

Unpuzzling Spirituality
An Introduction to Spiritual Thoughts
to Create a Big, Happy, Peaceful,
and Loving Life
(Ages 9 and up)

Published 2019

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The purpose of this book is to empower kids with inner peace through spirituality, so any help is greatly appreciated. Let's spread some good thoughts together.

All statements contained herein are the opinion of the authors and should not be considered professional psychological advice. This material has been written and published for educational purposes only. The information is not intended as a substitute for appropriate mental and/or health care.

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Published by: UnpuzzlingSpirituality.com

ISBN #: 9781092490504

Dedicated to my godchild, Kyle Gjersef,
who was the inspiration for this book.
- Kristin Neperud Merz

Dedicated to our readers.
May the ideas in this book start for you a new journey.
-Dena Mercer

How this book came to be

When my sister, Kathy, asked me to be my nephew Kyle's godmother I was thrilled by the honor, yet apprehensive. Reluctantly I told her that I would love to be Kyle's godmother, but I no longer considered myself to be "Christian," rather I considered myself to be "spiritual" instead. I believed in a creative force (or God), but I enjoyed learning from all religions. This included Christianity, but my exploration of spirituality now embraced good and valuable teachings wherever I found them. If I were to take on the role, I would want to explore all beliefs with Kyle.

Kathy paused and said, "Well, the title says 'godmother' not 'Christian mother,' so that should be fine."

Little did I know that one conversation would change my life so much!

Thrilled, I headed out to the bookstore. My plan was to get him a bunch of books on various religions and spiritual thoughts for his baptism. (Note: This was 1998 when there were big bookstores with lots of books in them to check out.) When I got there I was shocked by what I found. Or, rather, I was shocked by what I did not find. There was one whole area dedicated to religion for kids. Six of the seven bookshelves were on Christianity.

One of the shelves was on Judaism. I remember looking around thinking, "Where are the rest?" Disappointed, I grabbed a children's Bible and a children's Torah (which did get a few odd looks at the baptismal party).

But I still wanted to expose Kyle to more diverse thoughts and beliefs, so I decided to write something myself. I went to work reading, researching, and writing in my spare time. Eight years later, I had the first version written of what I was calling *Spirituality for Kids*. It was definitely more all-encompassing, including things like Native Americans creation stories, explanations of reincarnation, purgatory, and the like, and I encouraged an open dialogue between kids and parents but... something was just off about it, and I did not know how to fix it.

Well, life and inspiration took my creative time away from writing "Spirituality for Kids." I was still reading and researching, but my writing time was all going to a new different book - *Unscribbling: the art of problem solving and fulfilling your desires*. But I believe all things happen for a reason, and the delay and new project had their purpose.

After another two years, I moved from Chicago to Southern California, where I joined

a writer's group. At times, the group was just me and Dena Mercer (who was writing a memoir called *Campfires Remembered* about her time mule packing in the high Sierra Mountains with her daughter), and at other times it was as many as five ladies reviewing and critiquing each other's work.

When I was getting close to the end of writing *Unscribbling*, I decided to share *Spirituality for Kids* with the group as it felt like the time was right to get back to it. Having such a passion for this project, I could not wait to hear what they thought. After some silence, Lady No. 1 said, "There are two things you should never discuss: politics and religion." Period. End of thought. She folded her hands on the table and was done.

Lady No. 2 pretty much agreed with Lady #1 and that was the end of her comment.

Lady No. 3, who was a friend of mine (and religious), didn't comment on the writing, but took the time to insult my intelligence instead. And this was not an accidental insult in any way. It was well thought out and included a drawing to help explain to me EXACTLY how ignorant she thought I was. (I am not kidding, there was a drawing.)

Needless to say, I was very hurt. In a writer's group, you critique the writing, but you don't judge the person.

I looked to Dena desperate to say something that would not make me feel like a waste of space. But, all things for a reason, *Spirituality for Kids* had gotten lost in all the writings we were supposed to read, and she had not read it, but promised to do so for next time.

Not wanting to bring it up again at the next meeting, Dena handed me a note at the end saying how wonderful, important and brave she thought the piece was and encouraged me to keep going. It was a wave of relief, but what a wake-up call. What I was writing was definitely not going to be welcomed by all—even though the writing encouraged respect and acceptance of all.

Over the next few months, Dena finished her book, two of the ladies dropped out of the group (for reasons other than me, as far as I know), my friend moved away (she did eventually finish her book too, and admittedly *this* book is light years better than the version she read) - so the group was back to me and Dena.

Dena was exploring what she wanted to write next and having finished *Unscribbling* I was getting back to *Spirituality for Kids*. Dena's support and insight was wonderful! It helped that we shared a lot of the same beliefs and that Dena too had done a large amount of reading on the subject.

I could see Dena's interest in *Spirituality for Kids*, which seemed to animate her much more than the other projects she was exploring, so one day I asked her if she would be interested in writing it with me. She said, "Yes!"—so we started an enlightening journey and collaboration.

Writing this book has been a process of discovery. It's not like we created an outline and filled in the details. Rather, we just wrote and explored.

Each of us would work on writing part, then we would exchange and the other would add, edit, change and challenge what was written. Back and forth. Back and forth. Round and round. Discussing. Exploring. Until we could no longer remember who wrote what and the writing felt...true.

Then we would see how some thoughts fit together and rearrange the book accordingly. Then we would find more thoughts to add and go through the process all over again. Then do it all over again. Then do it all over again. (Seriously, it is kind of insane to think about.)

Many of the thoughts came through the great teachers and books we were blessed to have crossed our paths. But some of the thoughts were a little more intriguing—we would write the thought, and think, "I don't think I have read anything about this, but something about it feels right." So we would explore the thought more. I was always thrilled when later we would come across a book that also talked about the concept. (Whew! It was validating to confirm that the thought might be on the right track! But with spirituality, you really need to trust your own inner guidance.)

We kept writing and reorganizing and bit by bit it felt like more pieces of the puzzle were clicking into place. Often we would have part of an idea, then months later a new insight about that topic would flow in and—click—a new piece of the puzzle clicked into place.

Writing this book has been a process and a journey of discovery. We did not know what it would look like in the end. We just trusted the process to lead us where we needed to go. We trusted that the right thoughts/answers/insights would appear when we were ready to receive them. I have to say, the unveiling of insights was fascinating!

Thus, more than 20 years after starting this journey I now have a book for my nephew/godchild. And I am also happy to say that there are now many more books on the subject, too.

Our world is changing. We are becoming more accepting of other beliefs. Marriages are bringing together many diverse faiths and we are all learning from one another. We are opening our minds and souls to new levels of understanding. Science and spirituality are reinforcing each other's beliefs instead of contradicting one another. The world has become more open.

I still feel there is a need for this book, as none that I have found have quite taken the approach we have. And though the name has changed from *Spirituality for Kids* (that name

was already taken) to *Unpuzzling Spirituality*, my hope is that this book might make our search for peace, harmony, acceptance, and spiritual understanding even easier.

Exploring our spirituality is something that often does not happen until our later years in life. But, what kind of change could we put out into the world if we start exploring spirituality when kids are young? What change can happen if kids know they are wanted? If they know they are part of something larger than themselves? If they know they are vitally important in the world and can affect all around them in a positive way?

Starting this conversation earlier could make a world of difference in all our lives. My hope is that this book will allow you to start that conversation with your kids. Teach them an understanding that they will carry into the world and make this world an even better place.

Let's get the conversation started...

- Kristin



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Introduction

Your journey with this book will provide pathways to explore your spirituality, or your understanding of the world around you and your place in it. Your exploration will be a journey that will take you inside yourself, outside of yourself, and can connect the dots in between.

Drawing from the teachings of old and new, we will explore an introduction to key concepts of spirituality that are being explored today. But we don't want you to just accept the ideas—we want you to think about each idea and ultimately decide for yourself what feels true to you.

Our purpose for writing this book

1. To help people of all ages develop their spirituality, know what it is, and how it can influence their lives.
2. To give parents a language and understanding of spirituality so that they can talk to their kids in terms their kids will understand.
3. To ultimately help the world become more peaceful, compassionate, and loving, by helping individuals find a sense of inner peace and understanding.

What can you get from this book?

- An understanding of spirituality and its place in your life.
- An understanding of your role in the world and how you influence others through your connection to everything.
- An introduction to a spiritual (not religious) take on life.
- A feeling of connection, empowerment, and inner peace.

Who is this book for?

This book is for all ages, but it has been called “a children’s book for adults.” We are providing thoughts on spirituality in a way for kids to understand, but we anticipate adults actually reading it more than kids. This may seem convoluted, but questions about life and spirituality are questions that come up in the moment. If, as adults, we have taken the time to pre-think our beliefs and thoughts, we can then lead by example with our actions, and/or communicate those thoughts with kids in ways they will understand. (Or, we can grab this book and read the appropriate parts with them.)

So, this book could be considered a children’s book for adults, that works for kids, too. Because of this, you may read a few examples of concepts that are more fitting for adults, but nothing that is inappropriate for kids. Ideally...

Parents...

Read this book with your kids, or read it on your own. By exploring these thoughts, you will be better prepared to answer questions your kids may have as they arise.

Adults...

Use this book as an introduction to a variety of spiritual thoughts. If you want to explore some of the topics in more details, check out our website for a list of additional resources at: UnpuzzlingSpirituality.com/Spiritual-Thoughts.

Kids...

You don't need to wait for a parent to read this with you. If you are curious, read on! When you get to anything you have more questions about, find a trusted adult to discuss things with.

Everyone...

Please know that this is personal stuff and it can be challenging to talk about it, even for adults. We want you to be bold in exploring your beliefs, while also honoring the differing beliefs of others. These are conversations that will help us grow, learn, and build a stronger understanding of one another.

Beliefs → Thoughts → Actions → Experiences/Life

Your Life is Shaped by Your Beliefs

In any given moment, you have the choice as to what you think, do, or say. It is up to you!

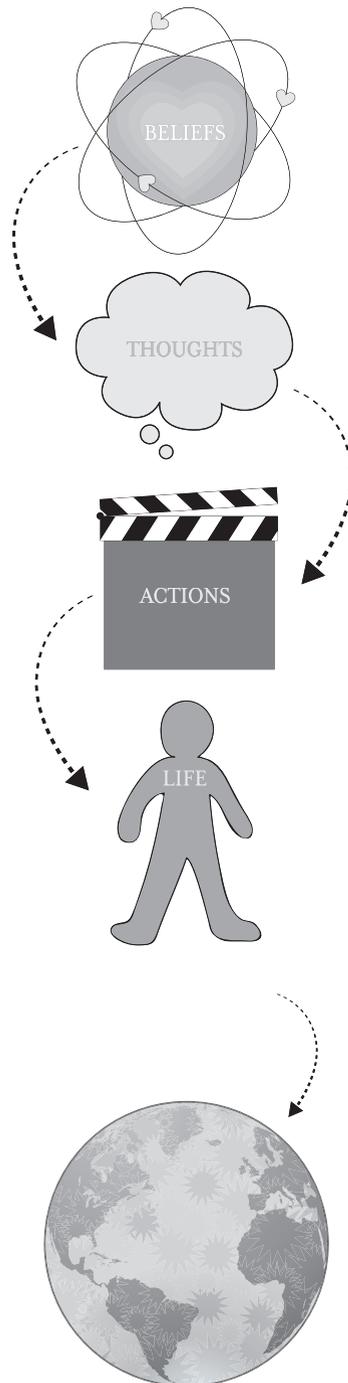
But what you think, do, and say are all influenced by what you believe about the world and your place in it. For:

- Your beliefs can help to guide your **thoughts**.
- Your **thoughts** help to shape how you see the world and determine what **actions** to take.
- Your **thoughts and actions** together help to shape your **experiences in life**.

So, understanding your beliefs becomes the key to shaping your life. They become the core of your spirituality which can become the guiding force that leads you to a happier and more peaceful life.

But it is not just about you...

Your beliefs go beyond just influencing *your* life. Your beliefs, thoughts, and actions also influence the world around you. Your influence gives you the power and responsibility to directly help create the kind of world we live in.



The puzzle without a picture to guide you

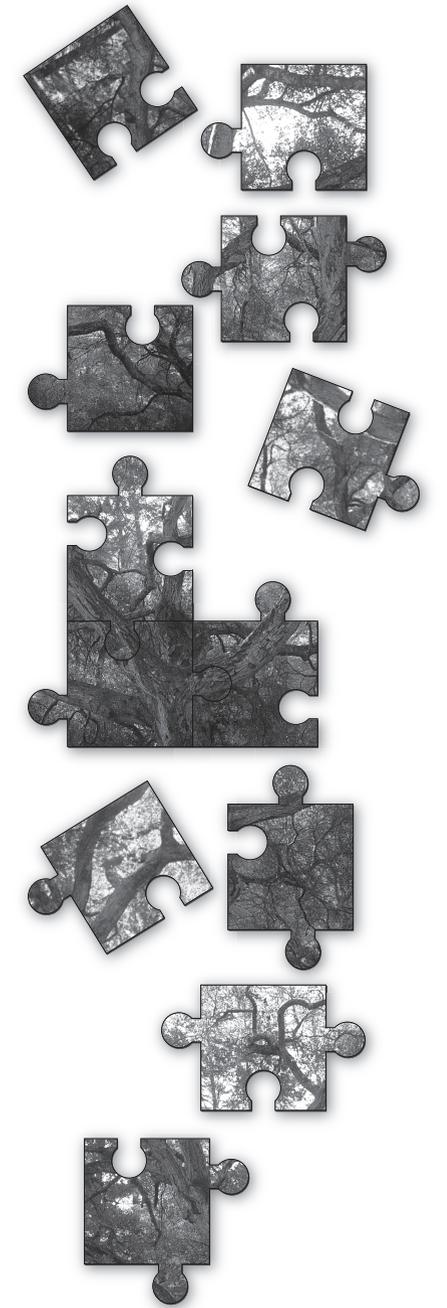
In this book we will look at some commonly held spiritual beliefs and how they can influence your thoughts, actions, and, ultimately, your life.

Understanding your core spiritual beliefs and creating a spiritual foundation will not always follow a straight line. It is not like you first learn A, then B, then C. It is more like you need to understand C to understand A, but you can't understand C until you know A, and B makes no sense without C and A, but you can't really understand A until you know a little about B. Yikes!

It helps if you think about it like you are putting together a puzzle without having a picture to guide you. As you look at the puzzle pieces you will start to see how certain parts fit together. The picture will unfold a little at a time and become clearer and clearer in different areas at different times.

That is what it will feel like as you read this book. We might put in a piece of the puzzle edge by introducing an idea at the beginning of the book, but really work to develop the idea/area later as we add more pieces to the puzzle.

Suddenly, the pieces will come together and you will see what the picture is really about. Once you understand the thoughts and how they fit together, it is our hope that, in the end, the picture will become clear and complete.



Try out beliefs

Spirituality invites you to draw on your own inner wisdom about the world instead of blindly accepting what others tell you to believe. So, here we invite you to question any and all of the beliefs we present. With any of the thoughts in this book, please DON'T just believe and accept them. See how they feel inside.

Just as you would try on a shirt before you buy it, “try out the belief” - see if it continues to feel right to you, or if you want to refine your thoughts.

As you read, ask yourself:

Does this thought feel right and true?

No? Keep exploring the topic on your own to find an answer that does feel right to you.

Yes? Try it out in your day-to-day life. If something happens in life that makes you wonder if it is true, go back and explore that statement again! Tap into your inner guidance—not just the guidance that adults or authority figures around you have provided. (Remember, we are all “works in progress”—even adults.)



Key Points

Empower yourself with your own inner knowledge and your own thought-out beliefs on your spirituality.

Your beliefs can help to guide your thoughts. Your thoughts can shape how you see the world and determine your actions.

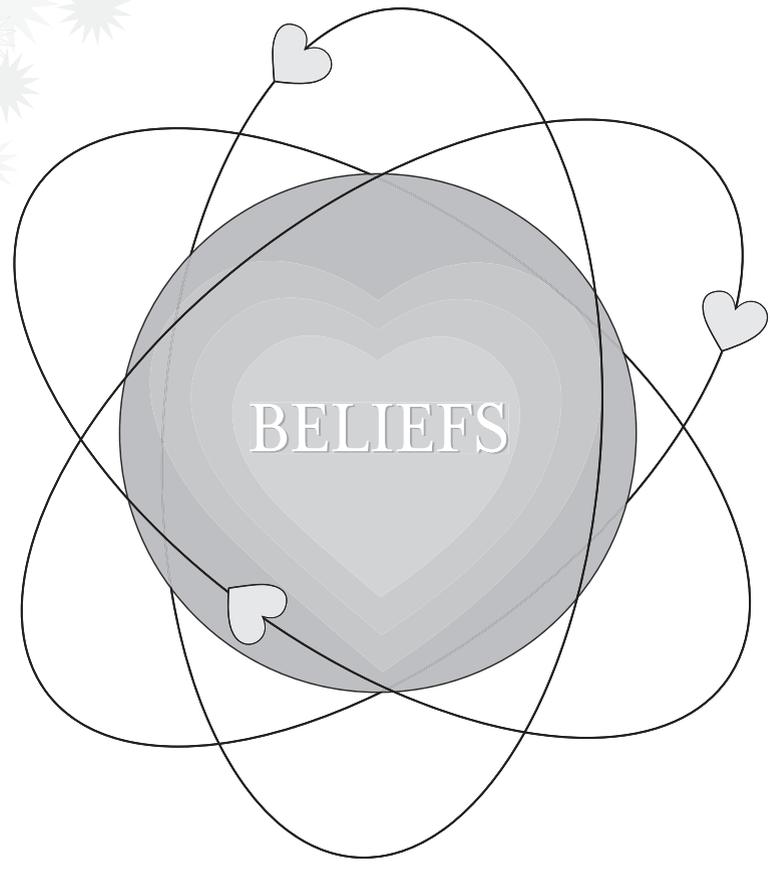
Your actions and thoughts help to shape your life experience.

Your thoughts and actions influence the world around you.

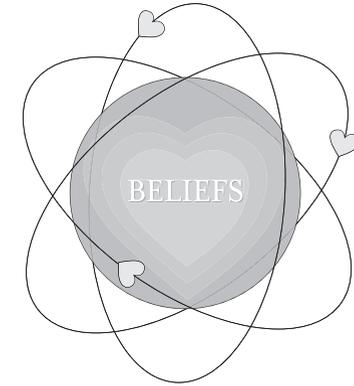
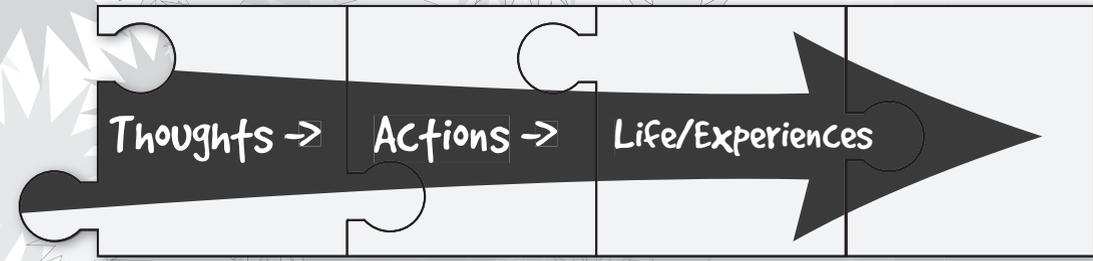
Question and challenge every thought presented to you (in this book and in life).

Trust your own inner guidance to show you the way.

Let's get started by exploring some common Spiritual Beliefs...



Part 1
Spiritual Beliefs



Chapter 1 You and the World



What makes you YOU?

Before you can understand your connection to the world around you, you need to understand the parts that make up who you are.

There are three parts to every living human and animal. There is a body, mind, and soul.

1. Body

One of the parts that makes you who you are is your body. Your body is the physical part of you that you can touch with your hand and see with your eyes. Your body is part of what is called the **material world**. The material world is made up of everything around you that you can feel with your hands, like a chair, houses, trees, animals, and water.

2. Mind

Another part of you is your mind, or the thoughts you think. Your mind helps you make sense of the world you live in. It helps you to process thoughts, beliefs, and ideas so that you can interact with the world around you. The thoughts you hold on any subject are extremely important as they will shape how you see, experience, and interact with the world. Your thoughts are often called your **mental world**.

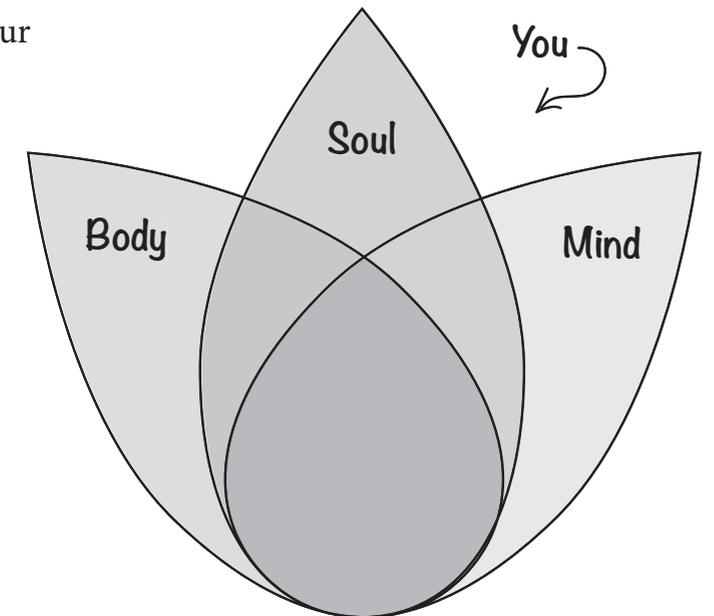
3. Soul

The third part of you is your soul. Your soul is the part that makes you unique in the world. Others have bodies, others have minds, but none are like you.

Your soul is part of the spiritual energy that is in all things. So, it connects us to everything and everyone. It gives life to your body and mind. Your soul is part of the **spiritual world**.

You need all three parts—your body, mind, and soul—in order to live. You need your body so that others can easily see and interact with you and so you can interact with the world around you. You need your mind so you can decide how to interact and experience the world. You need your soul to carry your uniqueness into your body and give you life.

It's easy to see and feel parts of your body, or even to recognize your mind by thinking thoughts and exploring ideas. Every time you scratch an itch or write a story, you can see how your body and mind works. Recognizing and knowing your soul, however, can be a little trickier at first. But keep reading, and we will try to unpuzzle this puzzle together.





Spiritual Energy

Every part of the world we know is made up of tiny atoms. These atoms are the building blocks for everything that exists. Each of these atoms is made up of waves of ENERGY. This means there is an energy that is within all things and gives life to all things. It flows throughout your body and mind, as well as through your friends, your family, your dog, the trees, animals, the stars, and even rocks—everything.

It is not something you can easily see, but it is continually flowing through you, connecting everything in the universe, and allowing all to exist.

Think about how you have heard the word and concept of energy used with electricity. The same way energy in electricity flows through your house and allows you to turn on your lights and TV and bring them to life, spiritual energy flows through all things bringing them into existence.

So even if you can't see the energy, you can know that it is there. Science proves it!

Try out the belief that an energy flows through and connects everything.

Where Did the Spiritual Energy Come From?

No one knows for sure from whom, or from what, the spiritual energy evolved. All around the world people seek to understand spiritual energy and what created it.

There are many many different beliefs about how this special energy was created, and its purpose...

Many people believe that spiritual energy was created by a higher power or “God.”

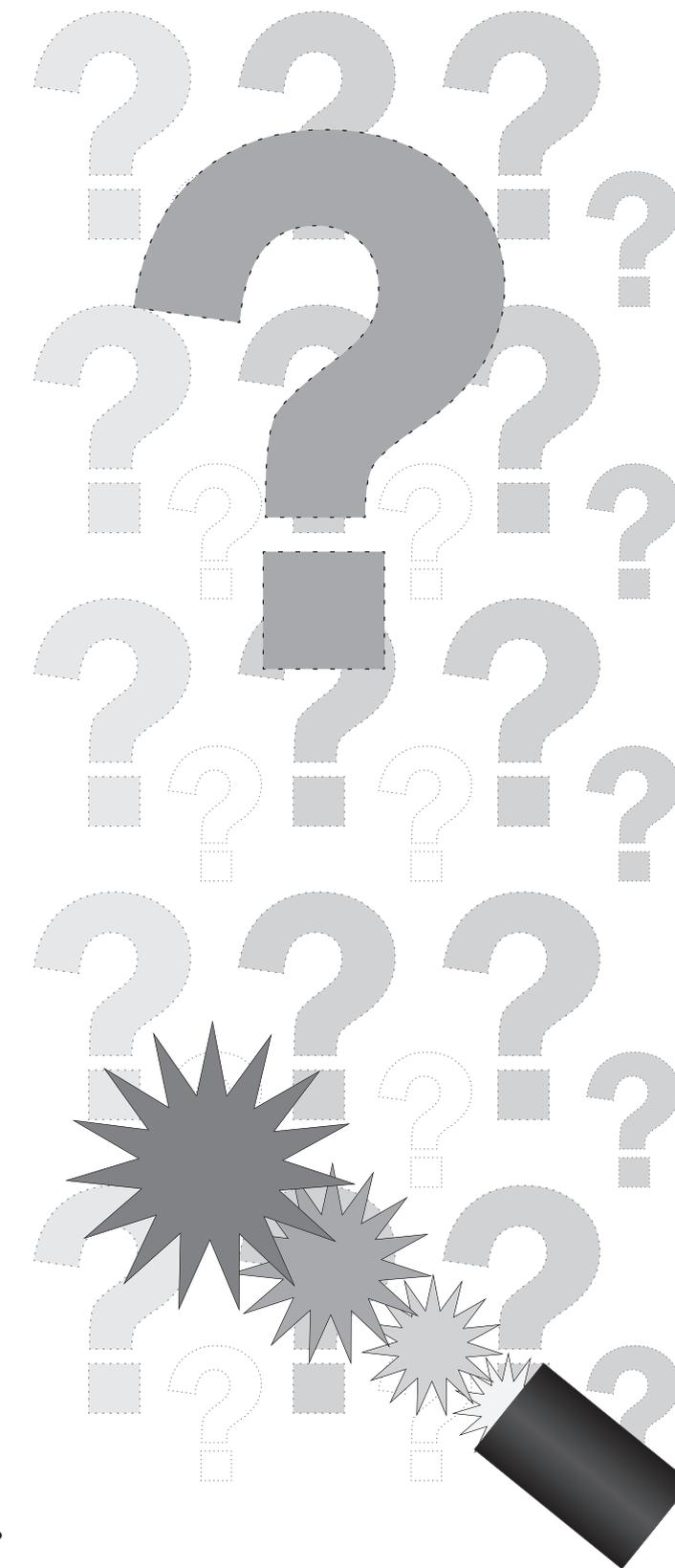
Some people believe that the higher power *is* the spiritual energy.

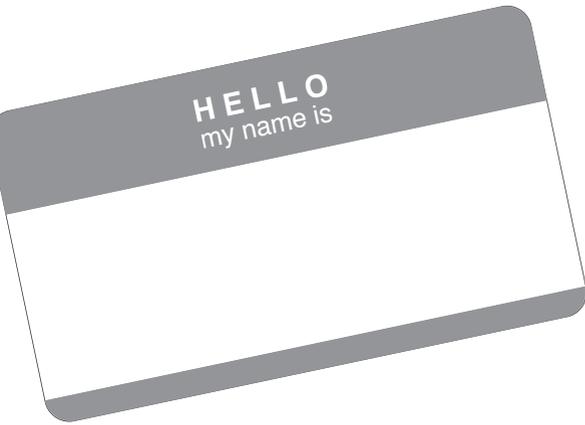
Other people believe that the energy came about as a result of an explosion that happened billions of years ago.

Another belief is that the Higher Power created the explosion that allowed the energy to flow.

No one knows for sure.

Wherever the spiritual energy came from, it started so long ago that no one CAN know for sure. We just know it is there. Whether it was a “God” or science or both, a creative force created everything.

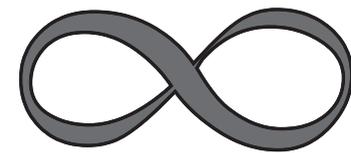




Naming the Spiritual Energy

People throughout the world call the spiritual energy and/or the creative force by different names. Some names given to either the spiritual energy, the creator of the energy, or the combination of the two include: God, Spirit, Life Force, Life, Infinite Wisdom, Love, The Light, Allah, Jehovah, Higher Power, Supreme Being, Brahma, Sira, Tao, Kami, the Creator, Yahweh, Great Spirit, the Universe, the Source of Life, Universal Mind—the list goes on and on. How you think about this energy, the creator of the energy, and its meaning to your life is your special connection, so you can pick a name that feels right to you. You can even change the name whenever you like.

From now on, in this book, insert your chosen name whenever you see the symbol...



Using the name frequently will help you become more comfortable with its use and your special relationship.

Choose a name that feels right to you to call the spiritual energy.

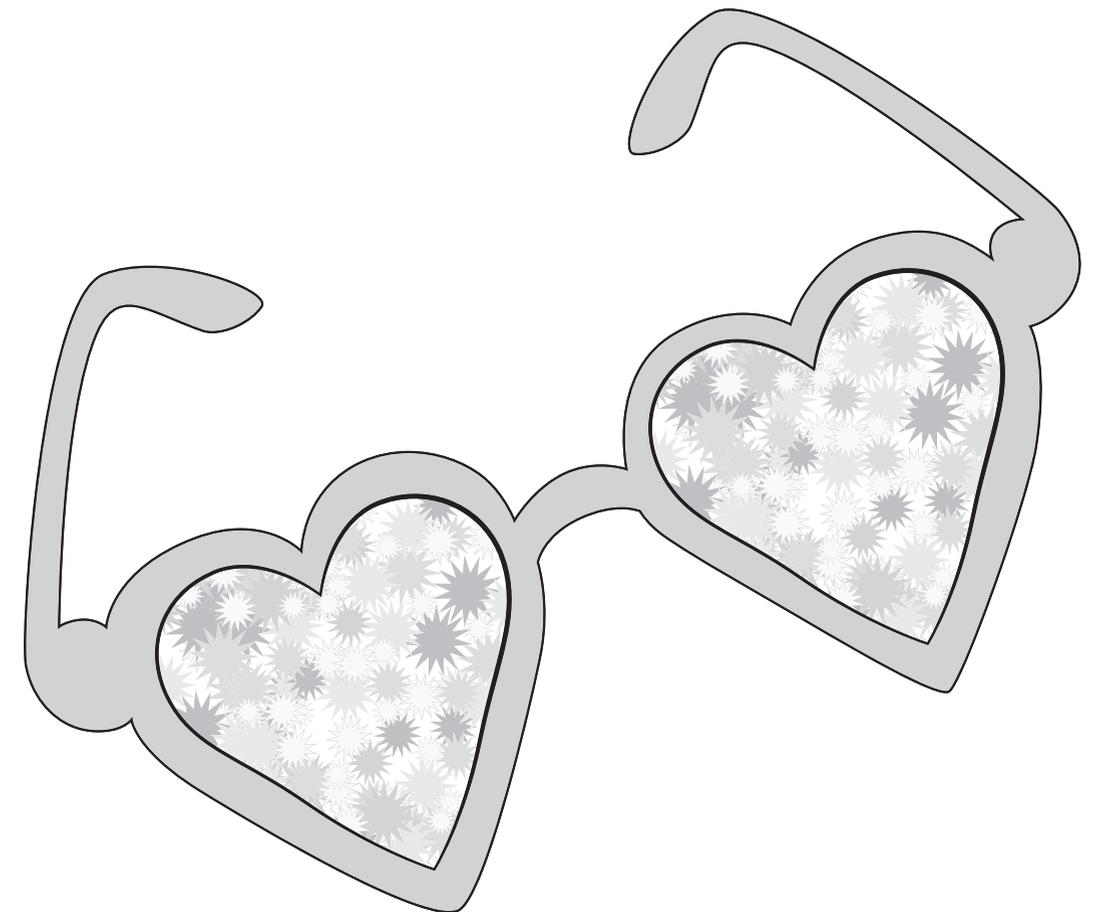
Kristin: Generally, I use the word Universe, but for whatever reason, when I read this book I read Tao (pronounced “Dow”).

Dena: Recently, after trying out a few names, I’ve come to realize that I don’t need a name for ∞. ∞ is within the core of each of us, so the experience of connecting with and feeling a positive energy works for me!

So, what is “Spirituality?”

Your spirituality is your special relationship, understanding of, and connection with ∞ and the world around you. How you know and understand ∞, or your spirituality, can shape your life. This can become the lens through which you see the world. It can influence your thoughts, actions, and life experiences. It will be the inner guidance that points your life in a positive direction.

But remember, this is *your* special way of understanding and relating to ∞, so it only needs to make sense to *you*. Just as your relationship with ∞ is unique, so is that of others. Let’s draw some parallels between the uniqueness of your spirituality and baking a cake...





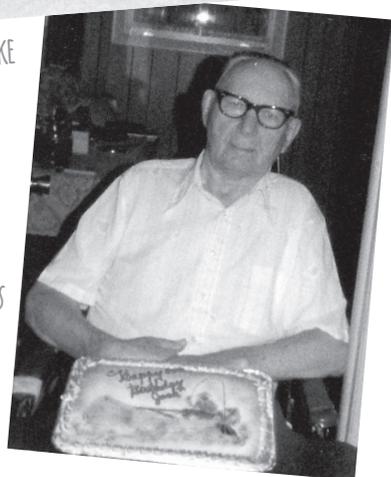
THIS IS KYLE, WHO INSPIRED THIS BOOK.



KYLE AND HIS BROTHER, DAN, MAKING A CAKE



KRISTIN, WITH A CAKE HER MOM MADE!



KRISTIN'S GRANDPA CLEVELAND

Spirituality—It's unique

Imagine that you and your friends and family are in your kitchen. Each of you has a bowl, and each are going to make a cake. As you add ingredients, you notice that some of the others add a few of the same ingredients you have chosen, while adding some different ingredients, too. Everyone may be making a cake, but each cake is a little different depending on what ingredients were added. Your sister may have ended up with a chocolate cake, your best friend a vanilla cake, and your dad carrot cupcakes. They are all cakes, but each one is unique!

Each person's spirituality and relationship with ∞ will be different, just as the cakes were. They might be similar in many ways, but each will be unique depending on what thoughts (ingredients) one puts into their relationship.

Even though everyone's relationship might be different, it does not mean that one is right or wrong. Each person's relationship may be different from one another but as long as you are comfortable with your relationship it is OK if other people's beliefs are different from yours. (Even your parent's beliefs can be different from yours!)

In this book we will offer some possible "ingredients" and you will get to create your own recipe.

Your thoughts will change

You will see and learn new things during your life's journey. Because of this, your spirituality and understanding of ∞ and the world will evolve as you grow and change. So, remain open to exploring new spiritual understandings, adding a new spiritual ingredient to your own relationship with ∞, or even subtracting or substituting a few ingredients. Allow your spirituality to grow as you continue to explore, investigate, and seek answers to a better understanding of yourself and your world. As you read the various beliefs in this book, try them out. Keep the ones you like and let the others go.

What are religions?

Religions offer a set of fixed beliefs (or a recipe) that people can use to help them understand their relationship with ∞ and the world around them. Each religion creates this relationship with ∞ differently and each religion has different rules and beliefs as to how we should act towards one another. (Though some use very similar ingredients.)

Although all religions are different, most religions agree that there is a spiritual energy.

Even if two people have the same religion, their connection and understanding of ∞ and the world around them can be different. It will be unique to them. So, find the beliefs (ingredients) that feel right to you.

DENA, WITH A CAKE MADE OUTSIDE IN A DUTCH OVEN.



DENA'S DAUGHTER, LORI



LORI AND DENA'S GOOD FRIEND, MADDIE





Using Your Resources

Other people, such as your family, friends, religious leaders, philosophers, authors, etc. can be a great resources of knowledge. They, too, have a unique relationship with the world around them. So, listen to others, and learn from others, but remember, your spirituality is unique to you—it is always yours to decide what you believe.



Begin alone, or choose to involve others. Read, take time to think, feel and express your thoughts as they come up. There are no wrong answers, only ideas and thoughts that will allow you to grow, learn, and feel more secure within yourself.



Key Points

Spiritual energy flows through everything.

Spiritual beliefs are unique to each person.

No one knows for sure what creative force started the spiritual energy.

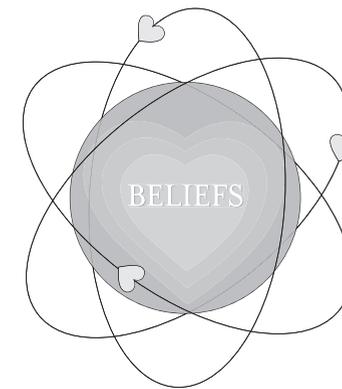
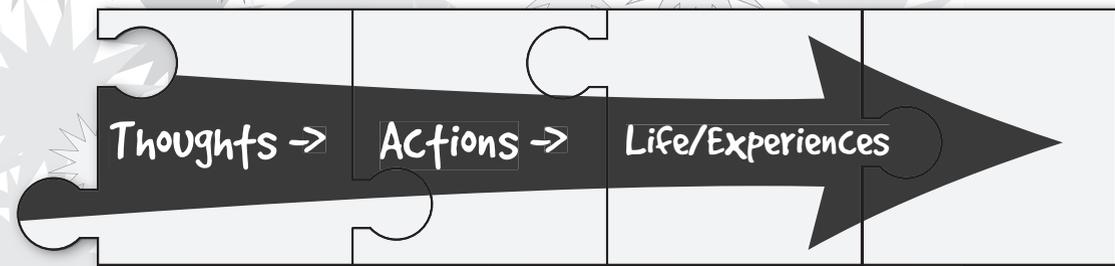
Spirituality is fluid; constantly changing throughout one's life.

There are many different names for spiritual energy. You can choose the name that feels right to you.

Religions offer a set of fixed beliefs.

It is up to you to decide what YOU believe.

Your spirituality is your special connection, understanding of and relationship with ∞ and the world around you.



Chapter 2 You and Your Soul