

Be the Light that You Are

*ten simple ways to transform
your world with love*

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Introduction

Not long ago, a student in my *A Course in Miracles* class asked an important question: “How can I stay friends with people who want to gossip all the time when I don’t want to do that anymore?”

A couple of weeks later, another student asked this question: “I want to join a protest march, but I’m not sure how to do that without getting angry and upset.”

And before long, this question showed up: “My cousin, who is black, was stopped on the street in her town by a man who told her to ‘go back to Africa where you belong.’ I wasn’t there when it happened, but if I had been, I’m not sure what I would have done. I believe in love, but how could I have been loving at that moment?”

Even though the three questions look different, they're alike at their core because all three stem from the same inquiry: How can I stay true to my spiritual principles when I'm faced with challenging situations?

In other words, how do we move from having a spiritual practice to practicing our spirituality?

You may find that it's relatively easy to find inner peace in the quiet of your home, in prayer, and with the comfort of your spiritual guidance. But then a driver cuts you off on the freeway. Or you find your kids' dirty clothes on the floor. Or you get a surly response from your spouse after a lousy day.

At some point, we have to get up from our meditation, blow out the candles, turn off the soothing music, and use our voices, our hands, and our feet. We're made for action. So how do we live according to our beliefs? How do we help make this world the peaceful place we want it to be?

That's what this book is about: What to say. What to do. And how to extend the light that is you—no matter what situation you're in, who's in the room, or how much your fear-based ego mind wants to distract you from inner peace.

Is it possible? Absolutely?

Is it simple? Yes.

Is it easy? Not always.

That's why this book is designed to give you a foundation for understanding yourself and the world in a new way, as well as actual words and actions that you can use in everyday situations.

We all need a little coaching—especially when the world supports our fear-based thoughts instead of our inner light. This book will help you bridge the divide between where you are now and where you want to be, showing how you can stand in the middle of conflict and chaos and transform your world with love.



Has there ever been a time when we *didn't* think the world was insane? Probably not, but the intensity of craziness seems to increase day by day because we're constantly exposed to every form of ego fear.

Even if that fear didn't show up on our phones, laptops, and twenty-four-hour news cycles, it would seep into our awareness. You can unplug your TV, but you can't unplug from the collective consciousness.

We all have a tremendous opportunity to see that drama as a call for love—a plea for help—and then answer that call. In our own homes, communities, and places of work, we can quiet the chaos one conversation at a time.

The ten principles in this book will show you how to take action that's aligned with love, not fear, and how to speak with a voice that reflects the highest part of who you are rather than participating in anger and blame.

Some of the principles may seem basic. For example, “Don't judge others. Respect diversity. Say you're sorry.” All of these are excellent admonitions. But what does it really mean to not judge others? What's required in each one of us to make that possible? Does respecting diversity mean putting up with differences in other people, or does it start with respecting the diverse parts of yourself? And is it helpful to say you're sorry when you're doing it with clenched teeth?

Maybe the reason we don't always live according to our principles is because we don't fully understand what they mean, the foundation on which they're built, or their value in reminding us who we are. Hopefully this book will give you a deeper understanding.

Along the way, you may also find principles that turn your beliefs upside down or challenge ideas that you've held all your life—ideas that are supported in this fear-based world.

For instance, what if detaching from a conflict is the best way to show you care? What if the most compassionate thing you can do is *not* buy into someone's pain? What if trying to protect yourself actually makes you weaker?

That's why *Be the Light that You Are* is more than inspiration. It's a handbook for bringing meaning and understanding to events in your personal life and the lives of the greater whole, helping you move from bitterness and divisiveness to true peace.

I've written this book so that each principle builds on the ones before it, with practical examples demonstrating what they look like in everyday life. You'll see the cumulative impact as you read and put the ideas into action. But be gentle with yourself. There's a wealth of information here, and it's not meant to overwhelm. Incorporating these principles into your life is about practice, not perfection.

It's important to note that I've drawn these principles from *A Course in Miracles*, along with other teachings. This is

not a Christian book or a Buddhist book or a Jewish book. It's a book for humans. It's about the higher ideals that govern us all, no matter where we live, what we do for a living, the color of our skin, our sexual orientation, our age, our occupation, or whether we worship and where.

Having said that, every principle in this book depends on a belief in a higher power. I use different names for that power, such as God, Source, and Divine Spark. In my mind, those names all stand for the same thing: the Creator, who is not defined by a particular religion or theology.

As a result, it may seem as though this book excludes atheists or agnostics, but that's not my intent. If any of the words for a higher power get in your way, substitute the word "Love" instead, and our beliefs will find common ground.

A couple of practical notes: Some of the examples in this book are based on stories I've heard or situations I've witnessed. Where necessary, I've changed names for confidentiality, and I've created composites of different people's experiences.

Also, on a few occasions, I use this wording: "Ask for your fear-based thoughts to be healed" or "Please heal my fear-based thoughts." Those statements come from *The Only Little*

Prayer You Need, one of my previous books. Reading about the prayer is certainly not a prerequisite to *Be the Light that You Are*, but it can add depth if you'd like to know more.

I hope *Be the Light that You Are* will serve as a primer, a reference, and a guide. The principles will help you step into your own power as an agent of change and peace, as long as you lift them off the page and into your everyday life.

So don't just read this book and then put it on a shelf. Keep it with you. Use it. Mark it up. Fill it with sticky notes. Read it before you go into potentially contentious situations. Return to it if something in your life feels "off." Know that you can have a voice. You can take action, and this book will prepare you to do that as the light that you are.

The only thing this book requires is a willingness, no matter how small, to believe that we *can* live without constant drama, violence and conflict. If you think your life and the world will always be broken and nothing will change, try suspending that belief just for a moment and let some light flow in.

By the time you finish reading, I want you to feel a sense of comfort and hope. I want you to be equipped with

practical ideas and responses you can put in place right away. And I want you to know that your words and actions matter. You don't have to be a public figure, run for office, or start a nonprofit to move this world forward in a positive way. With small adjustments in your everyday life, you can bring higher ideals into our fear-based world. And you'll know how to do that as the light that you are.

Your ability to respond with love is possible because you *are* that love. You *are* that light. If that's something you don't believe or completely embrace just yet, that's okay. Because that's exactly where we'll start.

one

Be the Light



Within all of us, there's a light that shines like a bright flame in a lantern. We may call it love, divine energy, or an expression of our Source. No matter what name we give it, that light never goes out.

As we go through our lives, though, our self-doubts dim the sides of that lantern. The drama in the world adds its own layers of soot. And eventually, it's easy to lose sight of the flame burning within, forget how bright it is, or believe it was never there at all.

Fortunately, our forgetting doesn't change the brilliance of the light, but it can limit our ability to claim the truth about our very existence. In fact, by starting this book with "Be the light that you are," we're beginning with one of the most challenging principles of all.

It's the only place *to* start, though, because every principle in this book rests on the solid foundation that you are the light. Without that, the layers of other teachings would teeter on shaky ground.

We've spent generations building our world on a fear of who we are. That's why, to build a better world, there is no place to begin but the truth.



When I was a little girl, I knew there was something more than this world of houses to live in and Monopoly games to play and bicycles to ride. On some level, even though it wasn't conscious, I knew that we each had a soul, a spirit.

Our dog, Pepper, and all her puppies had souls. The sycamore tree I climbed in the front yard had a soul. The fireflies we caught in Mason jars with holes punched in the lids had souls.

The word "soul" means different things to different people, but I mean it as a spark of light, a mysterious but animating energy that brought us to life and gave us the ability to feel, care, and experience.

I knew this light came from a source beyond me, and that we all embodied it. And it was so much more than how we looked or what we wore or how we acted.

Our gruff old neighbor across the street had it. So did my teachers—the ones I liked and the ones I didn't. So did Billy, the boy in my class who talked with a lisp and was the target of other kids' jokes.

And although I lived in a homogenous neighborhood in a homogenous state, I knew that the people of other colors and countries that I saw on TV had it, too.

Knowing there was light in everyone was not a special gift on my part. I'm guessing that as a child, you knew this as well. Hopefully you still do. But often the knowledge that we are the light—a light of goodness that's as divine as the power that created us—gets wrung out of us, and fear of not being enough takes its place.

That's why it's so important to start with this foundational belief and restore it, remember it, and embrace it—no matter how tentatively at first—so you can transform your world with the truth of the light within.



The idea that you are the light may seem radical. But references to being the light show up in every major religion and spiritual teaching.

- ✿ *A Course in Miracles* says we are “the light of the world.”
- ✿ The Buddha said, “Be your own lamp, seek no other refuge but yourself, let truth be your light.”

- ✿ Matthew 5:14–16 says, “You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Each of these quotes alludes to the truth that the Spirit/Creator/Higher Power who created us is divine love, and so are we. In other words, the Spirit/Creator/Higher Power who created us is not broken, sinful, bad, evil, or incomplete. And, as Spirit’s progeny, neither are we.

No matter what your life circumstances, your connection with God means you are entitled to abundance, well being, peace, and joy. That’s the starting point, not the destination. You don’t have to go out and find what is already in you.

You may resist this idea. You may remember the words to an old hymn that proclaims your sinfulness or Bible verses that portray an angry and vengeful God. You may feel that you’re unworthy of such a divine inheritance.

You may immediately think about all the mistakes you’ve made, all the ways you’ve hurt people or stood by and watched as others were hurt. You may point to Hitler or Stalin or

school shooters as examples of evil. You may start to build a case for why you can't possibly be the light, and even why it's blasphemous to think that you are.

But that resistance, those arguments for "evidence" of brokenness, can't alter the truth.

It's like the total eclipse of the sun. For those few moments when the Earth casts a shadow and mid-day becomes dusk, it looks as though the sun has dimmed. But, of course, the sun is the same as ever. A momentary blockage doesn't change the fact that it's still there, as powerful and brilliant as it has always been.

We, too, have momentary blockages that seem to cast a shadow on our light. Those barriers could be fears and insecurities. Judgments of others and ourselves. Feelings of guilt and shame. Stories about hatred and war.

And then we focus on those barriers. We judge them. We think about them over and over. We listen to others who reinforce them for us. And before you know it, we've forgotten the light within and believe that our blockages define us, and there's no escaping them.

*“Fear has been taught
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In fact, these fears have been taught for so many centuries, by so many learned people, that they've become institutionalized in our schools, our laws, and our governments.

And it's true, there's no escape—because we don't need one. We simply need to remember our light rather than our fear, and we'll see that we've been free all along. At that point, everything else in our lives will start to align.

That's why it helps to remember when you were little and could see the pure light in yourself and others, before it became stained with fear. And if you can't recall a time of seeing the light, that's okay.

This book will help you remember.



How do you remember that you're the light? How do you take a lifetime of indoctrination to the contrary and start to embrace truth rather than falsehoods? How do you get to the point at which you can look in the mirror and say, "Yes, I am the light" as easily and naturally as you say, "I am a mother" or "I am a teacher" or "I am a social media manager"?

First, it's important to distinguish between *what* you are and *who* you are. Throughout your life, you've probably been

asked the question “Who are you?” in a number of different ways—on forms, applications for school and jobs, or when you meet someone new.

The answer to “Who are you” typically goes something like this: I’m Marilyn Garcia, and I have two children. My husband and I have been married for sixteen years. He’s a contractor and I’m a bookkeeper.”

This provides a quick snapshot of your life. A word picture that allows us to see you with your husband and children or at work.

But how often in your life has anyone asked, “*What* are you?” The question may seem odd.

“What do you mean, ‘*What* am I?’ A vampire? A spy? A backup singer in a rock band?”

The answer to that question is the great equalizer, because it’s the same for everyone: You are the light.

This truth comes from a level beyond personality, identity, or circumstances of birth. It’s the level the Founding Fathers recognized in writing the Declaration of Independence. The statement, “All men are created equal” makes that document not just a charter for a new nation, but a sacred affirmation for humankind.

That's the level on which we're called to live. That's why remembering the truth about the light that we are is so essential to our peace—both individual and collective.



But what if you don't feel like the light of the world? What if you've been taught that you're a miserable sinner? What if you look around and don't see much light or love in your life?

Your current beliefs and life circumstances may feel deeply ingrained and hard to shake, but I can assure you that once you say, "I want to know myself as the light of the world, as the child of Spirit that I am," you will open the door to a new vision of yourself. Be willing to suspend your disbelief and entertain the idea for just a moment. That's all it takes to start remembering.

Some people have erected their entire lives on the idea of brokenness, helplessness or victimhood. For them, the truth can be disturbing because it threatens the structure of their lives and all the fears that have built them. So the first steps toward remembering the light that you are need to be gentle, yet persistent. For instance . . .

Envision opening a door and seeing light flood in.

Take a moment each day to sit in quiet and express thanks.
Smile at someone, as simplistic as that sounds.

Think about the stories you've told yourself about who you are. Pay attention to how many of those stories are based on your "shortcomings" or "failings." When you become aware, you'll likely see that those stories, no matter how deeply embedded they may be, don't fully explain who you are or what you're about.

Listen to the voice deep within—maybe long buried and faint—that says, "I am more than my fears. I am more than my mistakes. I am more than my shame. There is light within me I have not yet seen."

A part of you will fight hard to keep from going inside and seeing that light, but there is nothing to fear. As you remember the light that you are, you'll expose your old structures and beliefs for what they are: simply a story. Because you've lived with that story for a long time and it feels like home to you, nothing will be gained by making yourself feel homeless. So be patient and gentle with yourself. Don't try to dismantle the structure all at once.



What if a voice in you is saying, “Why should I believe that I’m the light of the world when I’ve been taught exactly the opposite?”

If that’s the case, take an honest look at what your beliefs have built in your life, because everything we experience comes from what we think about ourselves. Often a belief in sin or brokenness creates a deep chasm of shame and guilt, and you start believing that’s who and what you are.

Think of all the gay men and women who marry because they believe their sexual orientation is “sinful,” then live their lives in shame and fear of being found out. Think of the adults who abuse children as a punishment for their “sins.” Think of the millions of lives lost in wars that have been fought because another country or culture was “sinful.”

Teachings about sinfulness sometimes lead to mercy and compassion, but they also can lead to a distrust of God, yourself, and the world. This can make you feel alone, cynical, and rudderless because you always wonder if you deserve to be loved. And even when you’re surrounded by love, you can’t let it in.

So do this one simple thing: Change the word “sin” to “fear.” For example, instead of “I’m sinful,” change it to “I’m afraid.” Instead of “That school shooter is sinful,” he is “overwhelmed by fear.” And instead of “This world is sinful,” it “feeds our fear.” This language reflects the fact that we’re not broken, we’ve simply forgotten who and what we are.

When you remember, you’re likely to feel a deep sense of coming home. You may have wandered down a lonely path for a while, but now you can trust the welcoming light within.



We’ve been trained to think that claiming our gifts and grandeur equates with self-importance. But knowing you’re the light of the world doesn’t mean that you’re a braggart or that you think you’re more important or special than others.

There’s a big difference between saying, “I’m more important than anyone else” and “I’m important because I’m a child of God—and everyone else is, too.” The latter statement is not arrogance. In fact, *A Course in Miracles* says just the opposite is true. If God made us to be the light of the world, who are we to deny His creation?

*“If God made us
to be the light of the world,
who are we to deny
His creation?”*

So what do you have to do to be the light? Nothing. As *A Course in Miracles* says, there is nothing you need to do, say, or prove to be the light that you are.

There are no tests, no training, no certification. You don't have to accomplish it or dream it because you are—simply by virtue of being—the light.

Imagine a majestic oak tree in the middle of a park. Children come and sit under it for shade and shelter. Families take pictures of it because they admire its beauty. Couples talk about how much they love that oak tree for all the joy it brings to their lives.

Does the oak tree do anything? No, it just stands, rooted, being the tree that it is. And by sharing its innate gifts, it invites others to come and experience love.

That's the perfect metaphor for the light that you are. You don't have to be right. You don't have to be the best. You don't have to do anything except stand in your grandeur as a child of God. As you can imagine, this has the power to change everything in your relationships and interactions with others—and with yourself.

As you claim the light that you are, it helps to honestly ask yourself these questions:

- ❖ Do I try to please others so they will like me?
- ❖ Do I avoid conversations because someone might judge me or I feel like my voice doesn't matter?
- ❖ Do I question my value or try too hard to prove myself?
- ❖ Do I overlook, take for granted, sabotage, or dismiss the gifts in my life because I'm looking for the next thing to make me happy?
- ❖ Do I blame someone else for my troubles?
- ❖ Do I judge others for looking different or acting in ways that are foreign to me?

If you answer yes to some or all of these questions—and I'm guessing one-hundred percent of us do—it's an indication that you've forgotten the light that you are. This doesn't mean you "failed." You just need to take a moment and remember what you are once again.

So, every time you become aware of these thoughts and actions, stop yourself and then do something simple: Stand in a pose of grandeur for thirty seconds—feet firmly planted, shoulders relaxed, hands outstretched with palms up. Ask for the light to flow through you and be directed wherever it needs to go.

Let yourself be the oak tree with nothing to prove.

And, as you remember what you are, give thanks for the light within you that never goes out.



While you needn't do anything to *be* the light, here are four steps that will help you *remember* the light that you are.

1. Pay attention to what you tell yourself. Make a commitment to say one loving thing to yourself each day. As the days pass, increase the compliments to yourself so you're seeing and acknowledging the light within on a regular basis. You won't believe the flattery at first, and that's okay. But keep going until it feels more natural and you're better able to claim the truth.

2. Spend time in your heart every day. Nowhere is your light more easily witnessed than in your caring heart. Spend time

daily in gratitude for your blessings, sending love to the people you care about, and asking a power greater than yourself to extend love throughout the world on your behalf. The more you feel the light within you, the more you will trust that this is your true nature.

3. Bring more beauty into your life. When you start feeling frustration, anger, anxiety, shame, or guilt, focus on beauty instead. Buy yourself a bouquet of flowers or spend the day at an art museum. This may not seem relevant, but it will start training you to see the light rather than the darkness. Beauty is effervescent. It lifts you up and restores your vision to something you value, which will help you remember the value in you.

4. Imagine the light within you. In your mind's eye, focus on a spot just above your navel, and see the light as a candle, lantern, or open flame. Imagine the glow of light that it casts in a circle around you. See that light growing brighter and the circle of light growing as well. Imagine it touching everyone around you. Ask yourself how you feel as you visualize this. Know that any peace or blessings you feel are real, and that as

your light blesses others, you are blessed, too, because you're remembering the light that you are.



What does it look like in real life to know you're the light? Here are three examples.

I. Your husband had a bad day and comes home in a foul mood. He's never physically abusive, but lately his frustration at work has carried over into dinner conversation, and he has barked at you and the kids without apology or noticing the toll he's taking on everyone.

Without claiming yourself as the light of the world, you might snap back or absorb his negativity. Eventually, you might question your relationship. "Maybe this is my fault. Maybe he doesn't love me anymore. Maybe he's having an affair." In other words, you would end up doubting and diminishing yourself. When you don't claim your value as the light of the world, it's easy to take things personally and allow yourself to be confused—and potentially abused.

When you claim yourself as the light of the world, you can see that the best way to spread your light is to balance

compassion for others with compassion for yourself. In this example, compassion for your husband might sound like this: “It looks like things are rough at work lately. Let me know if you’d like to talk about it.” And the compassion for yourself could sound like this: “I’m sorry you’re going through a rough time, but it’s not acceptable to take it out on me or the kids. Thank you for doing whatever you need to do to improve the situation. I know you want to do the right thing for all of us.”

You don’t take responsibility for his emotions, and you don’t get swept away by them. You don’t turn the situation into more than it is, take it personally, or make assumptions about what’s wrong. You simply stand in your light, affirm your own inner peace, and allow yourself to shine.

2. You go to a craft fair and visit the booths of local artisans.

You’re especially drawn to the photography exhibits because you dream of starting a photography business someday. In fact, you have pictured yourself with a studio of your own ever since you were little.

Without knowing you’re the light of the world, you might dismiss the value of your dream. “I could never compete,”

you tell yourself. “Being a professional photographer is just a pipe dream. Better not quit my day job.” Then you go home from the fair feeling dejected and try to talk yourself out of being upset..

But when you know you’re the light of the world, you can trust that your work has value and your childhood dream has a purpose. As a result, you might speak to some of the photographers at the fair and ask how they got their start. You can feel the stirrings of joy within you—especially when one of them invites you to attend the next local photography club meeting—and you go home with a sense of possibility and next steps. By reaching out for help and trusting that you’ll receive divine support, you reinforce the innate light within and give it the freedom to shine.

3. You see a homeless person on the street with dirty clothes, greasy hair, and missing teeth. Without knowing you’re the light of the world, you may look at that person with derision and blame. In your mind, you might say, “You’re a blight on society. Why don’t you get a job?”

But when you know you’re the light of the world, you can look at that person and witness a light within him as well. “I

see the truth in you. No matter what your circumstances, you are the light you were created to be.”

Even if no words are spoken, your acknowledgment will touch you and the homeless man as well. Trust the truth in this. Light beholds light, and every remembrance of light for yourself extends the possibilities for others.



Being the light means:

- ❖ You have a purpose that has nothing to do with your job or the many roles you play in life.
- ❖ You're willing to turn many of your old beliefs inside out and upside down and see from another perspective.
- ❖ You're not alone because you're connected to something greater than yourself.
- ❖ Compassion, kindness, abundance, and well-being are your natural state, so you needn't do anything to earn or deserve them.

- ❖ You don't have to prove your value to anyone because your value is an innate state of being.
- ❖ When you combine your light with the light of others, powerful and wondrous things can happen with less effort.
- ❖ You're not a victim in a random universe.
- ❖ Like you, everyone on the planet is more than their bodies, opinions, and circumstances.
- ❖ You feel powerful and supported. Your heart opens up, and you feel more compassionate and less guarded.
- ❖ You become aware of opportunities to bless others every day. You allow yourself to be used for good, knowing your light can only increase the light in others.
- ❖ When you need answers and support, you trust that you'll find guidance by turning within.

- ❖ You embody the ultimate strength and invulnerability, knowing that the ever-changing external world can't touch the steadfast strength of who you are.
- ❖ The light that you are is made manifest in your connection to Spirit. Every time you ask the higher power to guide your thoughts, words, and actions, you bring more light to the world.
- ❖ No matter how much you forget or deny the light within, that light never goes out. The path to peace is always just a remembrance away.



Above all, remember this: No matter what has happened to you, no matter what decisions you've made, no matter how old, educated, prosperous, fit, or happy you are, you are the light. No exceptions.

If you're sitting in prison reading this, know that you are the light. If you just yelled at your kids and grounded them for the next month, know that you are the light. If you feel alone, you are still the light. If your ex-spouse just got

remarried and all the hurt from your divorce has resurfaced, you are still the light.

If you've got a chronic or terminal illness, you are still the light. If you're addicted to alcohol or drugs or food or work or sex, know that you are the light. If you cheated on your taxes, you're attracted to your husband's best friend, you haven't been to church in years, or you just binged on a plate of nachos, you are still the light.

Forgetting you're the light undoubtedly got you where you are now. That was your only real issue. It's not that you're sinful or bad or broken or don't have will power. You just forgot or believed something different from the truth. You don't have to be redeemed. You simply have to remember what you are.

When you combine your light with the intentional use of your mind, you take enormous steps toward peace.

And how powerful is that mind?

Ahhh. Great question. That brings us to the next principle.

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