



EARTH: A SCHOOL OF LOVE

by nejoud al-yagout

Earth: A School of Love

Nejoud Al-Yagout

Copyright © Interheart Kuwait Italia 2024

Quote from Chelan Harkin's *Susceptible to Light* used with permission from Chelan Harkin; Quote by Wald Wasserman on Goodreads used with permission by Wald Wasserman; Quote from Ramana Maharshi's *Who am I?* used with permission by Ramana Ashram Publications Department; Quotes from Phil Bolsta's *Through God's Eyes* used with permission from Phil Bolsta; Quote from Margaret Paul's *Do I Have to Give Up Myself to be Loved by God?* used with permission from Health Communications, Inc.; Quotes from Aruna Ladva's *It's Time...For Change* used with permission from Brahma Kumaris Publications; Quote from Pema Chödrön's *Welcoming the Unwelcome* used with permission from Shambhala Publications, Inc.; Quote from Gerald Jampolsky's (MD) *Love is Letting Go of Fear* used with permission from Ten Speed Press (formerly Celestial Arts Publishing); Quote from Zach Beach's *The Spiritual Path of Love* used with permission from Zach Beach; Quote from J.P. Vaswani's *Many Scriptures One Wisdom* used with permission from Hay House Publisher's India Pvt. Ltd.; Quote from Reverend Bonnie Rose's *Shadow Cannot Drive Out Shame* used with permission from Reverend Bonnie Rose; Quote from Gina Lake's *Radiance: Experiencing Divine Presence* used with permission from Gina Lake.

If you want to obtain permission to use quotes or excerpts from this book (excluding the quotes/excerpts from the publications above for which you need to contact the publisher/author of each publication directly), you can get in touch with Nejoud at interheartkuwait@gmail.com). Permission from Nejoud is also required to print physical copies of the book for distribution. Only the PDF file itself—in its entirety—can be shared freely with others or on websites with no permission from the author for non-commercial purposes only. This book is not permitted for sale in any format—PDF, print, audio, or otherwise—under any circumstance whatsoever. The book is a free gift to all readers and is not for commercial purposes.

The information in the book is not intended to substitute for professional medical or mental health advice. Consult with a medical expert if you are struggling in any way. Some practices or ideas in this book may not be suitable for you, so kindly use divine discernment when it comes to your spiritual path, as it is yours alone to take. The author absolves herself from any responsibility.

Stay blessed.

This one's for the One

Acknowledgments

This "i" acknowledges the Source of love through:

Everyone and everything. There has not been a smile nor a frown that did not shape this vessel, nor a push or a pull that has not prompted the false self to move closer to love and farther away from itself.

Dearest Reader,

I am neither wise nor evolved nor spiritual. I am neither a teacher nor a leader. Just like you, I am on a journey to discover who I am. And just like you, the path I have "chosen" to the Divine Reality is the path of love. I say "chosen" because even our choices are illusions. There is an illuminating quote in the Koran which states: "And your Lord creates what He wills and He chooses; and they do not have a choice."¹ It is the One who brings us to the One. Since we do not choose love, when you read about choice in this book, know that I am addressing the part of you who is unaware that you make no choices. One might wonder how we can embark on a path of love when we have no choice. What is the point of scriptures if we have no choice? The response is that God's knowledge is vaster than His creation. He chooses love for those of us who seek it. It is His will, but it is Just, because there are people who willingly align themselves with darkness and will never align with love. Perhaps the closest way of making this clear is by saying that love is when our intention meets God's will for us, because God's will was, is, and will always be love. Having said that, any act of evil is a belief in separation and an attachment to the false self. God never chooses evil for us. Evil arises when we refuse divine guidance and when we align with the negative forces within ourselves, when we worship our false self. Having said that, you and I are being guided on the same love adventure together, even when our thoughts and actions prove otherwise. This is why I use the pronoun "we" for the most part while "you" and "they" are used sparingly.

Although there are quotes from various sacred scriptures, there is no belief system that is being promoted. What is being shared are the loving parts of various faiths. The use of the word God throughout the book is not indicative of a particular God. It indicates the One, the Only: God as the Source of All That Exists. Being close to God entails being in touch with the highest love that is within us and in the universe and beyond. It is not a cruel, punitive deity, but rather a driving force of love, ever connected to our deepest essence. You do not have to believe in God to read this book. The book may merely be an affirmation of the love you yearn to align to within yourself. However, if God wills, this book may inspire you to the realization that Source is our loving guide. It is by aligning to our Creator that you can understand what it means to live on a higher plane in this earthly realm. You can read the excerpts from scriptures and continue to see God as a God of a particular scripture, the God of your religion. You can refer to God as Brahman, Allah, YHWH, Waheguru, The Lord, The Creator, Source or whatever name you use for Him. Here, in these pages, it does not matter. There is one God, regardless of what you believe.

The prompts regarding prayer can be actual prayer, in whatever way you pray, or used as a metaphor for silence to get in touch with the oneness within you that is connected to everyone or everything. The same applies to meditation. It does not matter how you choose to grasp the words in this book so long as you grasp the invitation to love. Every reader is welcome: atheists, agnostics, believers, doubters, skeptics, heretics, mystics, waverers of faith, unbelievers. In radical honesty, all of these belief (or disbelief) systems waltz within us. And yet, the spectrum divide of believers and unbelievers is something we can longer afford to be a part

of. It has created so much pain and insecurity for all of us. Let us side with everyone. Let us side with the believer and unbeliever within ourselves as well. Love means that we do not condemn anyone, and we no longer condemn ourselves. There is truth in all of us, however truth chooses to manifest, however little we know about the truth. This book is how I choose to perceive reality. It is not a proclamation of truth. And this current perception can transform into something else. It is not fixed in time and space.

I do not ask anyone to shed their belief systems, or to add to what they already believe or disbelieve in; but, rather, I call us to awaken from our stupor of separation and to face our shadows rather than deny them. This is an invitation to grasp that we are all connected. This book is simply your reflection. More than anything, follow your inner guidance that has been imprinted upon your soul by the Divine Intelligence. As Chelan Harkin says: "Your soul is the sacred tome, these books are simply arrows back into you."²

Read as many books as you want, but remember that no book should create division between you and another. Enough of that. And remember that after you have exhausted yourself on the spiritual path, the only book that will bring you to the truth is the book inside of you.

What you are about to read are words dedicated to you regardless of your faith or lack of faith, gender, inclination, orientation, financial, and social status.

Oh. And I love you,

Nejoud al-Yagout

How to Navigate the School of Love

Welcome to Earth, a school of love that will assist us in bringing about the realm of love. There are no founders of this course. All of us are founders, and all of us are qualified to enter. But until we obtain our diplomas, we have a few courses we need to enroll ourselves in to ensure that Earth is transformed into the realm of love it is, not the vortex of chaos we have created in which we suffer and inflict suffering on others, and not the vortex in which love is feared and fear is loved.

This book is divided into nine courses, each with a description and subtopics pertaining to the course. At the end of each course, there are reflections: questions poised to readers. The questions are not test questions. Even if you have not grasped or read a particular course, see what comes up for you with each question. You do not have to go back to the course to see what the correct answer is, because there are no correct answers. The reflections may reveal to you where you are on the path or may not. They are prompts that your inner Teacher can answer. If you do not feel like answering a question, skip it and go to the next question. The reflections are not practices to awaken you. Only the Divine Intelligence can wake you up. The reflections are mere friends having a conversation with you. Or you can consider the reflections as a way for you to get to know who you are beyond the answers themselves.

The courses, like the reflections, are not goals but possibilities. With each course, we do not pressure ourselves to pass or succeed. Instead, we reflect on how deep we can go. What does it take to surrender? How far can we penetrate the veils of anger to choose peace? How can we accept everyone and everything in our lives? How can we get in touch with the patience within us? The answer to all these questions is grace, of course, but connecting to our loving essence while God guides us makes navigating the questions and surrendering easier.

We are not trying to be spiritual by enrolling in the courses; we are awakening to the spirituality that is already inside of us. And we do not partake in these courses just for our own inner peace, but for the well-being of our world, for fellow humans, for animals, insects, birds, creatures, and the environment. We are under no illusion that we can master these courses. We are not here to master them. We humbly accept that there are deep, murky, and sticky trenches of conditioning within us, and we will have days when we fall back into our darkness or fall back into doubt and frustration. Yet our acceptance of where we are in each moment only propels us to continue our journey and keep exploring the love that awaits manifestation. We do not try to hold onto what we perceive as a good moment, nor do we try not to hold onto it. Whatever is arising is arising and cannot be any different from how and when it appears.

Love is a lifetime mission. We may slip in and out of it throughout our lives, but our lives will never be the same again once we embark on a journey of love, because when we taste an awakening into love, or even a possibility of an awakening into love, we have begun to transform ourselves and the world. These awakenings may be transient, in the form of brief moments of peace and love for everyone and everything, or permanent, where we are changed for the rest of our lives; regardless of how long they last, there is no turning back.

We remain students throughout our lives, and when we evolve, we reflect the peace of the Teacher, the only Teacher in existence. The reason we have entered the realm of love is to raise the collective frequency. It is important to be gentle on ourselves as we navigate the syllabus, and it is important to be honest with ourselves and remember that even when we feel we have graduated from a course, we may need to keep revisiting the course throughout our lives. The courses may seem repetitive, but that is because the path of love is simple and is oft repeated to penetrate our veils. The best part is that our realization of the veils within ourselves enables us to transcend our darkness and no longer act upon it, even while the darkness continues to manifest as thoughts. In time, our thoughts are purer as we focus on God in each encounter, every situation. We observe thoughts in nonjudgment and nonresistance and continue to open ourselves to love in every moment and accept God's choice for us to inhabit the realm of love.

The world is filled with labels which promote otherness. Vegan vs. meat-eater, conservative vs. liberal, and so on and so forth. In this school of love, the courses do not include an exercise or eating regime because there are people that are confined to their beds or cannot walk. There are people in comas, and there are people on their deathbeds who are not allowed to move. As for an eating regime, a diet is organic to each person. One suggestion that is given to students while taking the courses is to allow each person to choose what they eat without judging them. The courses also do not tell us who we should vote for, knowing that when we choose love, our inclinations will evolve beyond conservatism and liberalism. We will transcend political parties and divisions and work together to create harmony for all members of the community, because the realm transcends even leadership. Our only leader is the One who leads, who guides, who propels us to goodness with His power.

We do not delude ourselves that we are on the right side of politics, or followers of the right spiritual path. Rather, we see all of humanity taking the plunge into the ocean of love, each in his or her own time. Nobody is left behind in this school. We root for every member of humanity. We understand that we are all on different levels of consciousness, and we have no judgment for those who continue to hate, even while we defend the oppressed and stand up to injustice. If God chooses us to recalibrate divine justice, let us fulfill His mission with open hearts, so that the crime ends there and is not perpetuated with the thirst for revenge, which will only lead to more pain. God will inspire us to protect minorities and victims of evil, but the mission can only be completed when we do it to purify our world from the evil of false selves, not for recognition or revenge. As we defend the persecuted, we open our

hearts and forgive as God forgives. And when we hurt others, we forgive ourselves, and realign with the school's mission of love, and rise like phoenixes from the ashes of unconsciousness.

This school is not just for advanced souls. It is for every person on this planet. Every human who has existed, exists, and will exist has experienced, experiences, or will experience the school of love, because all of us are part of the divine experience. Love is what we are here to study and to graduate from, because it is the only frequency which brings us all to life, which elevates us, and which unites us.

Obviously, due to our temperaments and experiences, we do not take the same classes, nor are we all inclined toward the same love curricula, but the school is one—the School of Love—and is divided into courses according to what we are here to learn about love. But unlike human systems, everyone has been accepted to this school, because we all hail from the One. Everyone is welcome, even those who appear to be failing at love, even when we ourselves fail at love. Those who appear not to choose love are our greatest teachers, for they are here to test our ability to remain patient and dedicated to love. And if we are honest with ourselves, we are not embodying love either, which is why loving ourselves, owning our darkness, is an essential part of growing into love.

As we embark on this journey of love-learning, we find that when we inhabit the realm of love, we no longer defend ourselves or feel offended; we understand that all human beings are both sensitive and offensive and that the other person is who they are, and we invite understanding and wisdom to our hearts. We wake up every day excited by the prospect of embodying the light. We are motivated and honored that every human being is invited to enroll in this institution of love. Somehow everyone is prompting us toward love, even those who appear to live without love. These courses come from our collective heart, not the individual one.

The best part is that though everyone is in the same school, some of us can skip some lessons, while the rest of us must enroll in every course. And we can make up our own courses, as there are no limits to love. If there are any courses that we deem missing, or if we come up with creative ways to blend courses, then let us revamp the curriculum. There are no rules for taking these courses. There are no exams. There are no grades. There are no students who are better than others.

The only requirements are dedication and realization, which come by way of grace. The only way to "study" at the school of love is by keeping our hearts open as we go about our daily activities and see how often we separate ourselves from others through anger, antagonism, and tension.

May this book inspire us all to follow the word of God, a word that touches the heart of all creation.

Introduction

What if Earth were a school of love? And let us not take this as another concept to add to our list of existing beliefs nor as an affirmation of truth. Let us navigate this possibility as an invitation to a new perspective where we align ourselves and others to a divine love beyond labels, beyond rules, beyond even what is beyond. Let us invite ourselves to a new way of living in love where everyone we meet is an invitation to explore love, unconditional love, no matter how difficult our interactions are with them, and even when we must distance ourselves from them.

We label people as toxic, denying our own toxicity. We call others annoying without considering the way we bother others. When we face our own shadows, though, we begin to judge others less. It does not matter who we were yesterday or even an hour ago. When we make a conscious effort to love, our life transforms. And that can only be done when we connect to the Source of Love. This is when and how we transform. We become focused on healing the parts of us which are resistant to unconditional love. But we acknowledge that healing comes from God alone. This humility opens us up to a space which connects us to the only power in the universe. As such, when we encounter those who we label as difficult people, we thank God for showing us where we are lacking in unconditional love and acceptance. The more we can accept these teachers, the more we can accept the difficult parts within each of us, and vice versa. And the more we raise our collective frequency, the closer we are to creating a paradigm in which all of us remember our essence. However, as we awaken, we know who we want or need in our lives. Sadly, there are people that are disloyal, there are people who will hinder our spiritual progression, so to protect ourselves we need to keep a safe distance from hypocrisy and abuse and falsity. But we also need to distance ourselves from our own falsity and hypocrisy, from our own tendency to abuse or hurt others. Our ego makes wrong judgments all the time, but our Creator can guide us to love and keep us away from those who stall our process or who do not have our best intentions at heart. When others move away from us, we acknowledge our own failings so as not to only point a finger at the person who left us. But whatever our decision, we love and forgive them, even if from a distance. And we acknowledge that we, ourselves, stall the process of others; we, too, do not always have others' best intentions at heart. We ask to be protected, yes; but we also ask to be purified from hurting others with our own darkness. We also ask that God protect others from our negativity and any harm that may arise from our intentions. This course is about living in the realm of love. And we can only do so by being honest with our faults and the way we are toxic to others as well. In time, as we progress, we shift from trying to make others love us to learning to love others, to being of service to others. We begin to attract soul tribes that reverberate love. Or we will be placed in challenging situations with people we cannot abandon (our children, or close relatives under our care, or even colleagues, for example) to learn what unconditional love truly means. This arises when we open ourselves to enter the realm of love, a realm that changes our lives.

In the realm of love, racism dissolves without resistance toward the conditioned racism within us. We learn that our skin color is a palette on a divine canvas. We appreciate the beauty of others' skin colors as we appreciate the beauty of the various colors of flowers and animals and creatures.

In the realm of love, homophobia dissolves without resistance toward the conditioned homophobia within us. We learn that orientation is a gift and that love manifests in countless ways. Nobody is condemned for who they love. All the labels we have created to divide people according to who they are attracted to dissolve, and we honor lovers as ambassadors of love. We applaud those who are in divine commitments regardless of their gender or preferences. We represent loyalty, fidelity, and monogamy while inspiring others to do so.

In the realm of love, children are raised to love and embrace the other as though they were the other. We raise little humans who grow up to share with others instead of energizing the "me" inside of them. Toys and clothing are no longer attachments or possessions but means of creativity and expression. Art, music, and creativity that unify are encouraged as these little kids make their debut into the world.

In the realm of love, there are no rich or poor. We create communities in which everyone has an opportunity to live in security. Money dissolves as we advance to societies in which everyone contributes their talent, not just in exchange for someone else's talent, but merely for the sake of contribution. Whatever comes out of it is not our concern.

In the realm of love, there are no tribes or blue blood. Everyone is an esteemed member of a unified world. And we do not look down on anyone. In fact, we are in awe of everyone, for we see the work, the heavenly signature, of divinity in everyone and everything.

In the realm of love, there is no politics. Everyone is responsible for the community, and each person contributes according to their calling.

In the realm of love, we understand that young bullies are in pain and more in need of love than anyone. We create a world where there are no more bullies and victims, and we know that to achieve that, we must teach ourselves and others to stop labelling kids as bullies, so that they do not grow up to inflict more harm on others.

In the realm of love, there are no passports or borders. Wars do not exist because we return to the laws of nature: sharing regardless. As the trees bear fruit for all, as the oceans welcome everyone, we too remember that land is for everyone. Earth, the

planet of love, becomes a haven for both those with nomadic lifestyles and those who decide to stay in one place. We are all inhabitants of Earth, and we release the pain of our ancestors which have contributed to war and divisiveness and acknowledge that all are welcome. There are no nations that are richer than others, where people run away to for want of a better life. There are no longer refugees who need to escape from warzones or famine or genocide. There are no immigrants because we belong everywhere. Across the globe, communities are created to ensure every member is taken care of and included.

In the realm of love, our beliefs do not matter. We love because we choose to transform the world, not because scripture tells us to be good. Our love for God becomes pure and not egotistical. Rabia Adawiya, in a poem devoted to Our Sustainer, tells God that if any part of her worships Him to enter Heaven, then she requests that she be denied paradise; and if any part of her worships Him to avoid Hell, she asks to burn.³ Rabia inspires us to love God for God, not for ourselves, not for our salvation, not out of fear of punishment, nor for greed or a reward. We can be inspired by scripture, but only because at the beginning of our path we require guides to enlightenment. In time, we look within our divine hearts for the love that was always there, for the Source of love who placed that love within us.

In the realm of love, we are all one. And this is no longer a philosophy which makes no sense, but a reality we live in each moment.

Just the intention of loving entails that we are ready to honor our calling. The intention is by divine grace. For those who do not believe in divine grace, or for those of us whose faith fluctuates, we can see divine grace as the higher calling within us, a calling that invites us to love, joy, kindness, peace, humility, and patience. We need to remember that we are not in control of our awakening, so that we can live in love without feeling superior to others. In time, divine grace will become more than evident.

And once it is evident, we will know that divine love is the only calling which benefits everyone. Not just those of us on the path, but everyone. Thinking that we are better than others as we navigate love only hinders our growth. Dividing people into labels such as spiritual or unspiritual creates an "us vs. them," or "me vs. you" mentality. We cannot afford to forget to surrender our sense of pride as we navigate the divine love path, lest we give rise to intolerance and the forces that oppose love.

In the school of love, we are students learning to love. In this school, we understand that the relationship we have with ourselves and the relationship we have with others are the most essential aspects of love. We do not adhere to conditioning or concepts which separate us. We realize we are all part of a unified field. At certain times, we are called to love ourselves and at other times we are called to love others. It is about what is being called in the moment, not a rule or a way we have to follow to achieve love. Love is never achieved. Love merely is. When we live in love, loving ourselves and loving others is not a required action or a goal. We merely become manifestations of love. We are under no illusion that we ourselves are loving but know that the Source of love is

loving through us, guiding us. The practical way we go about these courses is what resonates for each of us be it chanting, meditation, prayer, sacred dance, walking in nature, or conversing with fellow seekers. The practical way is not through reading. That is a precursor of our awakening. The actual course involves going within and offering ourselves to connect with the One in prayer, meditation.

Remaining committed to the path of love includes the acceptance of our inability to love in certain moments. It includes the arguments we have along the way, the feelings of frustration, the times when we behave in an unloving manner. It includes the moments we feel distant from God or have doubts. It includes the moments we do not want to have faith anymore. It includes our hypocrisy and our authenticity. It encompasses our anger and peace.

The miracle is that when we are devoted to the path, grudges are released much faster. The path of love helps us outgrow the false self. It becomes like an old self that no longer fits with our vision of love. Eventually, no matter how attached we are to our false self, we choose to let go and surrender. This is the beauty, the wonder, the majesty of love.

Let us take this journey together and enroll!

CHAPTER ONE: THE COURSE OF NONJUDGMENT

Course description: While taking this course, we will understand that we have not attained universal love because we judge ourselves and others. We will learn how judgment keeps us frustrated and vibrating at a low frequency, and how it leads to hate and polarization. We will also notice how judging others creates arguments and tension and that we can transcend our inclination to judge by shining our light of awareness on it. But judging our judgment is an impediment on our path of love, so we shine a light without condemning ourselves. We learn that whatever emotions are arising, whatever thoughts are manifested, are indications of our frequency, and there is nothing to judge about where we are on our journey. After all, Earth is a school, and our level of consciousness merely indicates how evolved we are. There is no pride in being more evolved than others and no shame in being less evolved than others. Each person is waltzing with what is, and each person is a possibility in a realm of possibilities. We are no longer judged by where we work, who we spend time with, how we spend our time, or how we are feeling. We know that if things could be different, they would. And we do not pressure ourselves to change what is inevitable. It is essential to remain patient and easygoing with ourselves as we navigate nonjudgment. Our conditioning may get in the way from time to time, even as we near realization, but staying connected to God keeps us unstuck and prepared for times when we are not ready to surrender judgment.

Everyone and everything are in flux

In this course, we learn that we tend to hit the pause button on people, so even if a person has evolved from a bully into a lover, or from a lazy person to a motivated individual, we continue to see them as they were. We punish them for a past self they no longer are. We ignore that life is constantly in flux, in motion. We ignore that circumstances change, and things only appear to be the same. Even if a person refuses to change or evolve, we explore ways, via reflection or meditation, to realize that they cannot be any different to who they are in this moment. As for these so-called difficult people in our lives, we gossip about them, we denounce and condemn them, not realizing that our judgment of them keeps us stuck in a loop of negativity and far from the path of love. Even if we must stay away from those who present danger to us, that should not stop us from sending them love in our meditations or praying that they find the peace that every single human being deserves. And let us remember that to some people we are the ones considered difficult people. Perhaps when we accept that we can be difficult, we open the portal to accepting others who we perceive as difficult.

Loving the essence

When we are on the path of love, we hold ourselves and so-called others in our hearts and choose to love the essence within each of us, regardless of actions. In nonjudgment, we understand that who we refer to as toxic parents did not know any better, because they were not aware of the possibility of living in love and raising kids in love. When they, or we, reach an age where they can no longer harm us, we can even build new relationships with them, if the opportunity arises. And that person at work or in town who offended us or spoke harshly to us is a reminder to love unconditionally. Each time we criticize or feel repulsed by another human being, we can pause, breathe and ask ourselves: Are we like the ones we judge? Perhaps we are not committing atrocities, but isn't our mindset the same? Do we see ourselves as superior to others? Do we feel that some people, such as dictators and tyrants, deserve to die for the pain they have caused others? Do we recognize that many members of humanity are sick to the point that they fuel evil? Do we acknowledge that it is our collective duty to rise above separation so that genocide and expansionism and exclusivity are no longer a part of our journey on this planet, so that we no longer have dictators or authoritarian rulers as part of our reality? Do we make other peoples' lives hell for not thinking similarly to us? Are we cruel to our family? Are we vindictive when our friends hurt us? We may have more self-control than some people, but how pure are our thoughts and actions? The shift begins when we look inside ourselves and search for the part of us that is connected to the Source of love, so that we can rise from our self-obsession and become inclusive, kind, and of service.

Much of what we judge in others is in ourselves, but it is easier to be dishonest with ourselves and blame others than it is to observe what is arising within ourselves. While we judge, we ignore all opportunities for self-realization. But the converse is true. When we choose not to judge, guess what? We repress our judgment only for it to manifest as anger or frustration later when we lose self-awareness. The key is to become aware of our judgment and find the space within us beyond judgment. And that space is where we are in touch with God.

In that space, we grasp how that difficult person is out of touch with their essence of love. And we are not called to respond to their difficult behavior by being difficult with them, no matter how many times we have chosen confrontation as a way to "resolve" issues in the past. From this moment onwards, we change our way of doing things and ask God to help us let go so we do not react to disloyalty. If space is required for us to address their difficulty, then we honor that need. Asking our Creator how to proceed ensures we act from a place of divine love and not from the false self. If God chooses that we separate from another person, it is done in a state of peace.

Students of love

It is our duty as students of love to leave this planet without rancor in our hearts. We can reflect on why certain people behave in a callous manner. Were they abused as children? Were they abandoned by their parents? Were they taught that anger could protect them from others? Where did their prejudices originate from? Why are they arrogant, rude, and/or unkind? Can we recognize their arrogance, rudeness, and unkindness within ourselves? Can we accept that in many instances what we judge in others is what we choose to deny in ourselves? Some of us who are on this path of love were once bullies ourselves. Remembering that we have created harm to others can remind us to love everyone. This path calls on each of us to be gentle on ourselves and with others.

You are love

In every moment we ask ourselves: Do I choose universal love or myself? Universal love is the way of humanity, myself is the way of separation where I come first. The way of love is the way of what we refer to as heaven. And Jesus reminds us: "[T]he kingdom of God is within you."⁴ We can find heaven inside ourselves when we are aligned with God, when we choose love, peace, harmony, and forgiveness. Surrendering our selfishness and accepting our circumstances is the way to heaven. Otherwise, we create a hell for ourselves and others. The truth is we are all vessels of divine love. The path is about uncovering that. As Wald Wasserman reminds us: "Discover yourself as Love. Because Love, it is You."⁵ When this knowledge of ourselves as beacons of love becomes clear to us, we can do no intentional harm to ourselves or others. In our presence, people are disarmed, and their light begins to shine. The energy of love is potent, and we are that energy. That love, that energy, is within us, eager to present itself to us and to the world. Our conditioning, our past, our traumas are all in the way of expressing that love. To resurrect the love that we are, we need to get in touch with the unhealed parts of us and give them to God.

Transcending trauma

We deal with the past by getting in touch with the trauma within us, by talking it out with a professional if we need to, but we do so with a choice to love everyone, even when we feel that our anger at the world is justified. In this course, every encounter we have reminds us of how our judgment closes our hearts to the other. It is also important to be aware of how we judge ourselves and to acquaint ourselves with the negative thoughts within us that block us from embracing and loving who we are beneath the veils. In addition, this course reminds us not to judge our judgments. The more we judge our judgments, the more we berate ourselves for not meeting up to our expectations; but even not judging our judgments is not a goal we are to achieve, yet simply an invitation, a suggestion, a possibility. We take the pressure off not judging and enjoy each step we take toward love, even when we continue to

judge. As we go through the course, our awareness becomes the flashlight that guides us, and we embrace even the moments of tension, for they teach us to search deeper within to find the love that beckons us and others to the realm we know is here.

Becoming an observer

In every activity, we observe our judgments without judging them. When we watch television, are we judging the presenter? Why? What is s/he triggering in us? Is she making us aware of our inner judge or are we jealous of him or her? What about the news? Are we judging world leaders and those in power? Are we forgetting that they are a part of our human experience, that they are also protagonists in our shared story? Can we remember that they were born into this world, just like us, and their role, however brutal, is to be exactly who they are? How can we condemn what is? How can we bring love to this moment by accepting that we cannot change who they are, but we can change who we are? And by changing who we are, we can pass on the baton to future generations and co-create a world in which nobody is required to play the role of a dictator. We were invited by God to inhabit heaven, a realm free of tyrants, but to do so we are invited to a new way of living, of loving. If we continue to ignore our oneness, dictators will continue to appear in our collective dream, and we will continue to live in the hell of war and borders and racism and exploitation.

Diversity and the unified field

So long as we are judgmental, we destroy our chances of inhabiting a unified field. So long as we take pride in who we are, and condemn others, we are depriving ourselves of the beauty of loving and accepting diversity. Embracing diversity is not just about accepting those of different faiths and skin color and ethnicities and nationalities, but also about accepting the diversity of roles, personalities, characters, and temperaments. In the Upanishads, it states:

When a man sees God in all beings and all beings in God, and also God dwelling in his own Soul, how can he hate any living thing? Grief and delusion rest upon a belief in diversity, which leads to competition and all forms of selfishness. With the realization of oneness, the sense of diversity vanishes and the cause of misery is removed.⁶

Our suffering, as such, is created by a false sense of separation. Diversity exists, obviously, but what the Upanishads remind us is that diversity is mere appearance. Beyond the superficial differences of gender, nationality, ethnicity, tribe, orientation, skin color, financial or social status, even personalities, we are one. And in that oneness is God. When this is accepted, there will no longer be racism or movements which separate us. We come from different places, we behave differently, we look different to one another, but our essence is the same. It is obvious that we inhabit a world that is diverse. Even nature is diverse with all of God's

manifestations. But the belief in diversity, per se, or the part of us which buys into separation, is the cause of many of our conflicts. And spiritual texts keep reminding us of our oneness, despite the appearance of diversity.

Separation and judgment

In the department of judgment, we learn how our perceived separation from the other has created borders, nations, and institutions which polarize us from one another. We learn how essential it is to purify our own souls as opposed to judging how, what, when, or why. We need to remember we come from the same Source. No matter what our family or society has taught us about the other, all we can do is extend love to everyone who is suffering in any crisis in the world. As mystics remind us, the darkness is within each of us. And that darkness manifests as enmity and arrogance and a deep-rooted, bloodthirsty desire for retaliation. Let us forget our labels and see everyone who dies or cries as a brother and sister. In this course, we learn to be lightworkers on the planet by holding space for everyone. We recall our mission to be ambassadors of the Divine Reality. We learn not to announce to the world who we stand with, but rather, we inspire those in our respective communities to stand for all of humanity beyond borders, race, religion, nationality, orientation, gender, ethnicity, politics. This is no longer about what the other side is doing or has done. We learn to resurrect peace and forgiveness and compassion. When we take sides, we strengthen adversity, within ourselves and in the world. We sabotage the plans of others, we even sabotage bringing people together, because we judge according to perceptions, unaware that our perceptions are invited to evolve. Not taking sides does not mean supporting oppression. Far from it. So long as we inhabit a world of borders and nations, we know that love entails supporting the right of peoples and nations to live in security, and we ensure that victims are protected and freed from the brutality of expansionists. But all efforts to free the oppressed are non-violent in thought and action. If we have violent thoughts, we are not qualified to hold peace talks. We assign that work to true spiritual ambassadors of peace, those who do not wish harm on anybody, those who have no agendas, and those who care more about humanity than land. Nonviolence never takes the form of inciting hatred toward oppressors. As ambassadors of love, we ensure that hatred dissolves even for those we consider evil. Ramana Maharshi reminds us that “[h]owever bad other people may be, one should bear no hatred for them.”⁷ Because the only way to end hostilities is through peace. And peace begins in our hearts. While everyone around us laments, we remain peaceful and connected to every person on this planet. We know that even an end to war or a ceasefire will never put an end to hatred. The ideology that brings about war will continue for generations unless we welcome the peace that is already in our hearts. Once peace becomes our goal, the Earth goes from becoming a battleground of greed and animosity to a land of unity and harmony. It begins with each of us. Are we willing to put aside our judgment of the so-called other? Are we prepared to face the darkness inside ourselves and let the light of Source guide us to peace on our planet? Are we willing to take accountability for the animosity that exists on our planet?

Surrendering the darkness within us

In this course of nonjudgment, we surrender the dictator and hater within us to make way for the divine love that lives in each of us. We realize we are one humanity, and we wish the best for everyone, including ourselves. We love others for who they are and not who they think they are, knowing that who they are beneath obstacles and veils and labels is who we all are: pure beingness. How can we judge beingness? How can we judge the roles and the forms and the experiences and the conditioning of others? How can we judge what life presents to us in each moment? And why would we lower our frequency by judging what cannot be any different to what it is?

The world is filled with polarities. By understanding that polarities are one of the laws of nature, we understand that we cannot transcend polarities without love. Love holds space for everything. Love is the only force that can take us beyond judgment and into the higher frequency of nonjudgment, where nonjudgment is no longer the opposite of judgment but the original state.

Judgment is God's alone (and it is not even judgment as we know it)

We begin to realize that judgment is not the domain of a human being, but that of a loving God who knows us more than we can ever know ourselves, a God who has knowledge of whether we have the intention to align with good or evil. God as a judge is not a punitive deity, but rather a loving Being, who judges from a perspective beyond man's judgment. God judges with love and mercy and understands us in a way that is beyond anything we can fathom. Otherwise, our world would have been destroyed eons ago. God's judgment is aligned with patience and compassion and lovingness; our judgment is aligned with impatience, resentment, and vindictiveness. God's judgment is not even judgment, but an objective presence which knows that all of us return to His domain; as such, all of us deserve to be here and all of us deserve love. God loves at the highest frequency, a frequency that is beyond our comprehension. But still, we attribute human traits onto God to satiate our own desire for justice. God's justice recalibrates and realigns us with love and unity and harmony; our justice sates ourselves and our communities and our nations, creating more divisiveness and enabling future generations to take revenge, fueling a vicious cycle which can only cease when we let go of hate and enter the realm of love. God will always guide us to default to love, and when we do not, we suffer as does the world. That suffering is a compass. When we reject love, we see and manifest a world that is divisive and afraid. We have rejected love for too long. We have divided the world because we are divided. But when we are whole in love, we rest in the bliss of oneness.

Reflections

Who am I judging?

Is it a particular person?

Do I judge people from other countries, other belief (or disbelief) systems?

Do I believe in my thoughts of separation?

Is conditioning blocking me from loving everyone?

Am I judgmental of fellow human beings from other races?

Do I feel ethnically or intellectually superior or inferior to others?

Am I stuck in comparing?

Is there a way for me to see others beyond labels?

How can I meditate on my pure beingness?

Do I judge myself?

Who am I blaming for the problems in the world?

Is there a way for me to surrender judgment of myself and others to God?

CHAPTER TWO: THE COURSE OF NONRESISTANCE

Course description: In this course, we learn that there is nothing we can control, especially not the challenges in our lives. What arises cannot be any different to what it is. Why do we create unnecessary suffering for ourselves and others by trying to control what is happening around us? We cannot even control our own thoughts! And that is fine. Thoughts are just thoughts. It is the power we give to our thoughts that makes us suffer. For example, if a thought appears that is offensive to another person, if we translate that thought into speech or action, that is where our work lies. As such, before anything, we give the thought to God. We release it to the only power that can guide us to transcend thoughts. Because we have chosen to align with love, we delve deep into why we find it necessary to resist others and respond to people in an unkind or defensive manner. We know that our actions begin in the realm of thoughts, and that is where we peer to transcend negativity and show up as a gentle, patient, and kind human being. And each time we succumb to the false self, we bounce back and realign ourselves with divine love.

Negative thoughts

We do not waste precious time fighting, resisting, or repressing our negative thoughts because we learn that this will only make them stronger. We smile and assure ourselves that we are on the path of love, and it does not matter if our thoughts think otherwise. All is well exactly as it is. Our negative thoughts remind us that we are not our thoughts. These negative thoughts trouble us, because we have aligned with love. But unconditional love means accepting even these disturbing thoughts. The thoughts may be so evil that we feel shame, but it does not matter. God knows our struggle and healing these thoughts, or at least healing the resistance we have for these thoughts, is a process. Negative thoughts serve a divine purpose in that they remind us that we do not want to be slaves to our minds. If that much evil can present itself in our thought matrices, why would we ever trust our own guidance? Aligning ourselves with the Divine Reality ensures we break free from the hold of thoughts and enter the realm of essence. Something to explore would be: If we had complete control of our thoughts, would we still hold vindictive and angry thoughts? Or would we choose peaceful thoughts, loving thoughts? The answer can tell us a lot about our current state. The answer is not an evaluation of how *far* we are from the path, but how *close* we are.

The stronger the negative thoughts, the closer we may be to freedom, because these uncomfortable thoughts reveal to us that we do not want to live in a certain way anymore. We want out of that matrix for a reason. We were born to be at peace with ourselves and others and with the world. There is nobody on this planet who would be averse to a mind which generates positive, loving thoughts if they knew what that would entail. We are not the negativity that is produced by the mind. What we learn in this course is

to ensure that negative thoughts remain in the matrix of thoughts, and only creative or inspiring or kind thoughts—from where we can operate from the frequency of love—are thoughts we share via speech, writing, painting, singing, dancing, or any action.

Nonresistance and evil

Nonresistance does not mean we accept evil. It reminds us that evil exists on our planet because we are distant from God. We are afraid of one another, because love has been veiled for too long, and because we do not raise youth to honor everyone around them. We do not delude ourselves that evil does not exist. It does. And we are responsible for its perpetuation. Each time we speak ill of others, each time we retaliate, each time we choose arrogance over peace, or conflict over compassion, we are choosing to create suffering for ourselves and others.

We face all the feelings of envy, anger, resentment, and ask ourselves: Do we want to pollute ourselves and the world further? Is there space within us for acceptance? Are we committed to this path of love? Are these challenges testing our commitment? We continue to inquire why we are upset and continue to face the inner darkness, until, lo and behold, we find ourselves loving the person we resented and releasing the grudges we once held. This is love. Love is not about satisfying our needs, but by grasping that everyone deserves happiness. Love does not ask God to give it everything it wants. Love understands that we are not the only ones on the planet. We spend so much time thinking of our little me, our religion, our gender, our skin color, our social status, that we become stuck in this me-paradigm, forgetting we are in a we-paradigm. As we progress in this course, we become citizens of earth rather than citizens of our countries. We remember that divisiveness is instilled in us from a young age, and awakening prompts us to let go of labels and let love remind us we are one.

Pledging allegiance

Flag-raising at schools teaches our children that our country matters, that we should pledge allegiance to our man-made borders at the expense of anyone who does not share our passport. We are training kids from a young age to attach themselves to labels that only take into consideration fellow citizens and so-called allies while alienating everyone else. As we awaken, we do not resist the divisions we have created, we understand them. We wake up from our need to separate from others and transform ourselves one by one so that we welcome the realm of love that we are here to create. This awakening does not create anarchy. Anarchy results from our false identities. Rather, we accept the world exactly as it is, with its flags, checkpoints, and borders. And we become ambassadors of love in our respective communities, knowing that love will guide us to a world beyond nations, however long that takes. We do not start movements or fight governments. We know that any change we see in the world begins in our hearts. And

our hearts do not fight others. Love is contagious. It will spread in the community. But we can only do the work of love when we are ready to transform the world. For now, we bring peace by becoming peace, without protesting what is.

Protests

Women protests have brought women into the workforce and have put in place laws which protect women from domestic violence. But the mindset remains the same. Women are still fighting for equal pay and are still subject to femicide and honor killings and crimes of passion. Anti-war protests may have encouraged governments to create peacekeeping units and ceasefires. But enemies continue to fight one another, war rages on, and people continue to hate each other and fuel new wars. Protests do not work because they do not change mindsets, they impose change that the false self resists. We do not realize that harmful systems are in place either because we support them or resist them. This is why racism is still widespread, even with all the protests against racism. Protests, paradoxically, perpetuate the very divide that protesters want to dissolve by creating more resistance on the other side and separating the world even further.

Even with all our protests, we are seeing the growth of religious extremism and nationalistic and ethnic pride across the globe. Is there something that we have missed? Even when we protest an ideology, have we cut off the harmful system in place?

It is a relief to know that we are responsible for those very systems we protest. This means that we are aware that systems which exploit others can be dissolved when we reflect on why they exist. If every person in the world were taught this, if self-reflection were just as important as learning the alphabet, we can only imagine how wondrous the world could be for all citizens of this planet. All it takes is reflection. We are invited to ask ourselves difficult questions: Is our hatred for those who we protest as strong as their hatred for those they oppress? Is hate the solution? Is love not the only way we can dissolve hatred? And why do we insist otherwise?

Impositions may work on the surface but when our minds remain polluted, men will find a way to sustain the patriarchy and governments and businesses will find a way to go to war and sell arms. It is the transformation of hearts that will work, not protests, and this comes from educating ourselves to love the other and reminding ourselves that we are the other. Schools can incorporate spiritual awakening courses from a young age. We can all enroll in fun-loving courses which remind us to engage with the other. We can learn how to embrace diversity without feeling threatened by oneness. We can address our fears openly and explore our racism and prejudices and question them, all the while transforming ourselves, one by one, and inspiring others without trying to change them.

Ripples of love

We do not try to change family members or members of the community. We remain open to the possibility of awakening so that our ripples of love penetrate the hearts of those we live with and encounter, and so that they, too, imbibe the frequency of love and pass it on to others. This is how love is shared and spread, not through resisting our resentments nor by arguing with both those close to us and those we consider different to us. We remind ourselves, each time we have a conversation with another person, that we are not here to change them, but to explore how we can love that other person in a radical manner. And we discover, as we go through the course, that radical love comes about when neither blame nor praise faze us. We do not seek love from anyone, our mission is only to give love, to ensure that every person is uplifted in our presence. When we are aware of life's transiency, it may assist us in letting go of our expectations of others and living in love. The miracle is that love returns to us, without us even trying. When we no longer put ourselves first and live as one with humanity, we experience individual and collective ascension. The world transforms through love alone. The world transforms when we get out of the way. We are not saviors of the world. We are part of a vast experience of life, an experiment of love. And we are each unique. Even though we are aligning with love, it does not mean everyone around us has to. Everyone is entitled to their perspective, even when their perspective is not aligned with love. Feeling entitled because of our perceptions and beliefs does not mean we are right. We are all here to tune into our divine moral compass. Only then can we each be guided toward love. And until then, everyone and everything will waltz to its own tune.

Not resisting even resistance

In the course of nonresistance, we learn not to resist ourselves. So long as we resist the truth about what lurks beneath our illusions of ourselves, we will live in a self-created nightmare. We do not resist, we observe our resistance, allow it, embrace it. We know that we cannot force it away. We learn that resistance serves a purpose, which is to remind us how we try to control everyone and everything. As we go through this course, we will continue to control others and control ourselves. It is not about letting go of control but about noticing how much we control. When we find ourselves behaving in an unevolved manner or slipping back into ways that are not aligned with love, we thank ourselves for noticing and realign ourselves without rehashing what transpired or condemning ourselves. Of course, if we cannot help but rehash the events or condemn ourselves, we invite patience and kindness and love to ourselves. We remember that our resistance arises from a wisdom that knows there is a better way, so we do not try to resist resistance. Rather, we embrace our resistance with the realization that it is not serving us or the world. Our resistance creates movements which polarize us and make us feel superior to others. Our resistance alienates people and makes them feel as though they were a burden in our lives. Everyone is in our life for a reason. Our lives are custom-made for our individual evolution, which, in turn, affects our collective evolution. And we are where we are. The transformation is set into motion not by projections but by unveiling our false identities to reveal what is real beneath it all.

Awe and wonder

Nonresistance can also help us become motivated and creative. When we resist showing up for the world, we willingly reject opportunities to be inspired by the arisings of the day. But when we choose not to resist, while being gentle with the resistance that is a part of us, each activity radiates with presence, however mundane. We do not consider each day yet another day in the cycle of our lives. Rather, we marvel at what the day presents us. Did we smile at another human being today? What comes forth in our meditation? Are we aware of synchronicity? Is there someone who needs our attention or time? Are we aware of our breath? What thoughts are showing up for us? Are there moments of silence, where our mind revels in stillness? Can we become aware of the gaps between thoughts? Do we notice our resistance beginning to dissolve? Even if the nonresistance is brief, even one wave of nonresistance reveals to us that there is a shift in our consciousness.

As we expand our heart consciousness, every moment becomes a portal into further expansion. When we experience the vastness of divine love, we understand that everything simply is. We are no longer fighting life, fighting ourselves, fighting others. With this comes a peace that is natural and not coerced, a peace that was always with us but appears with the light of knowledge acquired through nonresistance, through acceptance of what was, is, and will be. We face our resistance and embrace it. As a result, we become lighter.

Wisdom and the path

As Luca Picilli reminds us: "True wisdom is drinking water and enjoying it as it goes down."⁸ This is a profound prompt to live and love in each action. If even an action we take for granted, such as drinking water, can be imbued with presence and gratitude and joy, then we can live in a manner where we are in a state of awe in every action, every encounter, even every thought. The spiritual path is not only about reaching enlightenment but about being present in what we consider mundane activities. When drinking water becomes an act of spirituality, we can transcend our false selves and reach the paradigm of love: love for the glass, love for the water, love for the moment the rim of the glass grazes our lips, love for the way it trickles down our throat, love for the way water nourishes us. This love expands to appreciation and awe for even difficult moments on our path, moments which remind us to remain aligned and vast and open.

The yin, the yang and expansiveness

In this course, we learn how to hold opposites. Each of us contains light and darkness within us. Those who appear to live completely in the dark are to be pitied not condemned. They remind us that the world is still undergoing a shift, and we are not here

to resist or control what is. We no longer resist those who are dark, as we have throughout history. We come to the realization that the world is exactly the way it is and focus on our ascension. We can no longer afford to ignore our own darkness either. We become aware of all the distractions in our lives that take us away from self-inquiry and self-awareness. Very few of us have the courage to look at the monsters within ourselves. We would much rather blame the enemy outside, or the enemy on our screens and in the headlines. We do not want to face our own evil because we would rather live under the illusion that we are good, and others are evil. We delude ourselves that our labels—our religions and politics and inclinations—are good and those of others are evil.

Control

Life flows as it does. And yet we are still inexperienced in living. We control our borders, we control our spouses, sisters, brothers, friends. In some dynamics the control is more one-sided such as bosses controlling their employees and parents controlling their children. But it does not stop there because employees and children find a way to control others. The frustrated employee may go home and control their spouse or neighbors. The child may control their friends at school or grow into a teenager who tries to wrest control back from his parents. And the torch of control is passed on and on from one person to another while our thought matrices become overwhelmed. We cannot sustain our need for control because we cannot control anything. The issue with control is that we restrict the lives of others and restrict our capacity for heart expansion and acceptance. We create tension because we are not happy with the way things are. In turn, we make others around us unhappy; and those we make unhappy retaliate and reject our efforts to change them, and try to control us in return, making everyone angrier. It is a toxic cycle that feeds off the energy of all participants, those who control and those who are controlled. The paradox is that the more we try to control others, the more we lose control, because we are burdened with the heavy weight of frustration that arises with our inability to control. As we grasp the essence of nonresistance and how it benefits everyone, we surrender control and accept our differences and even begin to cherish them when we are in a more evolved state.

Reflections:

Can I hold space for opposites within me?
How can I understand that life flows as it flows?
Is there room for me to be more accepting?
Do I control others?
How can I surrender that control?
Am I trapping creativity by resisting what is?
If I look closely, do I realize that resistance divides us?
How can I expand my heart center?
Is creativity an effect of nonresistance?
Do people walk on eggshells around me?
Is my resistance a form of protest against God?
Where is the part of me that accepts everything exactly as it appears?

CHAPTER THREE: THE COURSE OF HUMILITY

Course Description: In this course we learn that we are not here to impress others. We are here for the sake of the whole. Otherwise, we would have come to Earth alone. We share the planet with billions of other people and countless creatures, flora and fauna. Each person or being we interact with has the (birth)right to be here. In this course, we shift from a me attitude to a we attitude. We learn that we are not our possessions, so showing off our possessions has no meaning. We find ways in which every person on this planet has a roof over their heads, and we create a world in which material excess is no longer essential. We learn that richness comes from the depth of love we have in our hearts, and not the depth of our wallets. Nobody feels inferior to anyone else, as a result. When we envision this, it becomes a reality. We envisioned a capitalistic world, and here we are. Imagine what arises when we envision a love-centered reality. Abundance is a blessing, however. We do not reject it as we awaken. We can continue to enjoy the fruits of this world. But we are not attached to our possessions, nor do we claim them as our own. We understand our journey on this planet is beyond form. We are quick to share our bounties when we awaken and provide many services for free. We recognize the dangers of materialism. It keeps a caste-like system in place which ensures that those of us who are powerful exploit those of us with little or less wealth. As such, we surrender our greed and enjoy what we have without flaunting it or using it to undermine our brothers and sisters.

Is something amiss?

Perhaps our humility can reveal that maybe, just maybe, we have got it all wrong. Wars? Poverty? Famine? Genocide? Invasions? Rape? Human trafficking? Drug abuse? Are we immune to our insanity? Can we see the madness of selling food, when nature distributes it to us for free? Can we see the madness of paying for resources when they are plentiful and abundant on earth? We have monopolized God's gifts and have created financial institutions that deprive others of their God-given rights. Are we oblivious to the damage we do to forests and bodies of water and all living beings including ourselves? All that is required is to look at the world with humility and admit we have created chaos. Our beliefs about the world, including our insistence that we are right, and others are wrong, have created a nightmare of a paradigm. Our exploitation of nature and fellow humans is killing our world. Do we need to have our systems reevaluated? It is not about replacing one system with another. It is about allowing love into our lives and creating a paradigm of peace and safety for all human beings. It is hard to admit that our beliefs and thoughts are responsible for much of the world's tragedies. But it is when we are humble enough to stop blaming others that miracles arise. Humility reminds us that oneness is the way forward, oneness is enlightenment, and oneness is the solution to our woes. The realization of this oneness is within each of us after which we can no longer harm our planet our ourselves.

Disparity

There are people in power with access to special favors from others, but that is only because we have created a world of disparity where the rich and famous are treated better than others. Our true way of living embraces egalitarianism. Our true way of living knows that every single person is a protagonist. In the realm of love, there are no celebrities, no people walking on red carpets dripping in expensive jewelry and clothes and shoes. There are no paparazzi, because every person on Earth is seen as a manifestation of the Divine Reality, every individual is special and unique. Every person generates awe in us because we marvel at life itself not at the physical appearance or fortune of others. Everyone is welcome. In love, there is only one Lover, one Beloved, one Friend. We are mere manifestations. Knowing that there is One transforms the way we show up in the world and for each other. When we grasp our oneness, we remain humble and know that love is guiding us. The journey involves less of who we believe ourselves to be, and more of our essence of love. In the meantime, we do not judge our current system, or the way we are, but awaken to the madness of treating some people better than others. We awaken to the madness of placing people on a pedestal because they appeared in a blockbuster movie or sang a hit song. There are millions of people who are brilliant actors and singers, but who are unknown. Does their anonymity make them any less special for the gifts they have? Is that homeless guitar player any less special than the hitmaker who has platinum albums and travels the world? Is this thirst for fame benefitting our world or creating further disparity? We know the answers, and yet we continue to create societies where people scream and faint when they see another human being, a fellow human being like themselves, but wrapped in the gilded veil of fame. But we do not resent those in power; rather, we ask ourselves why we feel the need to worship humans when only God exists, when only God is worthy of our awe.

Censorship and repression

Are we supporting industries which promote divine values or are we keeping alive systems which reward rich people and promote a hedonistic or materialistic way of living? The music industry is one example. As time elapses, our youth are becoming immune to the objectification of women and men and the worship of money and material excess. Some ultra-conservative governments think the solution is to ban concerts. However, citizens travel abroad to see the very concerts these governments are trying to censor. Censorship, like protests, backfires. Writers who are censored become more famous. Movies that are banned are streamed online. People will read and watch and do what they want to do, even when they need to hide it from society or authorities. An evolution can only be a true evolution when it is authentic. Our inclinations are illusions, but until we realize that, until we have a glimpse of awakening, we will continue to be slaves to our desires, no matter how much we suffer as a result. The only way to evolve into a harmonious way of living is to understand why we are inclined toward doing what we do. And to ask ourselves: Is what we are doing beneficial to our collective evolution? Are we hurting ourselves or others when we indulge? The more we inquire, the easier it

is to see through the false self and find the purity of who we are beneath our desires and passions. Trying to suppress our desires or the desires of others creates perversions. We have seen even religious leaders exploit children. This is because some of them are not ready for celibacy and their repression becomes distorted and abusive. Such repression harms the entire community. We should learn to face the darkness of our desires in meditation and not pretend they are not there. In time, as we awaken, the desires dissolve as we surrender them to the Divine Reality. In the end, the paradox is that we are not surrendering anything. The only One who gives us the gift of surrendering to the One is the One. To be open to this grace, we say yes to God in each moment.

Worship of the other

The self-esteem of people today is tied to how many followers we have on social media, how much money we have, and how close our body shape is to the celebrities we adore. We indulge in self-worship and the worship of others. As such, we remain stuck in the illusion of misidentification with our false selves. This creates envy and frustration. Our obsession with celebrities and influencers distracts us from getting to know who we are. Our false self will create countless diversions so that we do not discover it does not exist. It will enable us to lose ourselves in constant entertainment.

Music is wondrous. Movies are magical. They can be beautiful channels for peace and love. But people do not just enjoy music or movies; they stalk celebrities or give their bodies away to someone famous. We speak of egalitarian love but promote the idolization of our fellow brothers and sisters. Again, we do not judge. We explore. We research. We observe. We wake up from the stupor of celebrity worship and turn our attention to our inner spiritual life. Who truly exists? And why are we perpetuating this divide? Where is the division inside of ourselves that permits this insanity? And how can we use art as a platform for universality?

When we discover who we are, or at least set ourselves on the path to self-discovery, we can continue to enjoy art without giving our power away to an industry which promotes hedonism and materialism and violence and subjugation. There are many artists who use their platform to spread love and peace on earth; and, in time, as we progress on the path, we will learn to appreciate these messengers of love. But we will appreciate and be inspired by their contributions, not obsess about them. Our devotion is for the Divine Reality alone, the Only in existence. In others, we recognize the divine existence. Until we reach such heights, we must accept that this is the collective paradigm and only God-realization can resurrect us from this worship of fellow human beings.

Surrender and humility

Surrender and humility are longtime companions. When we surrender, we open ourselves to light, wisdom, guidance. Surrender comes about when we choose the Divine Reality over our false self. Surrendering to the Divine Reality is not an act to enhance our lives but an admittance that we are beginning to realize, albeit in brief bouts, that we are not who we think we are. Again, the false self can only surrender when the knowledge of the Divine Reality within us is potent. The Doer is the only Doer that exists. We are not the doer. We learn about surrender because we have been inspired by the Divine Reality to walk on the path of surrender.

Prayer is a recognition that we cannot guide our lives, that we are humble enough to acknowledge that we need assistance, we need light, we need wisdom. Prayer is a form of surrender. When we take our lives into our own hands, we make mistakes and feel ashamed. Shame is not an effect of divine love but a clear indication that we are listening to our false selves. The false self is self-destructive, selfish, and will find ways to humiliate us and derail us from the path of self-discovery. This humiliation can only turn into humility when we acknowledge we are not in charge, and we need guidance.

The False Self and God

The false self worships itself. It also worships a projection of a god which is punitive and vindictive because its inner state is punitive and vindictive. The false self cannot fathom a loving and forgiving God because it does not operate from love and forgiveness. The false self loves only those who love it, and it hates those who challenge it. When our lives are in disarray, the false self places the blame on this punitive god of its creation and tells us that we are being punished for our sins. We are not being punished. We have walked on the path of suffering, and that is why peace seems far away. The false self lies to us all the time. It is a projection of our minds, a reflection of our inclinations. It continues to mislead us, because we align to it. As a result, the illusion of its existence becomes stronger. Paradoxically, it is the false self which dissolves into the Divine Reality. On this path, it is the false self that is divinely inspired to suspect it is a fabrication, and that its ideas of God and of the world are harmful to itself and to the collective. In due course, the search for truth is initiated, and the closer the false self gets to the One, the more love seeps through and dissolves it. Before its inspired surrender, it begins to understand that God is loving and that surrendering to God is not fearful but, rather, the greatest act of love and trust. The false self will both resist and succumb when it feels the divine love. This struggle will continue until the grace of God takes over. Everything is changed as a result. The world is no longer a prison of duality, but a nondual manifestation of love. Nothing we do can accelerate or delay the divine timing of realization. This is why some mystics tell us not to obsess over the goal of self-realization but to prepare ourselves and to revel in the journey, moment by moment.

Understanding the friend and the enemy

When we are humble, we apologize to those we have hurt. We reach out when we have misbehaved without expecting to be forgiven or awaiting praise. And we do not judge ourselves for expecting forgiveness or awaiting praise. Humility means we do not expect anything from others, even when they mistreat us, even when they gossip about us. A radical example of love and humility is found in Epictetus' quote:

If anyone tells you that such a person speaks ill of you, don't make excuses about what is said of you, but answer: He does not know my other faults, else he would not have mentioned only these.⁹

Can you imagine how beautiful the world would be when we were not offended by gossip? Instead of attacking the person who spoke about us, we choose to resurrect the love within us, we choose to remain humble, and, as Epictetus reminds us, to be grateful that they only spoke about one of our defects. We can distance ourselves from gossipmongers, of course, but we keep our hearts open to loving them from a distance. We no longer confront people as we used to. We no longer send out lengthy messages expressing our anguish at their behavior, we no longer meet up to discuss how they hurt us. If we do decide to speak to them about our discomfort, it is done in peace and from a place of wanting to make amends. Otherwise, we walk away from an unhealthy connection without creating a scene or adding to one another's misery. It might be difficult to change our old ways of handling tension, but this is the wonder of the path of love. The change is subtle at first but becomes a new way of living eventually.

Our lives are custom-made for our evolution to love. Our friends reflect to us our triggers and teach us how to transcend our woes and struggles. Our so-called enemies or those we do not consider friends are also helping us evolve into love. The miracles arise when, as Phil Bolsta reminds us, "[y]ou stop seeing yourself as a victim, and view every person in conflict with you as an instrument of God."¹⁰ Our conversations with friends and so-called enemies are an opportunity to listen, not to speak or defend our views. In humility, we no longer want to be the center of attention. Instead, we devote our time to making others feel special and loved. We shine our light on others. We look at the beauty of other, and do not focus on their flaws. When we are humble, we no longer feel offended or sensitive each time someone close to us points something out to us. We appreciate criticism because it brings us closer to love. We ask ourselves: Why were we offended? Is what they said about us true? How can I choose love and ensure that I no longer emit negativity or bask in sensitivity? Is there a way to remain present in my interactions with friends? How can I become sincere in my path to becoming humble? As we ask God for guidance, we attract true friends who do not gossip about us, who do not flirt with our spouses, who do not deride or ridicule us. We attract friends who are loyal to us, who respect the sanctity of our marriages, and who uplift and inspire us. This is God's gift to us when we choose heaven on earth.

Humility and unknowing

Humility means we admit we do not know much. We may continue to adopt belief systems, but even with faith, we know that there are many mysteries that are unanswered. Humility also means that if what we believe is harmful to ourselves and others, we are willing to change our beliefs. There are many uplifting stories of supremacists and extremists who have let go of their beliefs. There are also many of us who were once bullies but grow up to become kind individuals. Humility means we do not look down on anyone in any circumstance. In the Koran we are told that the devotees of the Merciful One are those who walk the earth in humility.¹¹ Humility means we are not arrogant; we do not walk on this earth as though we were entitled or superior to others. Humility also means that we allow ourselves to befriend our doubts and bask in the unknown from time to time, even when it is frightening. How much do we really know? Are we humble enough to remain silent when our beliefs are challenged? Are we able to listen to criticism of our beliefs with an open mind and an open heart? Why are people criticizing our beliefs? Are they destructive? Are our beliefs spiritually arrogant? Do our beliefs separate us? Do our beliefs reject the concept of oneness? Do we become angry, even violent, when our belief systems are derided? Is this attachment healthy or unhealthy? Our answers to these questions can reveal how far we are along the spiritual path of humility. And our sincerity of where we are can work wonders for our spirituality.

False humility, true humility

Sincerity is essential in the course of humility. Interestingly enough, many of us are falsely humble. We pretend that praise does not move us, all in our attempts to be seen as humble. At our core we know that humility is a virtuous trait, this is why we fake being humble. Sadly, though, this falsity is hypocrisy, which further divides mankind. But rather than judge our false humility or hypocrisy, we explore why we find the need to be fake or hypocritical. We surrender our falsity and hypocrisy to God. We ask ourselves: Is there a nudge inside of us to explore true humility? Are we perpetuating the false self by pretending to be humble? What is true humility? Is it not the knowledge that we are all one, that nobody is superior or inferior to us? We may be diverse, but we belong to the same human family. We may manifest as different races, genders, orientations. We may come from different countries. We may hail from or choose belief systems that are foreign to others. But true humility encompasses all these manifestations and integrates them into the shared human experience. In false humility, we pretend that we are not affected by all these differences. False humility, however, is not sustainable. It cracks through our façade, sooner or later. Our racism, our prejudices, our antagonism toward immigrants show up in our conversations or political choices. And when it exposes itself, we realize that false humility keeps separation alive, while true humility is inclusive. True humility means that we do not pretend to know things we do not know. True humility also means we are not defensive when someone corrects our behavior.

Transcending duality

We spend so much time arguing theories and defending our belief systems that we forget the reality of what truly is. And what *is*, is this: Whatever appears. Whatever arises. In each moment. We did not come here to be above others. We did not come here to show the world how to live. We came here to love and to inspire others to love. When we fulfill this duty, we will no longer feel special. Everyone becomes us and vice versa. We live as one, even though we remain unique in form. We embrace diversity, not as a philosophy or to prove that we are humanitarian, but because we live our truth, the truth of an unconditional love. This is possible when we experience the Divine Reality that mystics have pointed to throughout history. That experience can only be grasped by a divine acceptance for what presents itself in our reality, or dream-reality, for that matter. The paradox is that when we accept duality, we can move beyond it. It means we remember that the darkness is not real even though it exists. The Divine Reality is love, and so hate dissolves. Transcending duality means our program of conditioning is reset, and we are brought into union with our true nature. Our true nature is ever inclined toward goodness, while the false self is inclined toward evil. Our true nature is peace, while the false self is restlessness. Our true nature is inclusive, while the false self is exclusive. Our true nature is peaceful, while the false self is restless. There is a spiritual war going on in our minds. When we accept that both good and evil exist, we can walk toward what is true: goodness. When we acknowledge that the false self has hijacked our individual and collective reality, we are free. The divine light is never extinguished, no matter how strong the illusion of the false self appears. One by one, we will return to the One. And this dream, or nightmare, will finally become the haven of our collective imagination.

Reflections:

Are we happy with the status quo?

Do we have anything to do with the state of the world?

Are we possessive of the possessions we hold?

How does prayer resurrect humility?

Do we become offended when people criticize us?

Can I remain present in my interactions with others?

How can others' criticism of us bring us closer to love?

Can we notice moments of false humility in our interactions?

How is false humility tied to hypocrisy?

What is true humility?

Who surrenders: the false self or the true self?

Are we trapped in duality?

CHAPTER FOUR: THE COURSE OF HONESTY

Course description: Before we can embody love, we must unveil the hate within us. Before we can embody kindness, we must get in touch with our unkindness. The beauty of this course is that when we plant the seed of good intention and honesty, our life begins to flower. We emit a fragrance that permeates our core and transmits positive energy to those we encounter. But first, we enter this course with our darkness and surrender it to the Source, the Source of Awareness, the Witness, the Observer. We do not delude ourselves that we are good people, nor do we defend ourselves when someone addresses our bad side. We know that to be vessels of love, radical honesty is essential. We are grateful that our deficiencies are pointed out, so we can face our darkness and allow the divine light within us to permeate our being, to be a flashlight in the mine of our false self.

Honesty in our relationships

We also need to explore being honest with how we treat others, reflecting on why we keep some people away and why we keep some people close. Usually, we surround ourselves with "positive" people who praise us and make us feel good about ourselves. Evidently, we are wise to avoid people who are considered negative, but if the person is benign and merely annoying, it takes radical honesty to understand why we are avoiding them. We can delve deeper and try to understand why we find them annoying. Is it because they are talkative? Are they a reflection of our own talkativeness which we deny? Do they reflect to us who we are? How can we cherish their presence? Where do we feel the discomfort? In our chest, in our stomach? Can we bring awareness to the discomfort? How can we release the tension? Are they truly annoying or are they getting on our nerves because we are lazy? Yes, sometimes, we resent our children or parents out of laziness. They need our assistance, and we label them as burdens, because we do not want to be responsible for anyone but ourselves; we are too lazy to do favors for anyone but ourselves. This course is all about being honest with all our frustrations and judgments.

Gossip

When we judge people for gossiping, we need to be honest with ourselves. Do we gossip as well? Do we like salacious news? Are we drawn to celebrity gossip? These gossip column distractions may appear benign but obsessing about couples divorcing or people fighting indicates that we do not have goodwill toward others. If such news attracts us, it means we are drawn to the separation of others. As such we pollute the collective. We can purify the collective by being honest with ourselves and by not judging ourselves as we observe the darkness within. When we read such gossip, we can ask ourselves gently: What draws me to this news? What obstacle within me prevents me from wishing the best for others? Why am I drawn to conflict? How can I realign

myself with the choice to love? Is my obsession with gossip the reason I cannot tolerate it in others? How can I remove judgment of myself and others for being drawn to gossip? And how can I shift conversations from gossip to inclusivity? From separation to unity? If we cannot stop venting to others, we can explore why we feel the need to malign or complain about another human being. We can observe ourselves as we engage in gossip. Does venting make us feel better? Who feels better? The false self or the essence of love within us? We know the answers to these questions, but it helps to engage in such inquiry, because gossip will dissolve only when we witness ourselves and question ourselves as we speak of other people. When we realize that we hurt ourselves as much as we hurt others when we gossip, we surrender our desire to gossip to others and use our speech for words of love and harmony. We choose to bring people closer to each other; we do not try to bring others down and separate them. Each time we speak well of another human being when they are not around, we are bringing the human family closer together. Uniting the human family is what we came here for. As Jesus says: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."¹²

The news and our inner darkness

When we watch countries bombing one another, we can breathe, bring awareness to our inner state and ask ourselves what draws us to violence and hatred. Why do we focus on violence and war? What about all the peace efforts in the world? How can we support those who choose love without turning our stance into yet another "us vs. them" initiative? We have become so immune to war that we think it is normal for soldiers to kill and fight each other. One way we can balance this desire for retaliation and our justification for hating the "other side" is by witnessing how we perpetuate division in our conversations about conflicts. Do we place the blame on one side alone? Do we condemn violence coming from the so-called "enemy" but find excuses for violence when those under attack retaliate? Can we go deeper and accept that violence is never a way to end a conflict? Can we look at history and see both the madness of invasions and the violence perpetrated by freedom fighters? Only peace can bring peace. And peace comes about when we realize that our system of borders and nations has failed humanity. Nature is generous. Nature does not ask for our passports or documents. Nature has no borders. The oceans welcome all. As it states in the Bible, God makes "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and [sends rain] on the just and on the unjust."¹³ God's earth provides for us all. It welcomes us all.

We are nomadic by nature. Our ancestors would trek thousands of miles to escape extreme weather or to forage for sustenance. Today, people escaping genocide die crossing the sea and those who survive are rejected entry or treated as minorities or are exploited or are subjected to harassment and racism. Are we to blame when we see ourselves as separate from one another? When we are honest with ourselves, we will no longer condemn what is transpiring "out there." We will find the illusion of separation within us and find a way to bridge divides without claiming to be good fighting evil, or locals at war with immigrants, without imposing peace on others, and without forcing people to accept foreigners. Peace and acceptance are not authoritarian. Peace and

acceptance come naturally when we are peaceful and accepting. And we become peaceful and accepting when we choose harmony and unity over victory and greed. Looking within ourselves, we can find the part of us that feeds into the notion of aggression and nationalism. We need to be honest and ask ourselves whether our national identity makes us feel superior to others. When we delve deep with radical honesty, when we explore why we are the way we are, we are led to the original inquiry: Who am I?

Who am I?

We use thought and speech to get what we want. We put ourselves first even in our actions. But have we paused to ponder how what we think or say or do will affect others? Is there a way to remember to reflect prior to speaking, to breathe before acting, to be still before reacting? Even when we fail at controlling ourselves, is there an invitation to keep walking on this path of divine love? When we fail at love, can we remember we are being turned inside out? Can we remember that God is raising our frequency, and that these growing pains of resistance are a natural part of the process? Can we ask for mercy when we are overwhelmed? We may have to face many triggers and have many interactions with people who push our buttons until we awaken from the stupor of separation, until our thoughts no longer control our lives.

We have been hijacked by our thoughts because we give them way too much importance. Our thoughts and perceptions have covered us with veils. Now that we have been gifted the honor of walking the path of love, we must go through each of the veils one by one. This requires patience and commitment. Every part of us that we hide or deny is coming to the surface to be cleared. The question is: Do we really want this to be cleared? And the next question is: Are we sure? If our answer is yes to each question, then we must be prepared for a bumpy ride if our veils are thick, if the resistance within us is strong. As such, when we choose peace, anger will pop up. And anger will keep arising until we find that we are no longer inclined to operate from a frequency of anger. When we remain committed to love, hatred, fear and resentment, all the veils to love will make their presence known. These veils were always there, and we operated from them our entire lives. But now that we are aware of them, now that we know we no longer want to live our lives covered in darkness, a shift takes place. The stillness within us guides us to the way of love. Can we hear the silent invitation to shed this false I, this selfish I?

And who is this false, selfish I? Is it beneficial to our spiritual awakening? Is it conducive to a better world? Are we affecting our families and communities and the world when we operate from this selfish I? There are many questions we can ask ourselves. And all questions will eventually lead to *Who Am I?* Who am I really? Who am I beneath this facade of selfishness, beyond all these thoughts that vie for attention, beyond all these thoughts that vie to be manifested? Who am I before my desire to praise or condemn another human being? Before my dreams and goals? Before my labels? Who am I in the realm where I am as everyone

else is? Who is this "am-ness" even prior to the I? The simple yet profound question *Who am I?* becomes a portal that shows us who we are, who we truly are beyond our thoughts. Or who we are not, for that matter. While we embark in self-inquiry, if we find ourselves filled with thoughts and theories, that is acceptable. We must start somewhere, even if somewhere is replete with ideas and conditioning.

Who am I? Am I? I?

Self-inquiry slows down our thoughts. It creates a space in our thoughts for divine love to shatter our false self and reveal the truth about our existence. In this state, we no longer condemn ourselves or others. We bask in peace, and our beingness manifests peace. One by one, we can learn what it takes for peace to become a reality on our sacred planet. This requires profound honesty. In every thought, in every encounter, we learn more about ourselves. In time, we realize this self is a false self that is attached to its labels. This false self lives to strengthen the "me." Selfishness is the playground of this self.

And so, we ask ourselves who we are: Who Am I? Then we progress and ask ourselves whether we are: Am I? And then we ask ourselves whether we are separate to others: I? Then we are taken back to who is this I? Or yet again: Who am I? We cannot get answers from the mind, the same mind which created the confusion. But we will begin to grasp that we are not who we think we are. We are not our reputation, nor are we our personality. Reputations and personalities are fixed in time, we are not. We are not our skin color, we are not our belief systems, we are not our gender, we are beyond every conceivable label.

The I AM state and The One, The Only

Asking the question *Who am I?* is also a portal to recognition of our oneness. *Who am I?* invites us to transcend our names, our personalities, our identities, our weight or height, our faith (or lack of it), our background, our traits, our quirks. *Who am I?* in its purest essence also brings us to the state of I AM. The I AM state is the space before our dislikes and likes, prior to our struggles and attachments. Some even prefer to contemplate who or what they are not: I am not this, I am not that. I am not my body. I am not my mind. Whatever way we practice is not important so much as understanding that who we think we are is not who we are. Who we are is the essence before the manifestation. In touch with this state, love is finally freed from the cage of conditioning and veils, and our selfishness makes way for selflessness. We are first invited to explore all our ideas and notions we have about ourselves and the world. Prior to entering the I AM state, all beliefs are brought to the surface to explore. Is what we believe harmful? Are our ideas about ourselves and the world raising the frequency of our experience on this planet or dividing us further? We get out of our own way so that the silence can reveal itself to us. I AM does not mean we are God. Only God is God. Because

only God exists. And we exist because of God Almighty. The I AM state merely indicates that we have surrendered our false selves to the Creator who brought us into being. The I AM state reminds us that we do not exist.

We start from where we are and realize we never left the I AM state. But throughout our journey, we give up the sense of being better than others; otherwise, we embody a spiritual identity—a savior complex—and keep our false identity alive with notions of superiority. A wise person does not claim to be wise; s/he simply is. And that state of beingness radiates to others without assertions of being more evolved or advanced. It is passing the torch of wisdom from one individual to another for the benefit of the whole. When we identify as guides, or masters, or teachers, we can get distracted with these labels and think we are better than others. We create another divide between teachers and students. Mystics share what they have learned with others. They have come from all faiths and no faiths. They all share the message of oneness that is recognized through divine love. Mystics remind us that awakening transcends belief. And they do not ask for followers. They are guided to guide us to the One. They are but vessels of divine love, emissaries of peace. They embody humility, but their followers worship them or turn them into saints, even though they came to tell us that we do not exist, that only the One exists. They know that all of us can raise the collective frequency when we are attuned to divine love; otherwise, they would have kept the knowledge to themselves. They came to remind us to be attuned the Teacher and to remind us of who we truly are. All of us are here on this planet to evolve as individuals and to resurrect the love already within our hearts, the love that sustains the unified field.

We cannot raise the frequency so long as we look out only for ourselves or those from our country, our religion, our tribe, our gender. The I AM state is inclusive of everyone and everything.

In I AM state, we shed all our identities, even though we use them to function in the world. We rest in pure Beingness, even while we play our roles on this planet. There is nothing we do to reach that state apart from connecting to the divine power. Remaining curious to why we think and behave the way we do opens the portal to the I AM state. When we have accepted the divine call to surrender who we think we are and bask in the oneness of who we are beyond our thoughts and false identities, we are on our way to embodying the I AM state.

In the I AM state, all are equal. There is no focus on form. We find truth in the formless. And the world is transformed because we have trans"formed." We have literally gone beyond the illusion of form. I AM is not the initiation of an affirmation. It is not I AM this or I AM that. We do not add anything to it. It is a state of being that is beyond I AM loving, or I AM beautiful. I AM is the awareness of our beingness, or, rather, Beingness being itself.

I AM gives us space from our biases. We all originate from the only I, and we do not exist as separate from the only I, nor are we the original I. There is only One I. We are simply manifestations and projections of this One I. In the I AM state, even when we cannot fully grasp it yet, we are free, and we are at peace with ourselves and the other, knowing we are the other. Nonduality becomes a living reality. We do not profess it or impose it. We live it with our silence and the love we emanate to others. We know we are citizens of a unified field, a field which includes all beings. We realize the importance of sharing this information to create a world in which the One reigns and in which oneness prevails. We are aware that our thoughts resist and disbelieve in oneness, but we keep reminding ourselves that we are one.

I AM is in every single person on this planet. I AM is where we find unity in diversity, oneness in the many. I AM awakens us to the oneness of God. God is one. And God alone exists. In Islam, one of the attributes of God is *Al Wahid*, which means the One. Another attribute of our Creator is *Al Ahad*, which means The Only. Only God exists and has existed and will exist. All our arguments and theories and beliefs about God have separated us. In the I AM state we do not fight about who or what God is. Because the truth brings about peace and love.

Reflections

Do we think we are good, and others are bad?

How do we treat others?

Are we obsessed with gossiping about others?

Do we revel in hearing scandalous news about fellow human beings?

Have we become immune to atrocities?

Do we blame other countries or the "enemy" for the problems of the world?

Do we think our ideas about God are correct while the ideas of others are wrong?

How does the false self operate?

Who am I beyond who I think I am?

Have we accepted the call to surrender to the Divine Reality?

What is the I AM state?

And how can the I AM state inspire me to realize who I truly am?

Are we aware of God's oneness?

CHAPTER FIVE: THE COURSE OF FORGIVENESS

Course description: We understand that to truly attain the ability to forgive, we must address the part of us which holds on to resentment and rancor and an inability to forgive. We embrace the unforgiving parts of us and allow ourselves to be open to healing and to loving the person who hurt us. We do not seek justifications for their cruelty, but we learn that it is their forgetfulness of the light within them that has engulfed them in darkness. This applies to us when we hurt others. Forgiveness includes forgiving ourselves. When we hurt a fellow human being or creature, it indicates that we are operating from a low frequency. Forgiveness means we remove our own hypocrisy and remember how we hurt and continue to hurt others. With this newfound awareness of how we are rude or distant or downright cruel to others, we can walk on the path of love and dissolve any pain we cause to ourselves and others. When we are aware of evil within us, forgiving others becomes easier. In this course, we are reminded that the work involves self-reflection. And it is important to note that forgiveness is not an overnight magic pill. It is a process. But we can pray for another person even while retaining resentment for them. Not being able to forgive is not an excuse to give up on the path, however. Again, we can keep away from the person in question to protect ourselves from the falsity and negativity of their tongue and rancor and unkindness, while also protecting the other person from our tongue and rancor and unkindness. Through prayer and meditation, forgiveness will arise from our essence. When it does, there is no room for words such as *I forgive you*, because *I forgive you* indicates separation. It also gives us a feeling that we are noble, that we have the power to forgive. Forgiveness is God's domain, God's power. We are mere vessels.

Victim mentality

Forgiveness does not mean we have to spend time in the company of the one who hurt us, especially if the person is a threat to our wellbeing; rather, forgiveness means coming to terms with the fact that what happened happened, and nothing can ever change that. What we can change is how we view what happened. Are we holding on to victim mentality? Are we using our anger to threaten and hurt others? Sometimes, a victim can become a bully. We see this even in people whose nations have been invaded or those who have been persecuted because of their religion or ethnicity. They become just as, if not even more, violent than those who subjugate them. They justify their thirst for revenge by recalling all the pain that has been inflicted upon them. Sometimes, they even turn against each other in intranational betrayal if they cannot overpower those who dominate or once dominated them. As a result, neighborhoods turn into warzones, countries are thrust into civil wars. Or they channel their pain by creating a xenophobic and suspicious society wary of anyone different to them. Any failure they experience is blamed on those who hurt them. They create havoc wherever they go, because they do not look inside themselves and find the divine love that can free them from their

desire for retaliation or hatred. Love is forgiving. And by enrolling in this course, we nourish our intention to forgive everyone and everything that has ever happened to us.

When we feel we have been victimized, we choose to heal, not retaliate. Transcending victimhood does not mean that perpetrators of crimes are absolved. Rather, we speak to professionals and let the law protect us instead of committing a crime against those who have hurt us. When we choose to remain stuck in victim mentality, we perpetuate evil. Some of the most heinous crimes have been instigated by victims. An abused child becomes a serial killer. An oppressed people support terrorism and vigilantism under the guise of fighting for freedom. A spouse commits murder when a partner cheats on them. The prison system is filled with prisoners who are imprisoned by victim mentality. Victim mentality separates families, estranges us from one another, and creates problems at work. It keeps the notion of the other alive. When we remember we are one, we realize that what presents itself in our outer world is a projection inviting us to love. When we focus on the projection, we ruin our lives and remain victims. That person stole my position at work, we tell ourselves. We find ways to sabotage the other person, either by gossiping about them, or, in extreme cases, ruining their job. That person did not steal our position. It was meant for that person, even if we were more qualified, even if nepotism got them that job. How do we know it was meant for them? Because they got the job. Plain and simple. Obviously, if they sabotaged your welfare, or slandered you, then there are systems in place that can protect you. But usually, it is our envy that creates tension at work or at home. In challenging moments, we need to breathe and remind ourselves to love. As Margaret Paul reminds us: "All forms of hardship and adversity are challenges to your soul to move beyond your current limitations and beliefs into more loving behavior."¹⁴ Are we ready to move beyond our limitations? What are our limitations? What is holding us back from forgiving others from hurting us or getting what we want? Can we celebrate what each moment presents and bask in the opportunity to be guided toward love? Can we make it a daily commitment to remain devoted to God on the path of divine love?

Self-protection

Many times, people think that forgiving entails condoning another person's behavior or deluding ourselves that everyone is good, and evil does not exist. But that is not what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is acknowledging that there is evil but choosing to let go of what was done to us, because we know that the person who harmed us is overwhelmed by darkness. We have compassion and empathy for any human being who does not know that love is the only answer. We keep a distance but pray that our hearts remain open and that we remain on the path. We grasp that our true nature is that of an innocent newborn and that we inhabit a world of opposites. Any crimes that are committed are because someone is far from the Divine Reality. And God will guide us on how to proceed and what steps to take to ensure that the community is protected from people who commit acts of evil.

Radical forgiveness

There are many examples of radical forgiveness on our planet. Daryl Davis, an African-American jazz musician, befriended members of the Klu Klux Klan; as a result of his friendship, more than 200 KKK members left the Klan.¹⁵ He did not protest or criticize the white supremacist movement. He did not attack members of the KKK with violence or harsh words. His open heart disarmed the people who were taught to hate him for his ethnicity and skin color.

During the Rwandan genocide, Immaculée Ilibagiza's family was killed, and she not only chose to forgive the murderers but also wrote a book about it titled "Left to Tell."¹⁶ Choosing forgiveness while one's family has been slaughtered is a radical act of forgiveness that would put most of our petty grievances to rest. And Immaculée's humility, where she accredits God for her forgiveness, is an awe-inspiring quality and indicative of how spirituality can help us transcend our pain, in whatever way spirituality shows up for us. These are only two of countless stories of people who chose to forgive what most humans would deem to be unforgivable. Sadly, many of us do not hear these stories on mainstream news. We are bombarded, literally, with horrifying stories of anger and aggression and retaliation. If we turned our attention to these inspiring stories and looked for stories of forgiveness, if we incorporated these stories into our education system, we could be inspired to forgive and let go of our wounds, both ancestral and current. It is difficult to forgive because we have been trained to avenge by our systems in place, although mystics have always nudged us gently toward love and peace and forgiveness and kindness.

In the Koran it states that who forgives and make things right, his reward is with God¹⁷ and Jesus tells us to love our enemies and bless those who curse us.¹⁸ Buddhists invite the world to *metta*, which translates roughly to lovingkindness. The Jains speak of *ahimsa*, which advocates for not harming living beings. In the Jewish tradition, we are prompted to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.¹⁹ The Sikh religion reminds us: "Those who serve the One Lord, do not know any other. They abandon the bitter worldly conflicts. Through love and truth, they meet the Truest of the True."²⁰ Goodness is the way of God; this is how we connect to the One. How many more scriptures and mystics and enlightened souls need to remind us that love and kindness and forgiveness are the ways to the Divine Reality? How many more people need to be murdered before we realize that the love that is already in our hearts can transform our world? In his teachings, Abdu'l-Bahá states that love is light no matter where it dwells and hate is darkness no matter where its nest is made.²¹ We can never justify our hatred against anyone, not even those whom we refer to as enemies. We have tried responding to enmity with hate. By doing so, we are permitting murder and genocide. We have blood on our hands. But when a genocide occurs, or a war breaks out, we continue to point fingers at an enemy tyrant out there, without realizing we have galvanized enmity by supporting terrorism and murder, by choosing not to move on or forgive. When will we stop cheerleading madness?

It is never a favor to forgive someone

Forgiveness does not make us better than anyone. It is merely an alignment with divine love, inspiration from God. If we feel superior or as though we were doing another person a favor when we forgive them, we need to explore our arrogance and ask ourselves whether we are innocent of evil. Have we ever hurt another person with our words or actions? Are we aware of our stubbornness, our resistance toward evolution? Our mind will come up with excuses and justifications for the pain we have inflicted on others, but our heart knows the truth. When we are in touch with our heart centers, forgiveness is not even an effort we make, but a state of beingness, a state of forgiveness, a state of living in essence. A state in which we know that beyond the darkness, there is light, beneath hate there is love, beneath fear there is peace. We do not even have to set an example for others with our actions. All we need to do is remain present in the company of others, and people will feel the love. Love can never be faked. This is why when we are only kind or diplomatic to gain praise from others or to hide our bad intentions, we are not trusted. Our pretense is transparent to others, because we are emanating negative energy regardless of all our attempts to appear good. When we smile at colleagues who we have gossiped about or hug a relative we dread seeing, we think they cannot feel it, but they do. Still, we hold space for our hypocrisy and ask: Why do we dislike that person? Why are we pretending to like them? How can we unconditionally love them? How can we surrender our hypocrisy and be aligned with our true nature? God will answer all these questions for us in silence, or through signs, and we will find ourselves transformed.

Prayer and meditation

The way to unconditionally forgive another person is through prayer and/or meditation. When we pray to forgive someone that we dislike, we are opening the portal to our heart. We surrender the part of us that clings to unforgiveness. As we progress along the journey, we pray to become forgiveness, not just to forgive or be forgiven. When we meditate, we receive answers that guide us to unveil all the obstacles within us.

When we choose forgiveness, we are not being naive. Sometimes love means avoiding a person, if we know that person causes us mental or physical harm. In situations of danger, there are professionals we can turn to that will protect us and keep us safe from them. But we forgive them in our hearts, even when we know that keeping them in our lives is detrimental. We forgive them because the heart center opens when we forgive. We pray for them, like Jesus did, when he prayed to God and asked for the forgiveness of those who wanted to harm him, saying that they do not know what they are doing.²² This is radical forgiveness and it brings us close to God, the Forgiving One. In this state, we protect ourselves by maintaining a distance from disloyal or harmful people while continuing to pray and meditate for ourselves and for them.

Reflections

Does forgiveness mean we stay in relationships and friendships that are harmful to us?

Or does it mean we stay away from them for our mental and physical protection?

What is victim mentality?

Do I indulge in victim mentality at the expense of expanding my heart?

How can victim mentality be dangerous?

Am I guilty of keeping countries in a state of war?

What are some examples of radical forgiveness?

How does radical forgiveness bring us closer to God?

Do we feel more virtuous than others when we forgive?

What is the difference between the state of forgiveness and the act of forgiving?

Have we accepted that forgiveness means we have aligned with love?

How can prayer and meditation teach us about forgiveness?

CHAPTER SIX: THE COURSE OF KINDNESS

Course description: In this course, we research our unkindness. Again, we are holding space for opposites through nonresistance. We ask ourselves whether it is necessary to be unkind to others. We explore moments where we are abrupt with others. Choosing kindness means finding the parts of us that are proud, arrogant, vindictive, and facing them. As we face our darkness, we ask ourselves whether we want to remain stuck in our false identity or live the way of divine love. As we walk on the path of kindness, we realize that kindness is not about being nice to others, but an inner transmission of goodwill where we wish the best for others. Kindness is emitted from our hearts. And it is generated in our thoughts and speech and actions. If we find unkindness in our thoughts, speech, and actions, we surrender control to the Divine Reality. We may think it is our efforts that make us kind, but that is only the conviction of our false identity, which recharges itself by taking credit for any goodness within us. God is the Doer. But knowing God is the Doer does not absolve us when we choose evil. Any act of evil we commit is from our false self. When we live away from the Divine Reality, we manifest evil.

Many would argue that there are many people of faith who commit atrocities. But true God realization goes hand in hand with kindness. Trapped in dogma, some religious scholars focus on rituals while their hearts are hardened to the other. Women are subjugated, children are pressured into religion, and so-called infidels are arrested or killed. How can this be the way of God when God's way is a love beyond what we can fathom?

Ripples of kindness

Kindness brings joy both to the kind person and the recipient. Each kind act we do inspires our community. In his book, *Through God's Eyes*, Phil Bolsta tells readers:

Though your kindnesses may fade into the mists of time, they will live on in the hearts and souls of those who were fortunate enough to be graced by your generous spirit.²³

Kindness is a quality that has been praised for generations. When we die, what legacy do we want to leave on this planet? Do we want to be remembered as cruel people or as kind people? The notion of a legacy may be prompted by our false identities, but it is a step in the right direction. When we eventually explore our intentions, we can dissolve even the dream of leaving behind an inspiring legacy and focus on how kindness uplifts the world here and now. There are many kind people in our lives and on the world stage who can inspire us. Sadly, we give too much attention to people who promote a capitalistic lifestyle. We also prize

people who have an attitude and "stick up for themselves." We admire people who are tough. There are not enough movies and songs that promote kindness. But one by one we can use our platforms to inspire others to spirituality and positivity and goodwill whether through writing, dancing, cooking, singing, or simply interacting.

The veil of anger

We notice that there are many veils to kindness, one of them being anger. Anger prompts us to express our opinions or react. But when we are attuned to love, we understand that people, including ourselves, misbehave sometimes, and we do not need to nitpick everything another person says or does. Being unkind to others may be considered normal, but it is not natural. Our bodies hurt when we are unkind and when we replay an argument over and over in our minds. We also keep the anger alive when we speak about it to anyone who will listen. We wish we could have been even more assertive. We think of ways we can continue to punish the other person. We even engage in the same behavior as the other person to teach them a lesson. Can we explore whether we feel regret at the way we handled a situation? Does the other person deserve our punishment? Why do we think so? Is the rage within us lowering our frequency? Even if we feel it were justified, can we find the part of us that can give up our anger? If not, why? Why do we think holding on to anger is beneficial to our planet? How do we feel when someone is unkind to us? Deep down, no matter how much we delude ourselves, we are drawn to kindness. Because it is our natural state. And that is why we feel regret when we react in an unkind manner. That is why we are hurt when we are the recipients of unkindness. And that is why we finally embark on the spiritual path. We know love is the way.

Awakening and authenticity

Our awakening to kindness is the recognition of our true nature of love. It is an awakening to who we are beyond the suffering we inflict on each other; beneath the pain we cause one another. It is about being authentic to ourselves when we are upset but understanding that when we act upon anger or fear or unkindness, we are choosing to inhabit a matrix of separation. We cannot awaken when we repress our emotions or deny our darkness, however. As Aruna Ladva advises us: "Use spiritual knowledge to work through your issues and not as an excuse to bypass them."²⁴ Ladva also reminds us that "[w]e have the choice to bypass issues that may feel uncomfortable, but know that what you resist will persist and will need to be addressed at a later date."²⁵ We cannot pressure ourselves to transform instantly nor can we ignore the veils covering love within us, the veils that block us from being kind in each moment, in our thoughts, speech, and action. Awakening to our kindness is about alignment to the Divine Reality but knowing that alignment occurs when we surrender. The wonder of this path of love is that even when we have negative thoughts or are surrounded by people advising us to dislike a person, we choose to love them regardless, we choose to be kind to them no matter what they have said or done. We allow the light of the Divine Reality to penetrate our thought matrix and radiate

unconditional love and kindness to everyone we think about or meet. We choose kindness, even when our false self continues to bombard our essence with judgmental thoughts and prompts us to use harsh words against another person or body language which demeans a fellow human being, such as rolling our eyes or huffing in their presence or staring at them or even not looking at them. Such acts create separation and are intimidating. What we are saying is: I do not find you worthy of kindness. What we are also saying is: My kindness for you is conditional on you living your life the way I see fit. In such moments, we have further veiled our kindness with arrogance.

A Spiritual Identity

The journey is not about gaining a spiritual identity or adopting a kind character. It is about exploring how we contribute to the collective. The world may appear chaotic, but the natural state is stillness, peace. In that stillness, we find the silent voice of kindness that accepts everyone, and everything, as is. Being unkind means we are not connected to the Source. We are not here to assess our growth either. We are invited to simply be as we go through whatever it is we are going through. When we are kind, it is not because God has favored us. It is because it was our time. It is because our intention is to surrender. If we feel spiritual or good, it is a guarantee that our false self is in charge. When Jesus was called good, he asked why they were calling him good and that "there is none good but one, that is God."²⁶ Jesus was saying that any goodness or kindness comes from God. God is the only one who is good. And if God is all that exists, then only good exists.

Inauthenticity

Evil is not our authentic state. Evil emanates from the part of us which is veiled from the Divine Reality. In some traditions, this evil is known as the devil. This evil always prompts us toward unkindness and conflict with others. When we listen to this voice, we are distant to God. When we understand that the dissolution of our false self is where the truth is found, we open to God's goodness. Instead, we pretend to the world we are kind, to project an inauthentic image, an idol that we portray to others. Even many spiritual leaders are led astray. They feed off the devotion of their students. They put pictures of themselves on walls for their followers to worship. When their humanity is revealed, through a scandal or outburst, their empires collapse, and their devotees are disillusioned. But that is because instead of leading people to God, they have led people to their false self, a self that can only cause harm to oneself and to others. We do the same in our lives. We want our spouses and friends to adore us. We take photos of ourselves and send them to our partners. How excited we are when we are tagged on social media or when someone requests to follow us. We feel important and special. We urge others to follow us on social media, so that they can see how attractive and important we are. We are constantly luring people into the web of our false selves and superficial identities only to shatter their lives

when they discover that we were projecting a false image of ourselves. The only way to be authentic and kind is to connect with the divine spark within us that has no need to be worshipped.

Alignment and the I-ness

When we align ourselves with kindness, we have chosen to surrender our I-ness for the collective. We have chosen to live in a realm where our arrogance gives way to humility and our anger gives way to peace. We do not censor ourselves when we awaken, rather, we find ourselves choosing harmony rather than being right. Even the way we speak to others can raise or lower our frequency of divine love. In the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, it states that love is broken when we speak in a defiant manner.²⁷ And in the Bahá'í teachings, humanity is also cautioned against harming others with our speech, whether we know them or they are strangers, and whether they are a friend or an enemy."²⁸ This attitude is a reflection of divine kindness and love and can help us awaken into a paradigm where everyone is a brother or sister. This notion is reflected in the Bhagavad Gita, where it states that yogis look upon everyone impartially whether they are friends or foes, pious or sinners.²⁹ When we are impartial toward everyone, we cannot help but be kind and loving toward all. It is our biases and our preferences which create enmity and inclusivity: my family, my friends, my tribe, my fellow countrymen and countrywomen, my religious peers. My, my, my. When the entire humanity is one family, we are closer to the oneness already within us.

The beginning of the path is where you are

When kindness is our way of living, there are no winners or losers, only authentic souls who choose light over darkness and who choose peace over conflict. But we are not in denial regarding our current state of showing up in the world. As Pema Chödrön emphasizes: "We can't just hear a piece of inspiring advice and immediately go from wanting to slug the person to being able to turn the other cheek. We have to work with where we are and allow a gradual transformation to happen."³⁰ This point is similarly reiterated in *Physicians of the Heart: A Sufi View of the Ninety-Names of Allah*:

We should not lose track of the beginning stages. At first it is necessary for the student to blame others. It is necessary for them to see the problem as outside of themselves. That's how the unconscious operates. It sees what is within it as being outside. They will be blaming the father, the mother, and the society. They will be blaming the counselor, blaming their teacher, and just generally blaming.

Then they go on to blame themselves for not being worthy, because how could they have been treated so miserably unless they were somehow deficient? After going through all this, they can go into the deeper stage in which they begin to face their deficiencies calmly and with confidence.³¹

This calm, this confidence, changes our demeanor and the way we show up to one another. We are no longer on the defense. Rather, we are kind because we no longer blame anyone. We do not fight with the world or with others. We embody peace and emanate it to all who cross our path, not because we are spiritual, but because we are in touch with the part of us of which everyone has access to. This is where we find freedom. This is where we become kind and radiate kindness.

Reflections

Is being kind the same as being nice?

What are some veils to kindness?

What is an awakening to kindness?

Is authenticity necessary on our path?

How do we engage in spiritual bypassing?

What does it mean to surrender our I-ness?

How can the way we speak to others raise or lower our frequency?

Do we treat both friends and enemies with kindness?

Are we in denial of where we are in terms of our enlightenment?

Why is each stage of our awakening important?

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE COURSE OF PEACE

Course description: In this course, we will learn that wars are kept alive because we fuel the fire of hate among people by taking sides. When we choose to root for all of humanity, miracles arise. In this course, we also begin to explore our triggers with the people in our lives: our spouses, our colleagues, our friends. Are we choosing peace or conflict? When we slip into conflict with others, we reflect on our feelings and emotions: our sense of betrayal, our shame, our frustration. We do not hide from who we identify ourselves with. We do not run away from our conditioning. We simply watch, curiously, patiently. And when we want to drop out of the course of peace, we do not berate ourselves or try to steer our way back to peace. We understand that peace is never imposed, and the road to peace is not linear. Taking it easy on ourselves, being gentle with our struggles, is the way to peace. And the beauty is that when we remain committed to peace, it will arise, regardless of how many times we fail to keep it.

Inner and outer peace

To live in peace, we must extend the peace within us to everyone. We must choose to see the light in everyone, regardless of how they show up in the world. Gerald Jampolsky reminds us that "in achieving inner peace, we must perceive a world where everyone is innocent."³² Can you imagine such a world? It would be a world free of condemnation and grudges, a world we all dream of inhabiting. Instead, we rush to war and retaliation. We seek revenge although there are already laws in place which protect us from evildoing. Why do we want to take the law into our own hands and make it harder on ourselves and others? It is the false self that lies to us, that tells us that fighting is noble and justified. So long as we fight others, we will never be free.

Can we choose to rest in the vastness of life and understand that nothing can change the past? Can we let go of our desire to keep the hatred of our ancestors alive and seek healing for ourselves and the planet?

Peace and vulnerability

Peace in a relationship means being vulnerable. It means surrendering shame when an embarrassing part of us is exposed to our spouse or our friend or a family member. It means holding space for ourselves and for others when we say or do something we regret. Peace comes from radical acceptance of who we believe ourselves to be. Peace invites us to remain open to the possibility of sacrificing our false self in the service of love. We may repeat vicious cycles in our lives and interactions, but that intention, that seed we allow to be planted, makes way for grace. Peace has been patient for eons. We recognize it in moments where we do not

fear death, when a dog looks at us with eyes of love, when a child trusts us, when an ailing patient wants us in the room with them, when we are called to mediate between people, and always, always, when we acknowledge the presence of God. Peace is ever present. But when our focus is war, conflict, violence, and anger, peace remains buried; albeit as a light that can never be hidden.

There is no goal to peace

The course of peace is not about being a good spouse; nor is it a how-to-guide on being a good friend, or a good person, for that matter. The truth is we are not doing anything to achieve something. All we are doing is being open to love. With love comes peace. We accept both difficult and joyous moments. We do not try to obtain peace as a goal or a reward for the afterlife. Nor do we feel frustrated when we fail at peace, because there is no failure on the path of peace. There is only an openness that encompasses both what we perceive as successes or failures. We are where we are, even while we are broken and angry and upset. Peace entails even being serene with the parts of us we dislike and knowing that whatever arises in our inner field is part of our process of being, even when it feels like anything but love or peace or joy.

Making room for peace

When we observe ourselves in an argument with another person, when we feel disdain for another person, we make room for peace. We do not let the false self control us with stories of separation or conditioning. We find peace even in difficulty. Peace is found when we no longer seek being right or justifying our behavior to cover our shame. Peace is the realization that we are already peaceful. Whatever effort we make on this path, even if our effort itself is debatable—(grace anyone?)—is a sign that peace is going to make an appearance in our lives. After all, why would we seek peace if peace were not seeking us? We will notice synchronicity in our lives. The right books, the right people, the right messages. All will point us toward the peace that is within us. The journey is about looking inside. Everything we yearn for: God, love, peace, truth, is a self-discovery away. As we continue to observe our thoughts and the sensations within us, we are no longer who we think we were and closer to who we truly are. We are no longer deluded by the distractions but lured by our essence.

War and peace

When two countries are at war, by taking one side, we exacerbate the violence and hatred for the so-called other side. War needs to be observed objectively. We cannot support perpetrators of evil just because they share our faith or nationality. We claim to hate what the persecutors are doing, but is not our desire for retaliation woven from the same thread of evil we are trying to eradicate? Dictators are toppled, but their ideology remains. Is it not the case that the supporters of the so-called losers in a war go

underground only to reappear with a vengeance? They ensure their ideology is kept alive and sometimes even revamp their name by adding the prefix 'neo-' to it. Force can never put an end to evil. Only love can save humanity. Even when we fight what we delude ourselves into believing is a good war, we are committing murder. We attack cities. We kill children. We bomb hospitals. We test new weapons on the so-called enemy or on people we consider disposable. We sketch new borders to satiate our expansionist agendas and create a war to justify these new borders. And we label those who suffer the atrocities of war as collateral damage. We call this insanity the inevitability of war. The cycle goes on and on, and millions of people die for a war that could have been avoided if only we had surrendered our greed. What is most distressing is that there are countless people who support dictators, and who glorify soldiers, and this is also why we continue to see war and chaos on our planet.

We have failed to understand that not only does history repeat itself, but hate, often disguised as a noble imperative, is the cause of most of our issues, the reason we are stuck in negative frequencies. And war, among the vilest manifestations of hate, is a direct projection of these negative frequencies. Many claim to be on the good side fighting evil. But good can only do good. It never uses murder as a weapon. It never fights battles. One of the biggest lies in the world is the notion of a good war. Even anti-war activists are perpetuating war. A heart filled with rancor and judgment can never save those in need. This is why the world has not stopped fighting and why we cannot outgrow war. We need to outgrow our desire for revenge and hatred first. We need more peacemakers and less peace activists on our planet. We need more lovers on this planet who shine their light on everyone, even, if not especially, on the so-called enemies.

The futility of war

So much has been inflicted by both sides in a war and by many sides on our beloved planet, our shared home. We are not here to cheerlead state-sanctioned homicide, but to ensure that nobody else is ever killed by another human being. Ever again. War is never justified. We destroy the very land that sustains us. We place ourselves and our loved ones in danger. We raise traumatized children who fear the other. Many people have finally awakened to the insanity of war, but not enough of us. We remind ourselves and others that we did not come to Earth to glorify murder. We came here to bring peace to our hearts and the hearts of every single person on this planet. To inhabit the realm of love, where war is obsolete, we need to address the war within ourselves that we fight against ourselves and others. We need to attune ourselves to the imaginary arguments we have with others in our heads. If self-observation of the war within us becomes part of our education system, we can free ourselves from the need of an outer war, from the need to eradicate evil "outside" of us, from the delusion of thinking that war is a solution. But we are not judging war; we are only becoming aware of the futility of war; we are becoming aware of the potential for peace.

Raising the frequency

We no longer give our attention to war; instead, we consider focusing on peace and love and joy. We balance bad news with good news, negative thoughts with positive thoughts. This balance brings us closer to realizing that beyond negativity and positivity, we are embodiments of love. We are here to break the cycle of contempt and to focus on raising young souls who are not tied to collective identities that polarize. As we shift in consciousness, news channels will be portents of good news, not images of violence and bloodshed. We will see changes only when we collectively agree that the shift arises from within each of us individually. We share our divine gifts to raise the frequency of our collective consciousness and to encourage ourselves and others to live in love, without trying to convert or pressure anyone. Every gesture is made with the intention of love and not self-aggrandizement or self-promotion. We leave legacies behind which plant the seeds of love and peace and joy for every creature on this planet. We are under no illusion that we are changing the world, but that the world must change, and we agree to be a part of that change. Nobody is forced into this. Nobody is better than anyone else. Even tyrants and dictators are fulfilling a role. The collective is overwhelmed with darkness. And in this course, we learn that bringing in the light that is ever here entails saying yes to love. And saying yes to love means taking responsibility for where we continue to say no to love, be it with our families, friends, partners, spouses, colleagues, employers, employees, or strangers.

The dictator within

Dictators are not "out there." We each have a dictator in our heads, some more benign than others, but still dictators. This dictator tells us who to love, who to hate, what to watch, what to do, what to feel. Is it no wonder that these dictators are manifested in the "outer" world as tyrannical controllers who stop at nothing to subjugate us? Dictators are here to remind us that our individual and collective projection is not aligned with love, and only when we realize this will we be able to stand together and co-create a world in which peace is no longer a utopian pipedream but a reality.

When our collective focus becomes on peace, we will experience bliss on our planet. Too many of us are prejudiced, unkind, and nationalistic, just like the dictators we either support or condemn. When we cannot be at peace with ourselves, we are contributing to the collective madness of the human experience. It is time to surrender the dictator. The time begins now.

Reflections

How are inner and outer peace connected?

Can we surrender the hatred of our ancestors?

Why do we hold onto our grudges?

How do vulnerability and peace coexist?

Is there a goal to peace?

How can we unveil the peace within ourselves?

Can observing or witnessing our inner state help us awaken?

What are the obstacles that veil our essence?

Do we exacerbate violence when we take sides in a war?

Is war ever justified?

Can we shift our focus to peace instead of war?

What is the role of dictators on our planet?

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE COURSE OF ONENESS

Course of description: In this course, we explore our oneness. We are all on a journey on Earth, even though our experiences and characters and appearances seem different. In oneness, we know that goodwill for others raises the frequency. We see ourselves in the other. We see others in ourselves. We connect to the divine spark within us that is connected to All That Is. When we find ourselves struggling to experience oneness, when we are hypnotized by separation, we realign, we recalibrate. We do not drown in feelings of guilt or expectations. We do not label ourselves unspiritual. Nor do we label ourselves spiritual when we have glimpses of oneness. We accept ourselves as we think we are, knowing that beyond our negative feelings toward ourselves and others, we are one. We know that love arises when we go beyond our duality. Oneness is our nature. And every time we choose oneness, we reconnect with our essence and live in love. In oneness, we see people as one human family. We do not stereotype people based on their religion or nationality. We remain open, curious, present in all our interactions and are grateful for every experience with someone who is considered "different" to us. Life becomes a stage for love, and we revel in our roles as lovers, in service of the One who guides our every gesture and action, and to whom we surrender all our struggles and obstacles. Oneness brings about the embodiment of the noble qualities of love and kindness and forgiveness and peace that are in all of us. It is the only reality in this world of illusions and the way to it is found within us. It is a synonym for love.

Loving everyone as they are

Oneness is meeting others beyond labels. Oneness is choosing to love even when we have negative thoughts toward others. We see black and white, male and female, believer and unbeliever, conservative and liberal, gay and straight, but we are not fazed. We understand that all labels are manifestations. We cherish the people we live with and work with without attacking or forcing people to think as we do. Oneness is loving everyone as they are. We do not polarize or separate, and if and when we do, we reconnect to the Divine Reality to remember the divine spark that shines brilliantly in each living being.

Borders and polarization

In oneness, we realize land and water and the sky were meant to be shared by all living beings. When we realize that, we will see the futility of borders and territorial disputes. Our hearts yearn for liberation for the oppressed, and for those who are invaded by other countries, but when we recall that we created borders and separation, we understand that the madness of invasions and genocide and border expansion is a result of our broken system of polarization. We care more about our human family than our sense of national pride. We know that the way to dissolve injustice is to create new systems in which all living beings have access

to the fruits of nature. This is what nature has been trying to teach us with her generosity. Nature gives without expecting. Her bounties are inclusive of all. In the Tao Te Ching, it states:

The reason why heaven and earth are able to endure and continue thus long is because they do not live of, or for, themselves. This is how they are able to continue and endure. Therefore the sage puts his own person last, and yet it is found in the foremost place; he treats his person as if it were foreign to him.³³

Being a sage means we are foreigners to ourselves. We do not live for ourselves. This is the secret of endurance. This is the secret of oneness. We get out of the way and make way for everyone, selflessly.

Nationalism

Nationalism is a sickness of the mind derived from our obsession with exclusivity. Nationalism ensures that we put citizens of our respective countries prior to citizens of other countries and the world as a whole. Nationalism is bizarre when we consider that many nations today consist of people from other lands. Indigenous peoples were wiped out to make way for these peoples. And in order not to be conquered by people from other nations, they protect their nation with military might and spy satellites and extreme laws, all to keep the so-called other at bay.

Nationalism creates xenophobia, closed borders, and systems that are antithetical to nature and to our nature. Our refusal to grasp the selfishness of nationalism has enabled power struggle and disparity to thrive on our blessed planet. If we insist on inhabiting a planet of nations, we can explore unity and love and positive feelings between nations by ensuring that our education systems are replete with messages of love for every country on the planet. Perhaps hundreds of years from now, if our planet is still here, human beings will align with the generosity of nature and borders will dissolve. Until then, it is our duty as ambassadors of oneness to spread goodwill to members of our community and members of all communities on Earth regardless of nationality. It is our duty to ensure that all human beings are safe on our planet and to recall that we are here to care for everyone. The power of love is the only force we have not tried. And so long as we stubbornly refuse the message of love, we will continue to fight and keep in place systems that derail our path of love, that enable us to forget our oneness.

Attachment to labels

When we obsess over our countries or religions, we suffer and cause suffering to everyone. It is heart-breaking that our perceptions and labels create so much division in this world, but there is a place beyond our perceptions, beyond our labels: it is the realm of

pure awareness, pure consciousness, where we are one. It is about realizing we are not special. And if we are, then all of us are. There is nothing extra special about where we hail from or what we believe in. Still, we can continue to love our countries and remain devoted to our religions, but we must remember that when it is at the expense of other countries or followers of other religions, we promote separation and prejudices and fear of the other.

What happens when we no longer have a country or when our belief system changes? Will we resent the country we have emigrated to? Or will we speak out against our country of birth? And who are we in the new religion we have converted to? Do we mock followers of our previous religion and insist that we have found the truth? How long will our newfound truth last? Will we be sated, or will we explore other truths, or even other sects within the newfound belief system? How many sects and sub-sects will we continue to explore to further confuse ourselves or antagonize others? When will we realize that many of our beliefs were given to us at birth? How many more meetings and prayer sessions will we attend while harboring contempt for those who do not adhere to what we do? Prayer is supposed to bring love into our hearts, not hate, nor spiritual arrogance. If the God we worship is a God of hate, then we will continue to see war and divisiveness on our planet. Who are we worshipping when we alienate one another? God or our false self? A way to assess whether we are on the spiritual path of love is provided to us by Zach Beach:

If you are wondering which religion to believe in, make your religion kindness. If you are wondering what spiritual path to take, take the path of love.

If you are wondering if you are on the right path, simply ask yourself, "am I moving towards love or fear?" If you're looking for who to learn from, ask yourself if they are promoting love. Are they accepting of all peoples, in all places, of all races, genders, sexualities, backgrounds, and histories? If not, keep looking.³⁴

Many of us do not have the courage to keep looking. We stick to beliefs we feel comfortable with even when they cause us and others misery. We blame God for our prejudices and fear of the other. We tell ourselves that we are doing God a favor by hating His creation because He told us to be wary of the other, to suppress the other, and even kill the other. But when we realize we are the other, or the other is, at the very least, someone close to us, we may outgrow outdated systems which polarize us against one another. And then we will keep looking until we are on the path of love, which includes us all regardless. What matters, whether we remain on the same path we were brought up in or a new path altogether, is that we have expanded in love, in our experience of God, and our sense of oneness with all that is.

Our labels are killing each other. Oneness is a path which unites and accepts all of us. There is nothing to believe when it comes to oneness; it is all about our connection with Source. Oneness can coexist with any religion we choose to follow and can coexist with

all other religions. We do not have to give up our religion to acknowledge that we are one. We only need to be fearless in our interpretation of scripture and ensure that our beliefs are not harming anyone, including ourselves. And we must give up our obsession with labels.

"Meating" in the middle

Even a label such as vegan polarizes nonvegans. In the realm of oneness, there are no vegans. And we do not look down on others who do not share our diets. Each culture has its own set of dietary laws. In many cases, dietary laws are sacred. Some laws prohibit pork, others prohibit all types of meat and fish. Some allow fish and not crustaceans. There are laws that prohibit alcohol. And there are also certain preparations that are required with meals such as *halal* meat for Muslims and *kosher* meals for Jews. Oneness encompasses all these diverse diets. We use our individual discernment when it comes to our personal diets rather than poke fun at or look down on the diets of others. Everyone will reach a more compassionate plant-based diet when we have evolved, and we will not even label it veganism. Until then, we accept that even when human beings do not eat the same foods, and even while certain eating habits may not be aligned with love, we are all manifestations of the One. What others eat or do not eat is not our concern. Besides, what works for one body may not work for another. As such, we “meat in the middle” whether we are vegan, vegetarian, pescetarian, or carnivores. These labels will dissolve in time as we embody the realm of love, and what resonates with the heart will come into being without impositions.

Coexistence

In movies, there are protagonists and supporting actors and extras. In our lives, all of us are protagonists, and the supporting roles and extras in our lives are protagonists in their respective lives. If everyone is a protagonist, then each of us is equally important. How can we think we are superior to another person if each of us is a central actor? Even people who are in a coma or who have no awareness are protagonists. They have supporting actors in the form of concerned loved ones and doctors and nurses, who themselves are protagonists. When we know that everyone deserves to be here, that everyone is a star, then we can coexist. Some people today find that coexistence may not be the right word, because it implies that we must make an effort to live with one another. But since we are inviting the false self to dissolve, we have to start from somewhere. We have journeyed far from our default state of oneness, and to return to this state entails starting from where we are now. First, we guide ourselves back to coexistence. In time, we will no longer need to coexist, because existence will become our way of life. There will be no more prompts to live in harmony with one another because we will live as our true selves. Our true selves are beacons of divine light and love—who we were, are, and will be beyond perceptions, judgments, and the stupor of separation.

Competition

We do not only fight over countries. We also fight and compete in the name of sports. Tournaments may be entertaining, but they are divisive. Fans of opposing teams deride one another or hurl offensive and racist comments from the stands. In extreme cases, fans have killed or injured each other. We also feel superior to one another when it comes to our choices in music, art, film, literature, and even what we wear. From a young age, classrooms are divided into smart kids and unintelligent kids, as though our exam grades were an indication of our intelligence. Parents are under immense pressure to train their kids to fit into a capitalistic system which goes against our true nature of sharing and living in synch with our environments. Today, there is added pressure on our youth to look a certain way, dress a certain way, and conform to a world that is becoming more and more superficial and obsessed with beauty. The good news is that many people across the planet are awakening to this collective madness and breaking free from the constraints of our current models of society and envisioning a harmonious world in which everyone is appreciated. We are recalling that competition hurts our communities. We are remembering our oneness.

Inclusivity

One way to live in a state of oneness is to ensure everyone is included in our community regardless of faith, gender, orientation, nationality, ethnicity, physical or mental ability, tribe, skin color, financial or social status. We ensure that we do not look up at some people or down on others. Each person is entitled to our love. Inclusivity reminds us that we are one family under God. When our ideas about God are divisive, we have not found God but obstacles to understanding God and one another. Love is not conditional on a person's beliefs regarding the Divine Reality. Love is inclusive of atheists, agnostics, mystics, heretics. Love does not require that we convert others to our way, but that we let go of our prejudices. In the wise words of J.P. Vaswani:

Let me accept that all of us are different and let me respect the difference. For all our differences, for all our diversity in language, culture and religion, we share but one world.³⁵

Oneness does not mean we are the same. It means that regardless of our all differences, we all come from the One and return to the One. Oneness means we recognize the divine spark in us all. And we realize that God loves us all. God has given all of us an opportunity to live on this sacred planet. When we say God is loving and merciful, it means that God is loving and merciful. Period. We do not say God is loving only to those who follow a certain path. Or God is merciful only to those who worship Him. God's love is unconditional because God is the highest frequency of love we can imagine. And to be divine means to live in that high frequency

of love. Are we not tired of fighting over God and fighting each other over our beliefs? Perhaps it is time to gather the diamonds in the mine of all our faiths and evolve beyond the coal.

Our stories and separation

We no longer insult ourselves with stories that divide us. We garner the best from all traditions and discard what causes pain to humanity. To do so, we are invited to let go of our fear and to trust that God is loving. We are invited to remember that it is the false self that embarks on the spiritual journey and not our essence. It is the false self that embarks on a path to surrender. The false self will continue to make us suffer until it has enough of pretending it is in charge, until it lets go of its conditioning and prejudices, until it accepts it does not exist and bows to the Only in existence. The true self is already a part of God. The light of the true self can transform the darkness of our minds and resurrect our hearts. In turn, we grasp our oneness and find the peace we have been seeking for eons. We cannot afford to wait until everyone is ready to live in love and oneness and harmony. It begins with each of us now, one by one. Or oneness by oneness.

Reflections

What can loving everyone as they are do for us and for our planet?

Is our path inclusive of everyone or divisive?

How do borders polarize us?

Why is nationalism dangerous?

What labels are we attached to?

Are we judgmental of the diets of others?

Do we want everyone to follow our way?

What does it mean to coexist?

How can we dissolve competition?

Does oneness mean we are all the same?

What is inclusivity?

How do our stories separate us?

Are we ready to embark on the path of oneness?

CHAPTER NINE: THE COURSE OF LOVE

Course description: In this course, we learn that love is not a fuzzy feeling but a state of being. We align ourselves to love without trying to change our thoughts or trying to eradicate the false self. When we are overwhelmed by our thoughts, we can say to ourselves: *Oh, here is a selfish thought. Or: Interesting, here is a fearful thought. Or even: Ah, here is the false self.* By immediately remembering God, we are taken to another realm. In the Koran it states that our hearts are at ease when we remember God.³⁶ This God-consciousness can shift our attention to lovingness, our true nature. Love is the only force that can transform our inner and outer world, but to awaken that love, we awaken to all that is not love within us. And it is for this reason that the awakening process can be challenging for those of us steeped in conditioning and hypnotized by the world. But this course, which encompasses all the courses in the school of love, is the most essential rung on the ladder of love.

Love on the path

Love is the truth, a truth which welcomes everyone, a truth which resonates from our spiritual hearts. It may sound bizarre, but most of us are offended by love. Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us: "Love—righteousness—these are everywhere censured, while despised are harmony, and devotion to the truth."³⁷ We would much rather divide ourselves, create tension and friction. We would much rather punish those who hurt us. But our lack of love harms us, first and foremost. It closes our hearts. Mystics invite us to radical love even while their lives are riddled with injustice. Even when entire communities were against them, they chose and choose love. And we can learn from mystics that love is the only way.

Love is egalitarian, unconditional and allows us to root for everyone. When we are attentive, we can become aware of how the false self goes out of its way to stifle love, a love that can never be stifled. The love of the false self is conditional. It can love with a passion, but when it does not receive love in return, it becomes petty, and even aggressive and violent in extreme cases. This is why many couples are bitter after a break-up. Some people will do everything they can to make their ex-partner's life miserable because they dared to stop loving them. Love never stops loving, though. It is the false self that ceases to share its "love."

When we live in love, however, we do not fuel our negativity, nor do we exacerbate tension with others by defending a false identity or offending others. We simply welcome what arises while remaining aware. When we live in love, we continue to love those who leave us or harm us, even when they are no longer in our lives. We love even those who cling to their false selves, because we have recognized their true selves buried beneath layers and layers of veils. On the path, if we love conditionally, we are aware that we are still in the grasp of the false self.

Love and surrender

Love reminds us that we do not come first. We are here to unconditionally love the entire humanity. As Evelyn Underhill wisely points out:

To "look with the eyes of love" seems a vague and sentimental recommendation... The attitude which it involves is an attitude of complete humility and of receptiveness; without criticism, without clever analysis of the thing seen. When you look thus, you surrender your I-hood... The fundamental unity that is in you reaches out to the unity that is in them.³⁸

This unity is in every being in existence. When we are not aware of this, we hold onto our I-ness. Surrendering our I-ness is not a sacrifice. It is our way of expressing our unity with others. This unity is what will bring harmony to our planet. By surrendering our I-ness, we are no longer attached to identities. There is no "me vs. you" or "us vs. them." There is one being reaching out to itself in divine love.

Love is service

We think of service as volunteering at a soup kitchen or being of assistance at a refugee center. Or we think that service means helping people out financially. Yes, these are all noble acts of service. But service is much more. It can mean rushing to help a friend or family member in need. It can mean giving our thirsty pet a bowl of water. Service can mean smiling at or hugging someone. Service is cooking for our children, giving a ride to someone, treating someone. Service is giving time to the people and animals in our lives. Service is a manifestation of love. It does not matter how we go about it. In Sikhism, it is referred to as *sewa*, which translates roughly to service that is selfless.

Service also warrants our self-exploration. Why are we doing service? Is it to be rewarded by God? Is it because we believe in karma or the afterlife and want to ensure the next life is filled with benefits for us? Are we doing it to relish in the titles of philanthropist or humanitarian? Are we serving to be served? In time, service becomes an act of love with no expectations for a divine reward, although the divine reward will come in one form or another, because love brings rewards and miracles into our lives.

Each of us has a way of waltzing with the world. All that matters is that we show up, that we find a way to serve. We live in a world where we are told to look out for ourselves and our families and our loved ones. But service, like love, is expansive. It shines on everyone. We do not only serve the people in our lives. Giving up our seat for an elderly person or pregnant woman or a disabled

person is service. Calling someone we have not spoken to in a while is service. There are many ways to serve others. We even serve ourselves when we nourish ourselves and take care of our bodies and minds. Service is neither an obligation nor a practice but a way of life; it is a way to love whom God loves. And God loves everyone. But do we love God? Do we truly want to know God? In his book, *The Enoch Factor*, Steve Mcswain tells us how essential it is to know God:

[W]e are here for one purpose: to know God and walk in the joy of his Presence. When we know this, then it doesn't matter what we do. Our feeling of significance isn't found through service, however noble, but in God-realization. This is not to diminish the importance of our service in the world, but to heighten the importance of our relationship to Source.³⁹

So, while we realize the importance of service, we know that knowing God is our highest goal. It is not our mind that can know God; it is a sacred space within us that can, a space free of concepts and definitions and myths, a space where divine grace blesses us and provides us with knowledge of our divine imprint and heavenly heritage. Knowledge of God is a gift of grace, and we will be guided when we walk on the path, even if we walk in the valleys of doubt each time we expand further.

Our Concepts of God

Some religions lure us with temptations after death: a life of abundance and sensuality beyond our wildest fantasies. We commit acts of murder against so-called infidels and deride and ridicule those of other faiths yet rest assured that we are on the right path because we read our scriptures and fast and pray and chant and meditate. That is what God wants, we tell ourselves. When we are selfless, however, we keep away from myths that portray the Divine Intelligence as unloving or rash. We keep away from myths that promote selfishness and greed and ostracization of the so-called other in the name of a deity. We release stories that encourage us to kill those who do not believe in what we believe. We get close to God because we accept the call to inhabit a realm of love, the highest form of love. We can do this when we choose God, when we choose love, when our theories of God dissolve.

We also tell ourselves that if we do not believe in or worship God, then we will burn for eternity. Many of us try our best to believe and are told God is distant from us because we are not worthy of belief or because we have sinned. We have turned God into a dictator, the very dictator we would overthrow on Earth. The only reason we are worshipping Him is because we want to secure our afterlife. In this life, we want God to save our children, to give us riches, to ensure we get the job we prayed for, to destroy our so-called enemies. We do not want to love God. We want to manipulate Him. If we think God is omniscient, can we hide our manipulative intentions from Him?

Perhaps we are called to meditate as to what God is, who God is, *if* God is. God invites us to love, to a higher way. And we cannot grasp God with our mind. This is why we suffer when we try hard to believe. Our definitions of God are in the way of loving Him and knowing Him. How can we love something we fear or cannot experience or grasp? Who is God? Is it a being ordering us to behave in a certain way? Or is God the intelligence that moves and shakes existence? Does God have favorites or does God embrace the villain and the victim, the galaxies and the oceans, flora and fauna, you and me? Is it logical to call God compassionate but with conditions? Can God be the Highest Form(lessness) of compassion, mercy, and love if He is exclusive?

How we perceive God is indicative of how we walk on the path of love. Our perception is a mirror into ourselves. Did we ever ask ourselves where our perceptions of God arose from? Did it come from our upbringing, from the books we were conditioned to believe in, or did it come from our own seeking? And how are we convinced that we are right while billions of others are wrong? Is this spiritual arrogance creating war? Have we lost family and friends because of unnecessary debates about God and religion at the dinner table? Have we ostracized gay relatives and friends because we think God obliges us to hate them? Are our belief systems igniting anger or promoting love? Are we happy with believing we are superior to others? Are we okay with a God that will put us in heaven and others in hell? Are we okay with a God who created hell? Would a mother burn her child in eternity for not obeying her? Is a God who created everyone and everything exclusive? Or do we envision an Intelligence who accepts everything and everyone as is?

To love God means to redefine God. If God exists in the way most of us perceive of God, then we need to reassess how Divine Intelligence works. God can only be above creation. To create everyone and everything, He must be above our pettiness and vindictiveness. God must be good. Not good if we behave or good if we believe in a certain way. But pure goodness, pure lovingness. This is the God we can look up to. And when we perceive this God, we cannot help but be good because we want to serve Him, because we love Him, and because our hearts are filled with divine love, and not because we want something from Him. And we do not reject this God, because we know He is the truth beneath the myriad illusions of the false self and its concept of Him. Fear is the domain of chaos and breeds hypocrisy. We become hypocrites because God becomes a talisman, something we keep in our lives for selfish purposes. Loving God is a whole other paradigm. Love unites us with Source. And love helps us to see the world through the eyes of divine unconditional love and acceptance.

Experiencing the Divine Reality

We need more reverence of God, more awe of the Divine Intelligence, not terror. We need less theories about God and more experience of the Divine Reality. We also need to be gentle on ourselves when we lose the connection to the divine or do not have it. We need to place less importance on faith and more on a connection with the Source of love. The Source of love is within us. We

do not have to believe in a deity to experience love. But true love will bring us to our true nature, and our true nature is ever connected to the divine. How do we know this? All the mystics who invite us to universal love have experienced God. They invite us to love everyone including those who commit acts of evil. If they all speak the same language and practice what they preach, can we not trust these mystics? Anyone who preaches divisiveness cannot purport to come from the One. Anyone who condemns those who disbelieve has not learned what love truly is.

Faith is both wavering and unwavering, constant and sporadic. We somehow delude ourselves that if we believe hard enough, we will have faith in God. But those of us on the spiritual path know this is not true. There are times when we feel distant and abandoned. St. John of the Cross referred to this as the dark night of the soul, where the devotee feels he no longer has the yearning to think of God and feels abandoned by Him.⁴⁰ Sometimes doubts and disbelief arise as well, where we are emptied of everything we believed in. Some of us never return to belief. Others of us hold fast during our spiritual crisis, hoping that faith will return. Other times, our beliefs remain intact, but they are permeated with a new vision, a vision of love and a feeling of unity with everyone and everything. Our spiritual eyes have opened, and we understand what it means to be devotees of God. But what is most wondrous is that our definitions of God will have changed. God becomes more mysterious than ever before. Paradoxically, the less we believe, the more we have faith: a faith in the unknown, in a source beyond words, in a presence we feel and do not feel. We no longer fear moments when we feel distant. We know that the path involves struggles and is not linear. And it does not matter. All that matters is that we choose love and expansion. That love, that expansion is from God. That love is God.

So, the question is: How do we experience God? One way is through meditation. Another is through heartfelt prayer. Another way is by repeating His name silently in our hearts throughout the day. Another way is through all things. Yes, through everything and everyone. Because God is everywhere. All mystics know this omnipresence of Source. As stated in the Koran: "God encircles all things"⁴¹ and "wherever you turn, there is the face of God."⁴² And in the Bhagavad Gita, it says: "With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere, He exists in the worlds, enveloping all."⁴³

God is omnipresent. Everything and everyone are a sign of the Divine Reality. God is in the soul of souls, in the sacred temple that you carry around with you everywhere, but we seem to only look for Him in temples and scriptures. If God is everywhere, He permeates our inner world as well, even though He is not confined in us. Once we find the One within, once we are attuned with the part of us which has always been aligned to God, we will see the world with new eyes. We will see the divine everywhere. In every conversation, every challenge, in happiness and in grief, in the lion and in the gazelle, in the savannah and in the rainforest, in the traitor and the loyal companion, in belief and disbelief, in the guru and disciple, in you and me. We will no longer see the world in terms of allies or enemies, but with a heart of oneness where everyone is a divine spark. This is when our soul is home in God, a soul that never left home.

Feeling alone

How can we feel alone when life is with us wherever we go, when we dwell in this life? Our very existence can awaken us to be in love with what is and accept the totality of what arises in our lives, because everything is imbued with existence, including ourselves. Being aware of our presence opens us up to unconditional love. And once we touch that divine love within us, we are imbued with a love so potent, so unconditional, that we cannot help but love everyone and everything. Without any conditions. We place too much importance on faith in God. We have turned God into an object when God is the subject. And we are not objects because our existence is conditional on the very life that sustains us. The closest we can define ourselves is as projections, manifestations. How can we fight a projection?

Love and faith

Love encompasses faith, but the opposite is not always the case, unfortunately. There are many people on our planet, with devout faith in God, or the God of their projection, who believe that God wants them to kill people from other belief systems. Faith in this so-called God has not prevented holy wars or people blowing themselves up in His name. Faith in God has not tamed spiritual arrogance. Faith in God has not put an end to religious supremacist organizations who engage in the exploitation of others.

We cannot afford to let our faith be a threat to humanity. We are already divided in politics, social affairs, ethnic identities, genders, interests, and orientations. Spirituality is a domain of oneness. When it permeates all our identities, we can dissolve and give way to a world where we are united. We can cease trying to find our home in books and temples but realize that the Divine Reality is ever here. All we need to do is listen to the silence which invites us to peace and surrender.

We become a part of the Unfolding, we waltz with the Unknown, we attune to the Presence. Living in love means we bring joy to others. Our faith in dogma evolves into faith in God. This faith, this love, enables us to give people the space to be who they are. It means wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we bring tranquility to our lives and the lives of others. It means that our faith does not harm fellow human beings and creatures. Our faith does not make anyone uncomfortable. We do not defend God, for He does not need to be defended. Our faith is personal, and we are open to new paths if necessary for the awakening of humanity. There are no infidels when we live in love. The only infidels are separation, jealousy, anger, resentment, greed, and pride.

Religion or spirituality?

You can have spirituality without religion, and you can have religion without spirituality. The latter is dangerous because it can lead to warfare and mistreatment and even ostracization of those who do not share the same religion as us. Spirituality can never harm humanity. With spirituality, we remember that we all deserve to be here. The spiritual path is one of love and harmony. One does not have to give up their religion to be spiritual; but we will never be able to unite across religions if our belief systems are not infused with spiritual oneness. We will continue the way we are, where we believe our path is the only way to the Supreme Source. We will create discomfort and chaos for followers of different paths unless they convert to our way.

A lot of us think we need religion to know God. But when we become disillusioned with our faiths, we stop believing in God. God is beyond any religious scripture. A book cannot encapsulate the Source of all that was, is, and will be. Books are filtered by the minds of diverse humans. And God is not grasped by the mind. Books and paths can point to What Is, but they never take us beyond the threshold of our limited selves. Mystics speak words of wisdom that the masses cannot comprehend. The masses fabricate what they have heard to manipulate and control others. The verses that are from God contain love, mercy, forgiveness, and peace. God is not the realm of fear or othering or exclusivity. God is not the realm of conditional love or dogma. We can read scriptures for eons and never find the Divine Reality. We can pray and continue to treat others with contempt. Are we praying for love or for the destruction of others? Are we sending blessings or curses to our so-called enemies? Are we using scripture to justify the exploitation of others? Do we revel when a natural disaster wreaks havoc on those whom we deem wicked or sinful?

It is not our spiritual paths or religions that bring us closer to love but our sincerity. This is why mystics of all religions speak the same language regardless of what religion they hail from. Their experience of divine unity and acknowledgment of God's oneness leads them to be inclusive of everyone. Mystics do not try to take others away from their religions, nor do they deride or mock the faiths of others. They also do not try to convert others after their enlightenment. They know God's vastness encompasses all paths. Mystics can guide us but our inner journey towards the Source of love is unique. Because each of us is unique. Perhaps the best religion is the one that leads us to who we are and away from who we think we are. There, we find God.

Loving God unconditionally

Throughout history, we have been conditioned to use God. We pray for favors to be granted. Or we appease God by doing favors for Him. We pray for miracles. And, most commonly, we pray to enter heaven and escape hell. We argue why God permits evil or allows children to die or be exploited. We fight over God. We kill in the name of God. We convert others to our way to be rewarded. And we use God, keeping close to Him so that He keeps our families and loved ones safe. But amid all our attempts to control God

is an all-knowing Presence inviting us to choose love. Only with a heart of love can we surrender all questions and theories and bring peace to ourselves and others. Love is the only force where nonresistance and nonjudgment become a reality for us. In the Bible it states that God is love.⁴⁴ How wondrous is that? God. Is. Love. Can we grasp that? We are suffering on this planet because we refuse to love, we refuse to understand that God is love. The desire to know and to love God is planted within each of us. When we attune to this desire, then let us know that we are being guided, even when we cannot understand or believe. Loving God means holding space even for the phases of disbelief we go through. It is all part of our story.

Loving ourselves unconditionally

Our essence is love. And when we know that our essence is pure, we do not need to love ourselves, we already do. Were we in touch with our essence, we would love the divine spark within us, ever connected to God. But our inferiority complexes, or our savior complexes, our conditioning, our traumas, veil us from appreciating who we truly are. We can embrace ourselves when we make a conscious effort to love ourselves unconditionally, even while we face the complexities and darkness within us. Embracing our dark side does not mean accepting the evil within us. It means we know evil is there, but we continue to love ourselves, and choose love, peace, forgiveness. It means we do not act upon darkness, even though we operated from it in the past, be it a minute ago, an hour ago, a year ago.

Loving ourselves unconditionally is a way to get in touch with who we are beneath the parts we deny in ourselves. Loving ourselves is honoring who we were, are, and will be. Reverend Bonnie Rose prompts us to "love ourselves beyond our capacity to love ourselves... [and] learn to let God love through us. This lovingness extends to our love for others as well."⁴⁵

Loving others unconditionally

Loving others does not mean that we no longer hold negative thoughts about people. We see these thoughts as an opportunity to pray for the person, to ask God to protect them, and to unveil our hearts so we can see their essence. It means that we choose to love regardless. It does not mean we do not have moments of anger, but that we choose peace regardless.

When it comes to loving others, we can first ask ourselves: Why can we not love a certain person? Who stresses us out the most? Where is the anger located in our body when we think about or interact with this person? How can we come to the realization that anger is toxic to ourselves and others? Even when we find it challenging not to argue with them, even when we find ourselves sarcastic in their presence, we do not give up on being guided by divine love. Loving others is interconnected with loving ourselves. And loving What Is ties all the love in the world together. Because loving God keeps us tapped in the frequency of pure love, pure

essence, pure being. The path of love can be frustrating because we default into self-judgment. We judge ourselves for not being able to feel love for and judging others, but inspiration will come from everywhere when our hearts are open, even from, if not especially from, the person who stresses us out the most. Everyone deserves to be loved. And we learn, through love, how to stop transmitting negative energy to others and how to protect our energies from the negativity of others.

Choosing friends wisely

Learning from people who we consider stressful, and still choosing to love them, does not mean we need to be friends with them. If a friend has betrayed us, or if someone close to us is insensitive to our feelings, loving ourselves means that we know who to include in our lives and who to let go of for our wellbeing. In some cases, conflict and space can enrich a friendship; in other cases, it will only reveal the frailty of its foundation. If a friendship becomes a burden, then we cannot continue to pretend that we are friends.

In all instances, discernment is born from divine guidance. We can ask: God what should I do? Should I open up to the other person regarding my pain? Are they trustworthy enough for me to share my pain with? Should I keep this person in my life? Again, for those of us who do not pray, or do not believe in a deity, or those of us who are in the depths of a dark night of the soul and do not feel like praying, we can ask ourselves the same questions we would ask a deity and garner the answers from within. The answers will not come to the mind, but via inspiration and intuition.

When we trust another person, we will not be afraid to bring up uncomfortable discussions. We can have an uncomfortable discussion, and then when the conversation is over, we do not hold onto resentment but start anew from where we are. Starting anew does not mean the next time we meet them will be peaceful, but that we operate moment by moment instead of carrying the tension to the next encounter and repeating the same drama. Repeating a vicious cycle is a trick of the false self, a trick that is easy to play on us when we are unaware. When we break a vicious cycle, when we dissolve our own false selves, we understand the importance of having loyal friends around us.

We choose friends wisely because we do not want to be influenced by people who reject love. We also love them enough to ensure we do not hurt them in return. Choosing love means surrounding ourselves with people who will speak highly of us when we are not around and those who respect our jobs and marriages without crossing boundaries. Friendship is not meant to hurt. It *can* hurt, though, even when people have good intentions, but it creates unnecessary pain when people have bad intentions. On this path, we learn how to spend time with sincere people and ensure we are sincere to others. In the meantime, we keep our hearts open, even when we must, at times, keep our doors closed.

Gratitude and guidance

When we are loving toward others, we feel grateful. Gratitude is uplifting. When we feel connected to the highest frequency of love, to the Source of love, an effortless joy permeates our hearts. We do not pray for good days, because we understand that life is both tough and enjoyable. But we pray that during tough moments we remain devoted to the path of love. This resilience, this peace, comes from being grateful for living in love. And we begin to cherish moments with others, without judging or rejecting them.

When we find that we cannot love certain people, we remind ourselves that love is unconditional, love sees the light in the darkness, and love exists to raise our frequency, both individual and collective. The practice of gratitude and asking for guidance changes our lives and the lives of others. It allows us to give up the part of us that resists love and open up to divine guidance.

Prayers for everyone

Through our meditation and prayer, we ask for forgiveness for everyone, even those who have abused us. We do not hold rancor in our hearts against those who have hurt us, no matter what they have done. We understand that whatever happened was part of our experience, and we move on in love and peace. We also ask God to purify our intentions toward others and to dissolve any bad intentions we hold within us and to protect people from any harm we can cause them. If we find we cannot be kind to another person, then we should keep a distance from them for their sake. And in that distance, we pray and meditate to love that person unconditionally, a love so divine it is beyond even our human understanding. Then, when we know we can be gentle and loving around them, and we can revel in the gift of this divine friendship, we can reconnect with this person, giving them the gift of love they seek. The path of love reminds us that if we can change our selfish and unkind ways, anyone can.

Prayers to connect to the One

We are always connected to the Source of life. In every moment. And prayer is one way to feel the connection, to tap into this divine love. The Divine Intelligence does not force a relationship on us. But prayer makes us ready to experience a relationship with the One and Only. It is a portal to higher realms. Gina Lake has the ideal definition for prayer:

Prayer is another word for talking to the Divine. But rather than pleading to God to deliver what you want, you ask the Divine to reveal what it wants. Those are two very different approaches to the Divine. One assumes that getting what you want is the goal, regardless of what is best for the Whole; the other asks the Divine to help you play your part in the Whole.⁴⁶

Let us ask ourselves: Why are we praying? Do we trust the Divine Reality, or do we want to impose our will and our desires on God? Whether or not we pray, we all return to the Source of love. If we feel distant, or find ourselves unable to connect, we can ask: *Are you there?* Each of us experiences the answer in a different way. Some of us never hear the answer because we cling to our doubts, not knowing that doubting doubt is heresy, because even doubt is a portal to the One.

Reflections

How is love inclusive?

What does it mean to surrender?

Do I love God unconditionally?

How can I love myself unconditionally?

And how can I love others unconditionally?

Is faith the answer?

What does it mean to experience the Divine Reality?

Why is choosing friends wisely a part of awakening?

How can gratitude teach me about love?

Am I open enough to ask for guidance?

Do I pray for everyone, including those who have or continue to hurt me?

What does prayer mean to me?

How can doubt be a portal to the One?

CONCLUDING MESSAGE

When we know, when we finally acknowledge, that love is the way, there will be no more wars, no more conflicts. We can finally treat Earth as our home. Would we walk into our homes every day and vandalize our bedroom walls with profane graffiti? Would we set our bathrooms on fire? Would we slash our bedsheets or throw paint on our clothes? Would we kill the people we live with if they walked into our room without knocking? Of course, the answer to each question is no. But why do we do that to our planet and to each other when we are at war? We have so many whys that have never been addressed:

Why do we destroy nature?

Why do we bomb and kill one another?

Why are we unkind to animals?

Why does human trafficking and child abuse still exist?

Why is there domestic violence?

Why do people cheat others?

Why are minorities exploited?

Why are some human beings referred to as minorities in the first place?

Why do we continue to argue with everyone?

It is sad to know that the world would be better off without humans. Creatures and nature would breathe a collective sigh of relief. Do we want to be considered as a virus in our beloved transient home?

Can we imagine our power when we come together? Can we imagine a world in which we take care of each other and ensure all of us are loved and accepted? As we embark on the path of love, we look forward even to moments of judgment and resistance, because they point us to who we truly are beneath the discomfort, beneath the anger.

We can continue to live the way we are living, or we can begin to live in love. The message of love resonates profoundly for each of us. We begin to change when we love and are loved. Not when we are loved in return, but when we love and are loved, because love is not an exchange. Lovingkindness is vast and inclusive. Lovingkindness has no rules. Lovingkindness shows up in our hearts and brings light to all. Love may be divine grace, but we are free to remain attached to the false self. And it is a freedom that appears in each moment. It requires an awareness on our part in every thought and encounter. Love is invited to radiate in our speech, our body language, our expressions, our actions, and our interactions. It is invited to face each challenge with understanding, gentleness, and ease.

When we know that love is all there is, we will finally complete our divine mission in this universe. And our lives and the lives of everyone will be grand.

Viva l'amore!

About the Author

Nejoud Al-Yagout, a Kuwaiti writer based in Italy, is the co-founder of Interheart Kuwait Italia along with her husband Luca Picilli. Nejoud recognizes God's oneness and invites people of all sacred faiths to unite as divine ambassadors of love and oneness. She waltzes with the wisdom of many paths and even explains it in a poem:

*Not this way
Not that way
Neither that, nor this
But one who surrenders
to the Only Who Is*

*Al Ahad, Al Wahid,
The Only, the One
For the 'one' who surrenders
to the One becomes none*

Notes

¹ The Noble Koran. Surah Al-Dharyyat. 28:68. This translation is mine based on the Arabic text. <https://quran.com/en/al-qasas/68>.

² Harkin, Chelin. *Susceptible to Light* (2020), 134.

³ The Rabia Al-Adawiya reference is from one of her quotes that appears on the One Little Angel website from the page entitled *World Spiritual Heritage: The Quotes of Rabia Adawiya*. <https://www.onelittleangel.com/wisdom/quotes/saint.asp?mc=5>. The poem in its origin appears in: Rabia, *Essential Sufism*, by James Fadiman & Robert Frager, Harper SanFrancisco, p.86.

⁴ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Complete. New Testament, Luke 17:21 (Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England, 1611) Apple Books, 1526.

⁵ This quote by Wald Wasserman is found on Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9789231-discover-yourself-as-love-because-love-it-is-you>.

⁶ Translated and commentated by Swami Paramananda. Upanishads, Isa-Upanishad VII:2 (Public Domain, 1919) 9-10.

⁷ Maharshi, Ramana. Translation by Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan. *Who am I? (Nan Yar?): The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*. 14. (V.S. Ramanam, Sri Ramanasramam) 7.

⁸ In a conversation with my husband Luca Picilli, who is a guru of mine, he uttered this wise phrase, and I jotted it down and included it in the book.

⁹ Epictetus. *The Enchiridion*. 33:8. (135 A.C.E.) Translated by Elizabeth Carter. <https://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html>.

¹⁰ Bolsta, Phil. *Through God's Eyes: Finding Peace and Purpose in a Trouble World*. (James Monroe Publishing, Willow River, Minnesota, 2014, Second edition) 463.

¹¹ The Noble Koran. Surah Al-Furqan. 25:63. This translation is mine based on the Arabic text. <https://quran.com/en/al-furqan/63>.

¹² *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Complete. New Testament, Matthew 5:9 (Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England, 1611) Apple Books, 1398.

¹³ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Complete. New Testament, Matthew 5:45 (Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England, 1611) Apple Books, 1400.

¹⁴ Paul, Margaret, Ph.D. *Do I Have to Give Up Myself to be Loved by God?* (Health Communications, Inc., Deerbeach, Florida, 1999) Apple Books, 33.

¹⁵ Walker, Garret. *In the Lion's Den: A conversation with Daryl Davis*. Harvard International Review. 2020. <https://hir.harvard.edu/in-the-lions-den/>.

¹⁶ Hartland, Sarah. *5 Inspirational Stories of Forgiveness You Won't Forget*. Pure Flix - Insider. 2017. https://www.pureflix.com/insider/5-inspirational-stories-of-forgiveness-you-wont-forget?hs_amp=true.

¹⁷ The Noble Koran. Surah Al-Shura. 42:40. This translation is mine based on the Arabic text. <https://quran.com/42?startingVerse=40>.

¹⁸ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Complete. New Testament, Matthew 5:44 (Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England. 1611) Apple Books, p. 1400.

¹⁹ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Complete. Old Testament, Leviticus 19:18 (Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England, 1611) Apple Books, p. 198.

²⁰ Parwar, Premi. Vaar of Kanraa, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. Raag Gauree, Ashtapadees, First Mehl, Gauree Gwaarayree. "RAAG GAUREE, ASHTAPADEES, FIRST MEHL: GAUREE GWAARAYREE: *One Universal Creator. Truth in Essence. Creator of All. By God's Grace*. (Shahi Inc, 2015) Apple Books, 225.

²¹ Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá. 1: O Peoples of the World (Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í eBooks Publications. <http://reference.bahai.org/en>) Apple Books, 5.

²² *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Complete. New Testament, Luke 23:34 (Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England, 1611) Apple Books, 1541.

²³ Bolsta, Phil. *Through God's Eyes: Finding Peace and Purpose in a Trouble World*. (James Monroe Publishing, Willow River, Minnesota, 2014, Second edition) 356.

²⁴ Ladva, Aruna. *It's Time...For Change: How making positive changes will enhance your spiritual life* (Brahma Kumaris Information Services Ltd., London, 2014) 68.

²⁵ Ibid. 67.

²⁶ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Complete. New Testament, Matthew 19:17 (Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England, 1611) Apple Books, 1426.

²⁷ Parwar, Premi. Vaar of Kanraa, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. Raamkalee, First Mehl, Dakhane, Ongkaar: *One Universal Creator God. By The Grace of the True Light*. II:27. (Shahi Inc, 2015) Apple Books, 933.

²⁸ Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá. 35: O Army of God. (Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í eBooks Publications. <http://reference.bahai.org/en>) Apple Books, 60.

²⁹ Swami Sivananda. *Bhagavad Gita*. The Yoga of Meditation: Summary of Sixth Discourse. 6:9. (Divine Life Society Publications, Uttar Pradesh, India) 54. Holy Books: <https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/BHAGAVAD-GITA-By-SRI-SWAMI-SIVANANDA.pdf>.

³⁰ Chodrom, Pema. *Welcoming the Unwelcome: Wholehearted Living in a Brokenhearted World* (Shambhala Publications Inc., Boulder, Colorado, 2020).

³¹ Meyer, Wali et al. *Physicians of the Heart: A Sufi View of the Ninety-Nine Names of Allah*. (Sufi Ruhaniat International, San Francisco, California, 2011) 185.

³² Jampolsky, Gerald, MD. *Love is letting go of fear*. Third Edition (Celestial Arts, Berkeley, California, 2011) 95.

³³ Tzu, Lao. *The Tao-Te Ching*. Translated by James Legge. Chapter 7:1-2. <https://classics.mit.edu/Lao/taote.1.1.html>

³⁴ Beach, Zach. *The Spiritual Path of Love: The Only Path You Will Ever Need*. 2020. <https://www.zachbeach.com/the-spiritual-path-of-love/>

³⁵ Vaswani, J.P. *Many Scriptures One Wisdom: Treasures from the Sacred Texts*. (Hay House Publishers India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, India, 2013). p. 12.

³⁶ The Noble Koran. Surah Al-Ra'ad. 13:28. This paraphrase is mine based on the Arabic text. <https://quran.com/en/ar-rad/28>

³⁷ Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá. 1: O Peoples of the World (Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í eBooks Publications. <http://reference.bahai.org/en>) Apple Books, 4.

³⁸ Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism* (Feedbooks, 1915) <http://www.feedbooks.com>. Apple Books, p. 40.

³⁹ Mcswain, Steve. *The Enoch Factor: The Sacred Art of Knowing God*. (Smith and Helwys Publishing, 2022), Apple Books, p. 62.

⁴⁰ Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers. *Dark Night of the Soul by Saint John of the Cross*. Book the Second: Of the Dark Night of the Spirit. Chapter Three: Annotation for that Which Follows: 3. (Doctor of the Church Third Revised Edition, ClassicBooks.top, 2020), Apple Books, 88.

⁴¹ Although the most common translation for this verse is: God encompasses all things, the word محيط is more accurately translated as walls, surrounds, encircles, even encloses. In short, it entails that we are confined in God. God is omnipresent. It could still be translated as encompasses which is the same meaning, metaphorically speaking. This is my translation from the Arabic version. *The Noble Koran*. Surah Al-Nisa (The Women). 4:126. <https://quran.com/4?startingVerse=126>.

⁴² This is my translation from the Arabic version. *The Noble Koran*. Surah Al-Baqarah (The Cow). 2:115. <https://quran.com/2?startingVerse=115>.

⁴³ Swami Sivananda. *Bhagavad Gita*. The Yoga of Distinction Between the Field & The Knower of the Field: Summary of Thirteenth Discourse. 13:14. (Divine Life Society Publications, Uttar Pradesh, India) 102. Holy Books: <https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/BHAGAVAD-GITA-By-SRI-SWAMI-SIVANANDA.pdf>.

⁴⁴ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Complete. New Testament, John 1:8 (Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England, 1611) Apple Books, 7949.

⁴⁵ Rose, Reverend Bonnie. *Shadow Cannot Drive Out Shame*. <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=2653>. This article is an excerpt from her book *Dances with Dogs*, available on Amazon. <https://www.amazon.com/Dances-Dogs-Mystical-Minister-Cat-Handling/dp/BoC6W5M11G>.

⁴⁶ Lake, Gina. *Radiance: Experiencing Divine Presence*. Chapter Five: The Divine Speaks: Talking to The Divine. (2006) 32. Gina Lake's website is <http://www.radicalhappiness.com>.

References

The Noble Koran. <https://quran.com>.

Harkin, Chelin. *Susceptible to Light*, 2020.

Fadiman, James and Frager, Roberts. *Rabia, Essential Sufism*. Harper San Francisco. (From the following website: <https://www.onelittleangel.com/wisdom/quotes/saint.asp?mc=51>).

The Holy Bible, King James Version, Complete, Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England, 1611. Apple Books.

Wald Wasserman. Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9789231-discover-yourself-as-love-because-love-it-is-you>.

Swami Paramananda. Upanishads, Public Domain. 1919.

Maharshi, Ramana. Translation by Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan. *Who am I? (Nan Yar?): The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*. V.S. Ramanam, Sri Ramanasramam.

Epictetus. *The Enchiridion*. 135 A.C.E. Translated by Elizabeth Carter. <https://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html>.

Bolsta, Phil. *Through God's Eyes: Finding Peace and Purpose in a Trouble World*. James Monroe Publishing, Willow River, Minnesota, 2014, Second edition.

Paul, Margaret, Ph.D. *Do I Have to Give Up Myself to be Loved by God?* Health Communications, Inc., Deerbeach, Florida, 1999. Apple Books.

Walker, Garret. *In the Lion's Den: A conversation with Daryl Davis*. Harvard International Review. 2020. <https://hir.harvard.edu/in-the-lions-den/>.

Hartland, Sarah. *5 Inspirational Stories of Forgiveness You Won't Forget*. Pure Flix - Insider. 2017. https://www.pureflix.com/insider/5-inspirational-stories-of-forgiveness-you-wont-forget?hs_amp=true.

Parwar, Premi. Vaar of Kanraa, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. Shahi Inc, 2015 Apple Books.

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá. Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í eBooks Publications. <http://reference.bahai.org/en>) Apple Books.

Ladva, Aruna. *It's Time...For Change: How making positive changes will enhance your spiritual life*. Brahma Kumaris Information Services Ltd., London, 2014.

Swami Sivananda. *Bhagavad Gita*. Divine Life Society Publications, Uttar Pradesh, India. Holy Books: <https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/BHAGAVAD-GITA-By-SRI-SWAMI-SIVANANDA.pdf>.

Chodrom, Pema. *Welcoming the Unwelcome: Wholehearted Living in a Brokenhearted World*, Shambhala Publications Inc., Boulder, Colorado, 2020.

Meyer, Wali et al. *Physicians of the Heart: A Sufi View of the Ninety-Nine Names of Allah*. Sufi Ruhaniat International, San Francisco, California, 2011.

Jampolsky, Gerald, MD. *Love is letting go of fear*. Third Edition. Celestial Arts, Berkeley, California, 2011.

Tzu, Lao. *The Tao-Te Ching*. Translated by James Legge. <https://classics.mit.edu/Lao/taote.1.1.html>

Beach, Zach. *The Spiritual Path of Love: The Only Path You Will Ever Need*. 2020. <https://www.zachbeach.com/the-spiritual-path-of-love/>

Vaswani, J.P. *Many Scriptures One Wisdom: Treasures from the Sacred Texts*. Hay House Publishers India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, India, 2013.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism*. Feedbooks, 1915. <http://www.feedbooks.com>. Apple Books.

Mcswain, Steve. *The Enoch Factor: The Sacred Art of Knowing God*. Smith and Helwys Publishing, 2022. Apple Books.

Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers. *Dark Night of the Soul by Saint John of the Cross*. Doctor of the Church Third Revised Edition, ClassicBooks.top, 2020. Apple Books.

Rose, Reverend Bonnie. *Shadow Cannot Drive Out Shame*. <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=2653>.

Lake, Gina. *Radiance: Experiencing Divine Presence*. Chapter Five: The Divine Speaks: Talking to The Divine. 2006.