

## **“You Be the Book”**

**By**

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(Note: The breaks are for reading/presentation purposes and not grammatical purposes.)

I bow to the inner spirit, the fragment of God, the inner light, within you. As the gospel of John says, “...*the inner light that enlightens every human who comes into the world.*”

Can you imagine what the world would be like if we truly believed that every time we interacted with another person, we were in the presence of God, through His emissary that dwells within each of us?

I realize as Christians and Quakers we acknowledge this idea, and give it our intellectual assent, but often even we who say we believe it don't act in a way that would suggest we really “*know*” it's true, let alone all those who don't even include this idea in their beliefs.

And so, like so many ideas about God, we add it to our collection of intellectual ideas that we say we believe in and call it our religion.

Like any intellectual beliefs about God, we have not found any absolutely logical proof they are true, so we argue, debate, condemn, and even war over who has the “*true*” set of beliefs.

Or, if we're in a more ecumenical mood, we “*dialogue*” about who has the “*truer*” set, and at least give the appearance our religion is not the real one.

The question that occurs to me is why has our approach to knowing God become so dominated by our intellectual understanding about God? We have limited ourselves to reading the Bible and other books, listening to sermons and speakers, taking classes or attending seminars, and participating in discussion groups - all intellectual activities.

My answer is that we have been taught to think that our intellect is the primary, if not the only, way to know anything.

I would even suggest that the stronger our intellect is, and the more knowledge we acquire, the better defenders of intellect being the only way of knowing, we become.

Scientists would have us believe that only empirical knowledge, knowledge discovered through our five senses, can be believed.

Philosophers would suggest reason, the primary tool of the intellect, is the only way to know.

Religion would tell us to just accept what they teach, because it comes from a Divine Authority that shouldn't be questioned. To its credit, however, religion has been the guardian of another way of knowing. However, religion has often lost sight of it, like a treasure they buried, and forgot where they buried it.

But throughout history, Jesus and great religious teachers like the Buddha, Teresa of Avilla, and our own George Fox, to name a few, have been called upon to renew the search for this buried treasure.

What is this buried treasure? It is the "*key to the kingdom*" that unlocks the door to a path that leads us up the mountain top to experience God in a way that will transcend merely thinking or believing that God exists, with truly "*knowing*" God exists.

This "*other way of knowing*" is an inner knowing. It is the inner recognition of truth by our soul as opposed to the intellectual understanding of our mind. It's our inner spirit of God shining a beacon of inner light upon truth, whenever we discover it.

Imagine if it were so dark you couldn't see anything, and something became brilliantly illuminated. Would you not see it exceptionally clearly as it stands out against the backdrop of total darkness? Could anyone possibly convince you that you did not see it, after such a powerful experience?

This is the kind of knowing that differs from intellectual understanding. This is the kind of knowing that brings us "*the peace which passes all understanding*". It says there is a difference between knowledge and truth.

For example, our intellect tells us that if one man can shear a sheep in ten minutes, it is logical to conclude that ten men can shear a sheep in one minute. But we know this is not true.

In everyday life we easily recognize that "*to know something*" you must experience it. Imagine a young child comes to you one day and asks you what love is. You're excited that they have asked such a profound and important question. And so you gather your thoughts and begin to explain.

When a beam of light passes through a prism, it is split into the seven colors of the rainbow. We analyze and learn about the different colors to see if we can see common properties that will help us understand what pure light is.

When God sends pure unconditional love, it passes through the prism of a human being. Instead of colors, it manifests as types of love like love for children, parents, brothers and sisters, friends, husbands and wives, humankind, and God.

We study these different types of love to find the common properties of pure love, and we might come up with a definition such as, "*Love is the desire to do good to others.*"

As you continue your discourse on all that you know “*about*” love, you notice the child has fallen asleep! It then dawns on you that no matter how good your definitions and explanations are, the child will *never* fully know love until they experience it.

So the question I hope you are asking yourself by now is, “*What is this method by which we can experience God and thus “know” God exists?*” My answer to what these enlightened spiritual leaders have been trying to teach us is that we must turn our journey inward, if we wish to experience the presence of God, and, once you experience this presence, you will truly know God exists, versus just believing in your mind that God exists.

There is a story of a great master who gathered followers and instructed them, and sent them out to teach truth to the people in the villages. One day these teachers came back and complained to the master that the people were abusing the truth and weren’t worthy of hearing it. The master asked them what they thought they should do, and they replied they should hide the truth until the people were ready to receive it.

The master asked them where they should hide it. They looked around and said, upon the highest mountain peak. But the master replied that if they could put it there, couldn’t the people also find it there? Then they said at the bottom of the lake. Again the master replied that if they could put it there, couldn’t the people also find it there?

Having exhausted their answers, they then asked the master where he would hide it. He replied, “Why don’t you hide it within them because it’s the last place they will ever look”.

We are so conditioned to look outside ourselves for the answers to life’s questions.

When Jesus was facing his most difficult hours, knowing what he was about to endure, he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to be alone with God. His human self knew it was this inward connection to God that would give him the strength, courage, and composure to go through his trial and crucifixion.

He didn’t read a book or consult other humans. He did ask a few apostles to accompany him, but they fell asleep! Enough said about human help.

How about Biblical passages for providing us direction? “*The kingdom lies within*”. How much clearer can it be said?

In Psalm 46, verse 10, it says, “*Be still, and know that I am God*”. I think this passage means exactly what it says. It doesn’t say read books, listen to sermons, take classes, and participate in discussions.

Now don’t misunderstand me; I love and frequently participate in all these activities as good ways to learn “*about*” God, but I’ve now come to realize that only in the stillness of being in God’s presence can I truly come to know “*of*” God.

There is a story about Siddhartha Gautama, who came to be known as the “*Buddha*”, which means the enlightened one. You may already know his story. He was born a young prince in the highest or Brahman caste of Hinduism.

He was an avid student of the Vedas, the Hindu’s sacred scripture, but his knowledge of them wasn’t providing the answer he sought, so he gave up his wealth and status and wandered penniless for many years seeking a greater truth.

One day, while sitting in silence, he felt he was answered when he let go of his intellectualizing and experienced the truth of the oneness of all. This peak experience changed him, and he began teaching about this path of the inward journey.

As he approached a village and a crowd gathered to hear him speak, he sat down holding up a flower in his hand and said nothing. The crowd became restless wondering when he would begin speaking to enlighten them. He continued to say nothing.

After a while, one person broke out in great laughter as he understood what the message of the Buddha’s silence was trying to convey. The Buddha walked over and handed the man the flower and left.

Did the rest of the crowd even get it? Probably not, because again we are so conditioned to approaching truth only through hearing about truth.

Zen Buddhism, perhaps the most radical anti-intellectual sect of Buddhism, will start a new student with a “koan”, which is somewhat like a riddle. For example, “*What is the sound of one hand clapping?*” You can imagine a picture of this and how silly it looks while trying to figure it out.

The new student wears out their brain for days seeking an intellectual answer and finally gives up and goes to tell the master thinking they have failed. The master tells them they have successfully learned the first lesson, because they have learned there are limits to what we can know through our intellect.

Our reluctant recognition and acceptance of this limitation in the West is summed up in the words, “*Just believe*”. But believing is an intellectual acceptance of that which cannot be corroborated by material or physical evidence, and so requires what we’ve called a “*leap of faith*”. This is not the same as the experiential *knowing*, I am trying to explain.

Now the student is ready to try the inner knowing, and techniques of meditation and silence are begun to be taught and practiced. I think this emphasis on the path of inner awareness and the limitation of the intellect is a great contribution from Eastern religions, but the purpose of the inner journey is described differently by Western mystics and Jesus.

In the East, the purpose of the inner journey is to seek total silence and dissolve your sense of being an individual, separate from all other realities of the world. Instead of seeing yourself as a

grain of salt, when first poured into a glass of water, you see yourself after the grain has been dissolved.

In other words, there is no separate identity. Separateness or an individual self is an illusion the Buddhists call the Maya. You are as a drop of water in the ocean and the ocean is a diffuse spirit that pervades all life.

In the West, we believe that spirit is a personal God, who is the creator and upholder of all reality. This God gives a part of Himself to indwell each of us to be our guide on our journey to paradise. This is the guide who shines the inner light on truth whenever we discover it. This is the inner spirit, whose presence we seek to discern in silence.

Our purpose is to go within and seek the Divine Presence through prayer, worship, and listening to God. And when the presence is felt, or the still voice is discerned, a quiver shoots down our spine and we feel a spiritual quaking.

Finally, I would like to talk about Teresa of Avilla's experience. She was very passionate in her love for God and sought to understand him through reading the Bible and other books, but she didn't feel she was finding the answer she sought, and her church had banned some of the books she wanted to read.

One day, sitting in silence, she heard the still voice tell her to be her own book. In other words, it's not enough to read books about God. *You have to be your own book* based on your personal experiences of the inner journey seeking to know God.

She did this, and she describes how she came to "know" God by developing her personal relationship with Him in the silence. Of course, a skeptic could ask how she really knows, but I think Teresa would smile and say, "*How do you know I don't know?*"

When you discern truth versus knowledge, you realize truth doesn't have to be defended, only shared.

So, my message to you today is twofold. First, go buy a prism just in case someone asks you what love is. I'm joking, though it is an effective analogy.

Second, and, of course, most importantly, spend some time each day with God. Schedule your "*Divine Appointment*" in your daily planner.

Call it silence, stillness, meditation, centering prayer, contemplation - it doesn't matter. "A rose by any other name is still a rose".

Spend time seeking God within, if you want to know God. You can't fully know a person by just reading about them, and God is patiently, forgivingly, and lovingly waiting for you to call upon Him and spend some time with Him.

As a bonus for your time with God, the de-stressing and health enhancing effects of such meditative efforts, are well supported in medical and scientific studies.

Create your own first hand experience with God, and the second hand experience of believing in religious doctrines won't seem so all-important. The realization that we are all Brothers and Sisters in God's family, will become more important than our doctrinal differences.

As God told Teresa, "*Be your own book*". If I can be of assistance getting started, let me know.

In my sixty-two years on this world, I have accumulated some knowledge, but there is only one thing that I can say that I truly know. While I had always believed it in my mind, I never knew it as truth in my soul until I began the inner journey.

The Bible says "*seek the truth, and the truth will set you free*". Free from what? Free from fear of death, fear of failure, fear of being alone, or fear of not being forgiven? What is this one truth that makes me smile in every cell of my body?

It is "*knowing*", based on the inner search, without any doubt, that you and I are children of the most loving Father imaginable, and that He has a place for each of us in His Kingdom. I realize you've heard this many times and you believe it, but do you truly "*know*" it in the depth of your soul, so deeply that it has set you free from your fears?

As Albert Einstein said so beautifully, "*I want to know God's thoughts; all the rest are details.*" Or, as Jesus said, "*What does it matter if all things earthly crumble*"?

Thank you for allowing me to share my message with you. I bow to the spirit within you.