dynamics of human life would disappear. Seeing and being seen would never arise. Brokenness and healing would never come into being.

The origin of suffering is the existence of the ego, as Buddha said. But this statement is often misunderstood to mean that the ego needs to be eliminated, transcended, or in some way—spiritually or not—discarded. Nothing could be further from the truth.

To be separate, to have a consciousness that rides in a body that begins to grow toward death from the moment it is born—and to know that this is true—is the beginning of the existential suffering all beings share. That—along with poverty, earthquakes, tsunamis, illness, and other tribulations—is part of what it means to be human. Buddha knew this, and he did not mean to say that the disappearance of the ego would cure these troubles.

However, along with these difficulties, we tend to elaborate and improvise. In an effort to secure a completely safe future for ourselves—an impossibility, of course—we actually create additional suffering as we try to stop the world in its tracks, sensing the end of our separate existence at the end of the line.

The human ego—our sense of separateness—is not negative in and of itself. The cause of the additional suffering we all are prey to is the *unhealthy* ego, the ego that *only* knows separateness and that tries to maintain this separateness in the face of a much subtler truth.

However, when the sense of a separate self is understood for what it truly is—God’s expression of beauty and the vehicle for the journey home—even the existential suffering becomes more bearable.

This book does not encourage false forays into imaginary worlds where there is no suffering of any sort, where some magical notion of spirit has whitewashed reality into a palatable dollop. Instead, the words in this book seek to awaken you to the truth of God, that perspective and level of integration that allow you to be separate and one with the universe *at the same time*. It seeks to put *life* into perspective and to make our lives something worth living, despite the hardships inherent in the situation in which we find ourselves. In other words, this is a book about *life, now, us, and other people*. It is not a book of theory but a set of instructions for living.

Where did you come from but here? Where is “here” but everywhere? What is there to lose, and what is there to gain? We are *creations* and creations are not so much “made by God” as they are God in another form, or God *in* form! Our only job here on this earth is to heal, to return to the wholeness that we already are, having been born from the same milieu from which stars and galaxies emerge.

The human ego is such a star. You are such a star. Your magnitude is tied to your healing, and your healing is always calling to you from your deepest, innermost heart. That is why you are reading these words, why they have attracted you here. If you know this—that your wholeness is always calling out to your wholeness—you are already most of the way home.

This is a book about how to live life with eyes wide open, to see both what you can understand and the unending mystery of existence itself. When our egos are healed, this mystery is not a worthless thing, waiting for a revelation to make it relevant. It is the meaning of life itself. It is its own revelation. It is self-illuminated and always in the presence, the glow, of the Creator.

My hope is that each of these pages heals you. If one page heals you, then this book has done its work. If only one person is healed from this book, then this book has healed a universe.

Life is a journey to see how big our hearts can get. This book is meant to help your heart grow by removing obstacles so that your true intelligence and kindness can flow more easily. This is a book meant to show you that you already have what you need to receive God. You have your own song, and God has a ticket to your concert. If you are shy, God, being God, will sing for you.

Mind, Buddha, God, awakening, liberation: they are all fancy names for being alive and present to what it means to be truly human. I write with gratitude for the hard work you have already put in and for your future hard work. I bow to you. I lift a glass and salute you.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In this book, you will find more than one hundred entries that I call *seed passages*, which lay out a real and practical path to making yourself ready to see the reality of God in your life at this very moment. Along with the seed passages, I have written commentaries to open up the main passages and, at times, to suggest a different approach to the idea being presented.

This book is meant to be a chariot, something to hold your body, mind, and spirit as you continue the great journey you have embarked on: the attempt to cure your suffering. It is the fruit of my own journey, from suffering in Brooklyn to joy in New Jersey—not a long distance geographically, but a lifetime of learning, healing, and letting go.

So how to use this book? My first suggestion is to not so much read it as *contemplate* it: Open yourself to those moments when you stop *thinking* about the material and instead begin letting it work on you in its own way. These words will work on you because of where they come from: deep in the heart of what it means to be a human being. So, like a medicine designed to heal the human body, this book, designed to heal the human soul, will seep into every pore of your spiritual self if you let it.

I suggest that you read small sections at a time. One a day or even one a week will do. You can go through the book from front to back or open it randomly. Although there is an order and you might find it helpful to follow it, a random choice opens the door to experiencing a miraculous moment of serendipity. Chance is the way God likes to mix and mingle with us, and since God is always present, we always have the possibility of bumping into something that speaks to exactly where we are at that moment, as if someone were keeping an eye out for us.

You can return to passages you want to work on again and again. No effort put into any of these passages will be wasted. As Jesus said, they will all be as “a treasure for you stored up in heaven.” Except the heaven I am talking about is right here and now, on this earth and in this life: your life and my life.

You will also find many small exercises throughout: Be sure to try them. But also realize that each seed passage is actually an exercise in “being a new way,” in trying on a new perception or point of view so that your life itself becomes your practice.

One of the unique things about this book is the explanation it offers on how to use our suffering—whether it is physical, emotional, or spiritual—to find God, to *receive* God. That is why each of these seed passages is so potent: They all go right to the heart of the matter, which is that God is always there, waiting to be received.

This book is not about creating some grand edifice of theology. It is about the practical steps you can take to actually experience God, and it unfolds in such a way that each step is a complete world in and of itself.

This sounds impossible! Isn't experiencing God—the real Self, Buddha-nature, inherent authenticity—extremely hard? Doesn't it take years and years to achieve? The answer is both “Yes” and “No.” “Yes,” because in our wonderful creativity, we have succeeded in distorting what it means to be human. This is not exactly our fault. It is part of the journey we take when we step out from the featureless background and become a separate being. This perilous moment is experienced again and again as we “step out” of childhood to become an adolescent, out of adolescence to become a young adult, out of our middle years to become older, and finally, out of our later years to become old. Each step is fraught with difficulty, because we are creatures of habit, blind to what is happening in the present moment, preferring our version of the present to be exactly the same as what went before.

The answer is also “No, it is not hard to receive God.” We are all capable of embodying these eternal truths because we are actually *made from* them. These truths are what hold the universe—and you and me—together. Realizing this, we can see freedom in an instant. There is nothing inside us that is not outside us as well. The reverse is also true.

It is my belief that all people can receive God and find liberation, and that this sort of freedom is really what the world is waiting for. It is as if there were hands stretched out at every border in every country on the earth, just waiting for the signal to step forward and grasp the hand of a stranger in love. I know this may sound implausible, but it is true. I can see it in my heart; I can hear the laughter that

would ensue; I can smell the delicacies from every country being prepared and passed between hands and people from all over the earth.

It starts with you. It starts with you becoming ready to receive God in your own life—a God who will not damage you in any way; a God who will only love and support you because both you and God are only love.

This book is in your hands. You have already knocked on the door of heaven many, many times. May this book be one of your answers. Make the most of it.

God, human, universe, home. They are all One eventually. My hope is that this book is a beginning for us all.

SEED PASSAGES



When we are consciously, personally aware of who we are—flaws and all, greatness and all—we hear God calling.

How do we find God? We start at the beginning. And what is the beginning? The knowledge that God is always near when wholeness—no matter what it looks like to our egos—is present. “Be who you are” is the great secret of spiritual work.



God receives us just as we are. But we don't receive ourselves in the same way. We don't love ourselves as we are. Our deepest work is not so much to improve ourselves as to realize ourselves, to see ourselves clearly and dearly.

The small self, hearing the words "Be just as you are," immediately takes it as permission to sidestep the spiritual path. It whispers: *Just do what you want! Don't worry! No effort is needed!*

But we arrive at the truly effortless condition only after practice and more practice. The secret here is that we are not practicing being *better* than we are. We are simply practicing *kindness* toward *who* and *what* we are.

