

**Everyone Wants to Be Their Best**

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*"There is no way to happiness, happiness is the way."*

*Buddha*

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Be your best. Every day when you arise, that's what you set out to do. We all do. But most of us don't always know how. We go to church. We go to therapy. We ask our friends. We quiz our parents. We read books. We seek answers all around us for how to be the best people we can be but the way remains unclear, especially in the heat of challenging circumstances. What does it mean to be our best? How can we define it? What is it to be healthy and balanced and fulfilled? Where can we find these things? What does it mean to have them? What should we do to find our way? And once we have find what we are looking for, how do we keep it? There are times when our best selves seem so elusive, in spite of our seeking.

Most of us believe we will find our best selves in relationships, jobs or bank accounts. We strive for financial or professional success, believing that fame or wealth will ensure our happiness. We seek for the perfect partner, thinking that the right person will complete us. We change jobs, towns, or spouses, hoping to find that one last thing that will make everything feel right. Like we are living the best life we can. We go to church, we join support groups and we watch Dr. Phil. And although some of these things can contribute to a fulfilling life, lasting happiness does not exist in these external pursuits, relationships or accomplishments. Happiness does not come from a possession, whether it is a job, a title, a car, a spouse, or a house. Your best you is not discovered on the surface of daily life. It is realized in one way alone - *in the discovery of true love and perfect balance* -which can only be found within oneself. With this realization, or *in-light-en-ment*, health, balance and fulfillment naturally arise and sustain themselves. Before we can discover this, however, *we must stop searching* outside ourselves for these things and begin *discovering them within*. It is a new kind of journey. So many of us have been going in the wrong direction for so long, growing tired of seeking without finding. It is now time to turn within in order to see what we have been missing. This book attempts to guide you towards the discovery of true love and perfect balance within yourself. It is a journey beyond external happiness and worldly success towards something deeper and even more important- your best, most balanced, you.

### **The Journey**

The journey inward is difficult. Many of us have not been taught to travel within and the territory is unfamiliar. Our culture is strongly rooted in a mindset that inspires the active outward exploration of new territory. Most countries were founded by colonists seeking to break free from stagnantly familiar places and oppressive systems of government and thought. The American forefathers, for instance, looked outside their immediate vicinity to push the edges of their world, buoyed by a pioneering spirit that rapidly claimed the North American continent and continues to impact the world with its all encompassing economic and political reach. Many governments, cultures and people approach life in the same way. In fact, this outwardly exploratory approach to life has been adopted by most of the developed world, so that most of us live our daily lives with this as a primary influence. We “go for it” and “just do it”. We set goals and make “to do” lists and have a strong vision of where we want to end up. This approach to life is an important component of growth, accomplishment and physical survival in the world. Its success relies upon the power of focused intention, a magical tool that produces what it sees. It is inspired and expansive. As a species, we have artfully mastered this creative approach to life. We have built cities of awesome grandeur filled with machines run by the invisible wisdom of silicon chips. We can fly around the world and beyond by harnessing the power of fossil fuels and surfing the sea of air called the sky. We can wage war in an instant with enemies half way around the globe using the seemingly omniscient eyes of satellite imagery to guide our attack. We can now cure some previously incurable diseases and slow or reverse aging. We can alter the genetic makeup of living organisms. We can even mail an electronic love note to our beloved at any time, any place, from anywhere in the world. It is an awesome reach that we enjoy. And we can use it to create a magnificent wonderland, or a nightmare, of a world to live in. However, this all-encompassing approach to life and the world is only half of the picture because it is unidirectional; it is purely outward in its focus and as such, is unbalanced. Although magnificent in its abilities, its potential to do harm cannot be overlooked. An exclusively outward focus can engender unreflective, unbalanced and controlling actions. In its worst expression, it can foster oppression, domination, and destruction. In order to be balanced, it must be tempered with an equal measure of exploration within.

## PRELUDE

### Looking Within

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*"People work variously at all sorts of callings.....but they are not at peace because what they are seeking cannot be found.....the heart finds peace through the beloved. How then can it find peace through anything else?"*

*Rumi*

*From The Rumi Collection Edited by Kabir Helminski*

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Looking within is different from looking ahead, around, over, or forward. First and foremost, it is benign in that the inward journey causes no turbulence, though it may very well encounter some, and the actions it engenders are harmless. An inward directed, contemplative person observes the ocean's depths and has no need to make waves on its surface. Yet the inward journey is not always placid, and it often requires a measure of courage that equals or surpasses what is necessary for looking without, partly because the inward journey is so boundless and unfamiliar. The inward journey is an ongoing rite of passage to the mysterious unknown, where our essential core of true love lies buried in bondage by our deepest fears and internal obstacles. The inward journey is a mission to free the true Love that defines us from whatever binds it, and though it is often a road less traveled by, the inward journey is the one that will make all the difference in your life.

### Taking the First Step

Traveling within can be a daunting journey. The territory of the self - mind, body, emotions and spirit - is vast. There are unknown demons living within us, guarding the limitless reaches of our souls, wherein lie our deepest fears, loves, dreams, and possibilities. In comparison to the outside world, the worlds within us can seem far more scary, far less tangible, and ominously difficult to access. At times, it feels as though we are lost in our own back yards, without a roadmap and with no clear path to travel.

Some of us are more prepared than others to begin the inward journey, brazened and wizened by life's challenges that have contributed to a certain degree of maturity and depth. Yet no matter how well we have mapped our routes in advance, or practiced the art of living, the unpredictability of life's road makes even the wisest and well-traveled among us, little more than wayward travelers feeling our way home to ourselves, following signs of unknown sources, and winging it, so to speak - angelic spirits in human bodies. No matter who we are, we all need help finding our way sometimes.

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There are some who walk ahead of us, shepherds that have been blessed with clearer vision and a greater ability to lead the way. Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Moses, Ghandi, Mother Theresa, and others have provided inspiration, healing and vision for a world full of travelers. Their lives and teachings have established the basis for many of the world's great religions; maps for the road less traveled. Though each of the world's spiritual leaders expressed their truths in a different fashion and followed different individual practices, the essence of their messages was the same. Each of them pointed to the truth beneath the surface of life, encouraging people to reflect inwardly on their own divinity and to let their outward actions mirror that perfection. Each of these avatars provided directions for the journey toward true love, encouraging the development of virtuous qualities, and warning of the many distractions and obstacles to the development and expression of this love. They showed us how to do this in their own unique ways, but in our daily lives, it is not always easy to apply their teachings. Jesus' eight beatitudes, one of the simplest and clearest teachings for how to live life well, are poetic and wise truisms about humility, meekness, poverty and other virtues.

**The Eight Beatitudes**

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*  
*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*  
*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*  
*Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*  
*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*  
*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*  
*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*  
*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

*Jesus, from the Bible*

But what does this mean in our lives today? Who will remind us to be meek when our spouse is yelling at us? Who among us seeks poverty, especially with three kids in college and medical bills to pay? How can poverty be good when I see its ill effects all around me? What are we to do between church services when we are being treated disrespectfully, and there is no sermon to remind us to be humble and non-judgmental? How do I handle my anger when I am being attacked? How can I see past my fear when life feels so threatening? How do I love others as myself, when I don't even love myself? Why should I selflessly help others with

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their lives, when no one helps me? How do I become peaceful in a world full of conflict? These are worthwhile questions to ask because by asking, we turn our attention within and begin the journey toward the discovery of the answers and, perhaps, a sort of modern day holiness built on greater awareness.

Learning to be virtuous, balanced and loving on a daily basis, with only the short memory of our life experience, a weekly sermon, or the example of trusted friend as our guide, is not easy. The answers to life's most difficult questions and situations are never black and white and the lessons rarely easy. Success in anything requires patience and practice. For our worldly journeys over land and sea, we have maps, trail guides and guidebooks that show us, or suggest, places to visit, stay, eat, and meet people. We have perfected the art of worldly exploration as a culture so that now we live in a "global village" in which we can contact or visit any place on globe with relative ease. But what about the everyday, inward journey of our personal lives? It is the most important journey of all and we walk it each day with very little guidance except the often unfamiliar inner calling of our hearts and souls, and perhaps the fortunate gift of a friend or loved one who can sometimes point the way. Life is often confusing, and I have often wished I could reach into my back pocket for the answer or a little guidance on the most common life challenges, in a language that made sense to me. Something practical, like a road map; something to bridge the gap between esoteric philosophies and my daily human life. A roadmap to being my best, most balanced, me. This book attempts to provide that for you. It attempts to condense and clarify the tools needed to help you navigate life's challenges on your way to greater love and balance. Along the way, we will explore the nature of many of life's most common challenges and examine tools and strategies that will assist you navigating through them. This book will help you learn how to turn every challenge in your life into a springboard for your personal realization and fulfillment as a human. It's a portable pep talk. Everyday cliff notes. A spiritual guidebook. But it's more than that too. It's an opening into the world of the unseen and infinite spirit that you are. My wish is that this book helps you to find a deeper meaning at the core of simple, everyday experiences. My wish is that it infuses your daily endeavors with a sense of sacredness by helping you to bring more attention to them. My wish is that you learn to use your everyday life experience as a vehicle for discovering and expressing the truth of love, which is inside each and every one of us and which is ultimately at the heart of this journey called life. My wish is that you reach beyond external happiness to the more fulfilling discovery of true love and authentic balance, within yourself

### **Where Are We Going?**

You may be asking yourself, where are we going on this journey? What is our destination and why? The primary goal for most of us is to arrive at a place of

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authentic and lasting happiness in our lives. The paradox of the spiritual journey, however, is that in order to reach happiness, we must focus on the *process* of the journey itself, and not on the destination. When seeking lasting happiness, the journey *is* the destination! Maintaining focus on the journey without thinking about the destination is a challenging discipline; much like being told not to think about a pink elephant. How do we focus on the “path” and the “present moment” when we see happiness up ahead of us on the horizon, in the future? For some reason, we tend to live our lives looking ahead and thinking about the future when in fact, the present is all we ever have. The present moment is yesterday’s dream of the future. But without the ability to appreciate the present moment, it is virtually impossible to become truly happy and truly in love with life, now or in the future. Therefore, the most important questions to pose are not “where are we going?” and “how far is it?” but rather, *where* and *how* are we *right now*? Where do we place our attention and find our direction in life? How are we living our daily lives in this moment? In order to answer these questions, we begin and end our journey, by paying attention to the present moment through the essential practice of meditation, the art and science of being – *existing* - in Love.