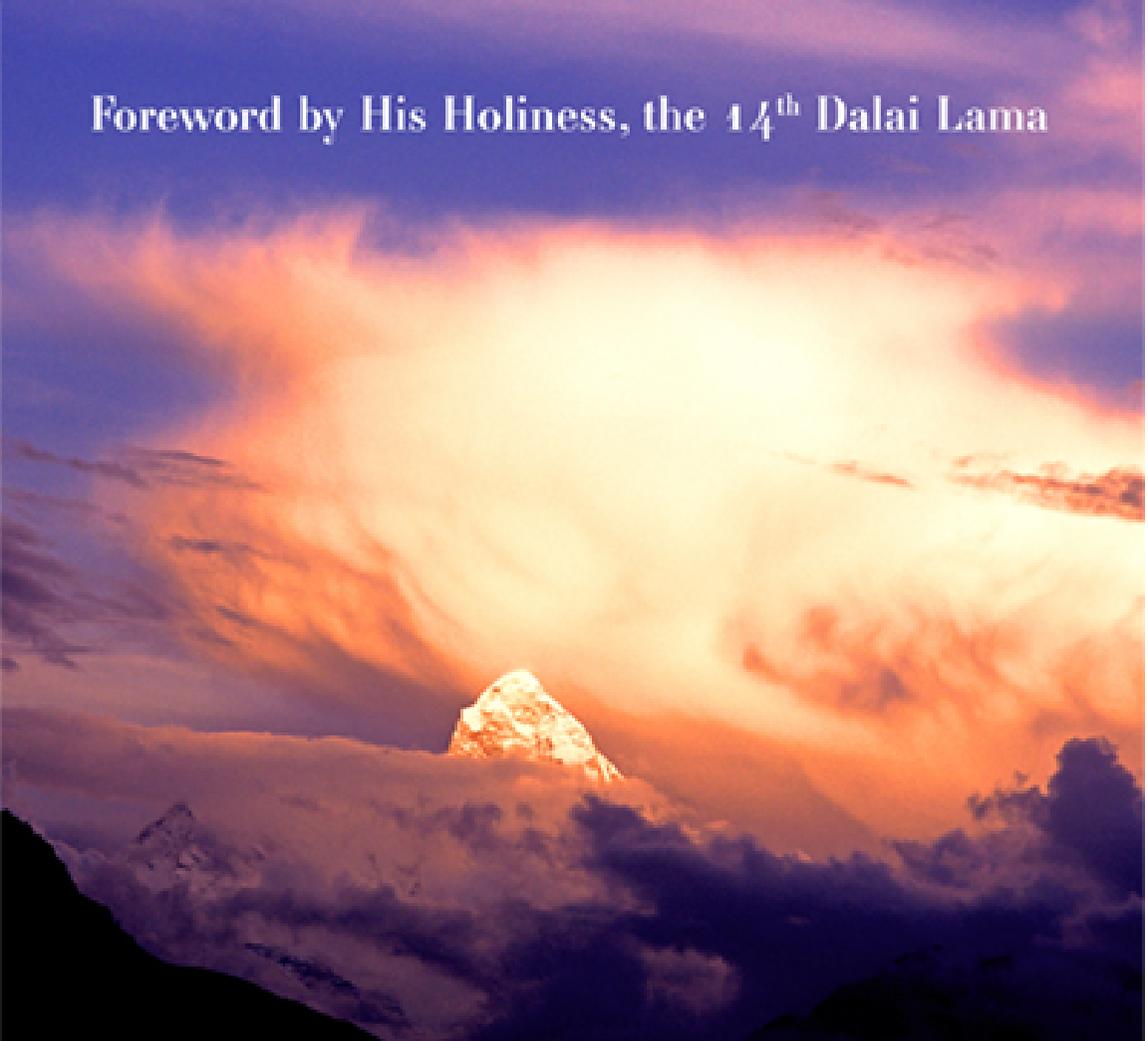


Foreword by His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama



True Light

Ordinary People on the Extraordinary
Spiritual Path of Sulyo Mahikari

LEENA BANERJEE BROWN, PhD
with contributions from ROGER L. BECK, PhD

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Cover photo by Deb Mukharji taken on Canon A1 with f2 135 mm lens on Kodachrome 64 film: While trekking in the Himalaya, Deb Mukharji sensed the light turning mellow as the clouds began to lift one gray September afternoon. He rushed up the trail hoping to get a glimpse of the mountain and was rewarded by the glowing tip of Nanda Devi just moments before the shadows crept up. Named after the consort of Shiva, Nanda Devi not only dominates the skyline, but also the folklore and mythology of the Garhwal region, which is itself a rich storehouse of mythological associations linked to the ancient Sanskrit epic Mahabharata.

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True Light: Ordinary People on the Extraordinary Spiritual Path of Sukyo Mahikari
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Tradepaper ISBN: 978-1-945026-74-4

Electronic ISBN: 978-1-945026-75-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021930981

Published by Light on Light Press
An imprint of Sacred Stories Publishing, Fort Lauderdale, FL

Printed in the United States of America

*To the memory of my father,
the late Lieutenant General Ashish Banerjee, PVSM
whose name **ashish** means blessing, as he was.*

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THE DALAI LAMA

Foreword

A spiritual journey is essentially devoted to developing our genuine concern for others. We cultivate positive qualities such as patience, compassion and loving kindness, while countering negative mental qualities like anger and attachment, which cause us unhappiness and inflict suffering on those around us.

The benefit we derive from practicing more altruism will be an increase in our mental as well as our physical wellbeing. The process can be thought of as “mental hygiene”; just as we must attend to our physical hygiene, it is important that we improve both our heart and mind to develop inner peace.

Dr. Leena Banerjee Brown’s book is an account of the spiritual journeys of a few practitioners who describe how their own happiness and wellbeing have increased as a result of their effort to help others. I hope that this book will be an inspiration to the many who make their way along their spiritual paths.

Handwritten signature of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

1 February 2021

Preface

Long before Roger Beck and I met one another, each of us was separately introduced to the same spiritual practice and spiritual path. For him in 1986 and for me in 2002, initially, our new spiritual practice functioned like a small add-on to our lives. But as the practices began to transform us, the path became central to both of our daily lives. That's what this book is about: what happens when ordinary people embark on an extraordinary path by integrating spiritual practice into daily life. Roger's path and mine happen to converge on the practices of Sukyo Mahikari—an organization devoted to the divine inspiration revealed to 20th-century Japanese teacher Kōtama Okada—yet we strongly identify with millions of people pursuing countless other paths for whom the transformative experience of spiritual practice is equally powerful. I speak for all of the people whose stories are held in the pages of this book when I say we're not interested in promoting one path over another. We simply must share our stories lest we greedily hoard the blessings we've received through spiritual practice.

If you want to read a detailed description of the history, mission, and vision of Sukyo Mahikari, we recommend an excellent book written by Dr. Sidney Chang called *God's Light and Universal Principles for All Humanity: An Introduction to Sukyo Mahikari*. If you'd like to walk beside people who have experienced inner and outer transformation through the practice of giving and receiving True Light (which we sometimes just call "Light") and bear witness to their stories in the context of your own life, the book you now hold in your hand will be a fine companion for you. Less a treatise on Sukyo Mahikari and

more a narrative compilation of many personal experiences and insights, it speaks to the impact of deep spiritual practice on individual lives and minds, the natural environment, and the world as a whole. Although our stories reflect a particular spiritual practice, our experiences suggest that integration of spirituality in daily life holds tremendous potential to change lives for the better, whatever the chosen spiritual practice may be. And so, we offer here a general endorsement of integrating spirituality in daily life by way of sharing a range of stories emerging from a specific path.

It's not uncommon for people to begin a spiritual journey as a consequence of some sort of physical, mental, or emotional loss (or the perception thereof). Coincidentally, for both Roger and me, the first leg of our spiritual journey coincided with a trip to our respective doctor's offices whereby physical health challenges served as a window into the spiritual dimension of life. As we each recovered from chronic ailments, not through medical treatment alone but primarily through spiritual practice, our lives were transformed. We weren't opposed to choosing medical options; that's where the journey began. Roger and I both remained open to using traditional medicine when needed, but it was the powerful impact of spiritual practice that awakened us. The blessings we received left us with a deep and pure sense of gratitude and a desire to pay it forward to others, hoping they would reap great benefits as well.

But improved health was only the beginning. Over time, as spiritual practice became integrated into our daily lives, we began to recognize a deeper transformation. Just as the practices we regularly engaged in removed physical impurities that had caused us bodily harm, these practices began to gradually eliminate physical, mental, and spiritual impurities. And just as the removal of physical impurities restored our physical health, through the removal of mental and spiritual impurities we became more conscious of our true selves—spiritual beings connected with the perfect will of God. We eventually understood that through our spiritual practice we were being filled with wisdom, love,

forgiveness, altruism, and a refined sense of our personal will flowing to us from something much larger than our individual selves.

Step by step, we studied universal principles like gratitude, acceptance, and humility, and worked to incorporate these principles in our thoughts and actions. Our innermost attitudes began to change, which supported changes in the boundaries of our consciousness. Gradually, our lives were more and more directed toward God and centered on altruism. We have seen impacts on many aspects of our lives such as well-being, education, and connection with nature through the natural environment, agriculture, and food.

It would not be an exaggeration to say our lives have been significantly transformed for the better, allowing us to live with a deep and authentic sense of purpose. The changes we've experienced continually fill us with surprise, wonder, and gratitude. And, of course, we are not alone in this experience. So, I have invited a number of people from the greater Sukyo Mahikari community to join us by sharing their experiences. Each of us has his or her own unique experiences, consistent with the truth that each individual's needs for spiritual growth are unique. At the same time we deeply share common ground. We have learned to rely on divine action, however one wishes to define or describe it, to make the best arrangements for each person's growth, including the pace at which growth occurs.

Awareness of this deeply personal relationship with the divine comes with a caveat: there is simply no way to name the source of this divine action that would adequately recognize the nameless quality of the source of all. Please forgive any disrespect or clumsiness on my part as I choose to apply the proper noun "God" to describe That Which Cannot Be Described. Language is sorely limited in its ability to convey the ineffable, but after consulting with several friends and editors, I have decided that the simplest way to go is "God." If this nomenclature causes you any discomfort or disagreement, please feel free to mentally substitute a word that is preferable to you. Some have suggested

“Universal Will”, “Ground of Being”, “Source”, “Comforter”, or “Divine Parent.” I’m told the founders of 12-Step recovery programs wrestled with the same desire to offer inclusive terminology to describe the entity they knew as “God.” In the interest of reaching as many people as possible with their message of freedom from addiction, they settled upon the phrase “Higher Power.” Please know that I share their desire to be as inclusive and general as possible, but I have returned to the word “God” in the name of simplicity and non-distraction.

Reading about others’ spiritual transformation can be a strange experience. As you thumb through the pages of this book, you may ask yourself “Why should I trust what this author has to say about such deeply personal, sensitive things?” Or you may wonder “How will I ever live up to the amazing stories these people share?” Or you may find it difficult to believe the miraculous transformations documented and conveyed through the written word. I can certainly relate to these sentiments. And so, I simply invite you to read these stories through the lens of your own experience. Spirituality is indeed a deeply personal topic. Your spirit, your mind, and your body are just as important to this book as are the spirits, minds, and bodies of the people who have contributed to its content. Please consider yourself an integral part of this compilation, in which your personal stories are welcome alongside those you are reading. Some parts of the book may resonate deeply with you, while others may leave you scratching your head. Isn’t that how life is?! The spiritual life is equally complex and diverse, yet many universal truths unite us.

As you read these stories, may you be blessed as you consider the role of spiritual practice in your own life. This is my humble wish for you, dear reader.

Dr. Leena Banerjee Brown, 2021

Introductory Words

Wayne Teasdale, in *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*, wrote that in the near future diverse leaders, from many cultures, would come forward proposing holistic and universal understandings of the world's great wisdom traditions. As the global interspiritual discussion has evolved, many have recognized that among such major figures in the global evolution of a universal spirituality, a notable one is Japan's Kōtama Okada. Kōtama Okada is the founder of the global Sukyo Mahikari movement which, as "Sukyo Mahikari Centers for Spiritual Development," originated in Japan and has since spread expansively worldwide, today having over one million members and centers in seventy-five nations.

Like other pioneering figures of our modern day who became pathfinders in their own unique ways, Kōtama Okada's roots stem from a particular national and cultural religious heritage, but also from a unique personal direct experience which led him to not only articulate his universal teachings but create a global community around them. Anyone who familiarizes themselves with the foundational writings of Kōtama Okada immediately recognizes their similarity with the language, worldview, cosmology, and yes—even the general view of the future—now commonly associated with the phenomena of interfaith and interspirituality around the world. These include, in short, a whole-world global perspective on the shared heritage of all spiritual traditions and perennial philosophies, the desire that they help create "a world that works for all" in a cosmopolitan global age, and, in that, emphasize shared universal principles and advise universal action steps that are deeply holistic

and all-inclusive—much akin to the ancient and often nature-based wisdoms of indigenous peoples.

History of Kōtama Okada and Sukyo Mahikari

Kōtama Okada's birth was accompanied by a mystical occurrence. His mother had a dream in which she said she experienced a message from a “Messenger Deity” (or spirit) from the ancestral lineage to which she belonged. In fact, Kōtama Okada was descended (on both his mother's and father's sides) from two of the three lineages of “great unifiers” recorded in Japanese history—Nobunaga Oda and Ieyasu Tokugawa. These two lineages of military and political leaders of the Warring Period (1467-1568 CE) and Post-Warring Period of Japan were instrumental in unifying the nation. This unification led to a period of internal peace, political stability, and economic growth that lasted three-hundred years. Okada is thus seen, historically, as shouldering the responsibilities of his heritage—the reputation, stature, and influence of his ancestral lineage.

This background is reflected in Okada's brilliant military career, which was cut short by the sudden onset of severe illness. Gravely ill, he was told by medical specialists that he had only three years to live and he was transferred to the reserves. Forced to reshape his life, Okada liquidated his entire ancestral inheritance and invested these resources in a number of business ventures. In a relatively short time the companies he created became so successful that he was nationally recognized as an important business leader. In addition, contrary to expectations, his physical condition improved considerably and, eventually, all signs of his serious illness disappeared.

In August 1945, however, all of his companies were destroyed in the air raids concluding World War II. Okada found himself physically exhausted with a mountain of debt. Also homeless, he spent his nights sleeping under a bridge.

As he reflected on all of this, he came to deep personal conclusions about what had befallen him. First, he felt he had forgotten God in the midst of his previous successes. He also felt there was need for him to compensate for negative karma associated with the warring activities of his ancestors in how they had carried out their efforts and activities to unite Japan. This was the beginning of Kōtama Okada's personal spiritual evolution.

Typifying how the history of our world's religions has often unfolded, and also Wayne Teasdale's emphasis on the importance of "prophetic voice" in his now well-known *Nine Elements of a Universal Spirituality*¹, Okada was then guided by what he interpreted as revelatory experiences. The most important of these occurred on February 22nd, 1959 when he fell into a deep unconscious state for five days. For Okada, the content in this experience was numinous, meaning it was experienced as both a direct personal epiphany and a directive to personal action. The experiences of February 1959 led Okada to conclude that a calling, a mission, had been revealed to him—to establish a spiritual movement that would promulgate into the world a new wave of universal teachings.

Further typifying the origins of many of our world's influential spiritual movements, Okada at first questioned his own experiences and tested them, both personally and with his surrounding community. He began his new work by combining the message of his emerging teachings with his business skills, establishing cottage industries to serve the impoverished people around him. The success of these businesses, and their unquestionable linkage to the optimism and hope found in his teachings, increased certainty about his sense of calling and established him as a trusted community and spiritual leader. This gave further confidence to Okada and his followers about the efficacy and importance of their novel and innovative beliefs. These included a view of the Creator's universal laws and a future plan framed in an emphasis on universal principles and advised universal action steps, a way of living more in harmony

with nature and natural laws, and spiritual practices that provided deep senses not only of personal well-being but of collective harmony. In the face of a perilous time and threatening future, these promised the chance, Okada taught, for humanity to make a “Great U-turn” back to basics.

Typifying again the history of many new religious movements, Okada continued to have directly personal experiences concerning his sense of calling, which further shaped his work. Some experiences were dramatic or even severe, including one concerning what became his new first name: “Kōtama.” In this direct experience he was told:

You will be made to speak the depth of the teachings, which was not revealed before. The Spirit of Truth has entered you. You shall speak what you hear. The time of heaven has come. Rise. Your name shall be Kōtama. Raise your hand. The world shall enter severe times.²

Okada was surprised by this, and other experiences that followed, but he elected to continue following his calling. This devotion soon led him to discover friendships among the adherents and leadership of ancient Shinto (the ancient indigenous spiritual tradition of Japan) which, again to his surprise, revealed a deep context within historical Shinto prophecy by which he could further understand the meaning of his experiences. Some priests from a tradition of esoteric Shinto suggested that he participate in a series of well-established ritual tests to determine the authenticity of his experiences. He agreed.³ The Shinto priests were interested because there exists in Shinto a teaching that a person with the mission of *Yō* would appear on earth at about this time.

The Shinto tests were repeated several times, beginning in June 1960, and each time they produced the same result, not only convincing the priests but also confirming through their own inquiries the validity of many of Okada’s

predictions. Thus, Okada, now known as Kōtama Okada, became the founder of a new religious movement that was not only prophetic in its cosmology—looking toward the world’s globalized future—but also innovative in fresh methods of personal and collective spiritual practice. These practices, which became known as the art of True Light, were both uniquely nuanced and akin to the energy related practices of a number of the world religions. Typifying the origin histories of many spiritual traditions, the art of True Light – the purification of spirit, mind, and body with divine energy, through Okada’s movement, achieved such positive results in the lives of adherents that the movement and its teachings spread quickly and widely.

Kōtama Okada’s Message

According to Okada’s teachings, it is important now for society to nurture spirit-centered people who can take on the responsibility of being pioneers in the twenty-first century. Seeing the global landscape emerging after the World Wars, Okada wanted to share a vision that transcended human-made barriers and boundaries between ethnic groups, cultures, religions, and nationalities. He clearly perceived that such teachings could help humankind awaken to a global sense of oneness and the desire to pursue a planet-wide civilization based on unity consciousness.

According to these teachings, the Creator has a plan that spans billions of years. The ultimate goal of the plan is that human beings, who are the Creator’s children, will create a heavenly civilization on earth, a civilization that is a physical reflection of the highest of ideals, those that have historically been associated with the divine, where people live in accordance with perennial teachings of love and thus enjoy eternal prosperity. In this cosmology, after providing the earth with its bountiful supply of natural resources, the Creator intended its human inhabitants to use their diverse talents and physical skills to

properly utilize and steward the earth's resources. This is a co-creator cosmology in which humans have an important and highly responsible role to fulfill.

Because of this context, Okada's cosmology can be described as a developmental cosmology, much in tune with the modern views of the evolutionary consciousness, integral, and developmental movements. It takes into account that, historically, humanity would ebb and flow through different paradigms of attainment, one replacing another. There would be appropriate times for materialistic development followed by appropriate times for the reintegration of spiritual and moral values. Thus, as history has shown, people developed civilizations in many parts of the world in which the quest to produce and accumulate material things played an important role. In the process of developing these civilizations, people often became excessively materialistic and frequently exploited other people and nature. Okada said, for instance, that by placing material values above ethical, moral, or spiritual values, people would end up polluting not only the earth, the oceans, and the atmosphere, but also their core values—their souls. If people continue to live contrary to universal principles, he said, it would become increasingly difficult for them to establish a sustainable civilization on earth. Indeed, he said, if humanity continues to ultimately travel along the purely materialistic path, one day this path might lead to the destruction of humankind.

But in turn, he said, if humanity would take responsibility for the repercussions of its materialistic achievements and return to a deep sense of ethics, morals, and spiritual values, there could be a healthy movement on to the next stage of history. This stage of history, he said, could be one of a sustainable and healthy global civilization, one dedicated to the well-being of all. According to Okada's teachings, in 1962 humankind entered a new era, a period of major transition, a time wherein spiritual wisdom and values would begin to take precedence over material values and eventually encompass them. When he founded the Mahikari organization in 1959, Kōtama Okada's intention

was to find and nurture people who could become seed persons, or pioneers, for the new spiritual civilization. He hoped that such pioneers would elevate themselves spiritually by truly dedicating themselves to practicing divine principles in daily life. Through their efforts to work for the accomplishment of such a future for the world, seed people, he said, could help create the best possible outcome for an ethical, moral, and heart-centered global civilization at this critical stage in history. This vision is one that has helped make the modern vision of the Sukyo Mahikari movement inspiring to millions.

Day-to-Day Life

Typifying a spiritual community for the global age, Sukyo Mahikari is an organization where people from all walks of life and different backgrounds come together to develop themselves spiritually so they can realize their true potential as human beings. By developing themselves spiritually, people have the opportunity to improve their lives and to enjoy better health and well-being. In addition, they have the opportunity to find an effective way to help others and to live in greater harmony with their family, colleagues, and their environment. Helping others and living in harmony with one's surroundings are some of the best ways to achieve personal growth and real happiness. A major principle of the movement is its commitment to green living and sustainability. For instance, its New York City center is a model LEED-certified green building celebrated by designers and architects worldwide for its pioneering approaches to buildings and building materials.

In the day-to-day life of its adherents, the lifestyle tools that Sukyo Mahikari would like to share with everyone include its spiritual energy practices—the art of True Light—and its teachings concerning universal principles that could achieve the type of future world that so many long for. For Sukyo Mahikari adepts, the practice of giving and receiving divine Light allows people to

gradually awaken to the existence of the spiritual dimension—the world of the subtle and spiritual realms and the reality of God, Source, or Creator, the subtle vibrations of their soul or true self, as well as the subtle vibrations of their innermost attitude and those of others. The integration of these felt experiences and understandings has a profound influence on human life. It leads to appreciation of the close interconnection and relationship between spirit, mind, and body, and particularly the importance of one's inner life. Regarding day-to-day life, a major Sukyo Mahihari principle is expressed as the principle of “spirit first, mind next, body follows.” Utilizing both the teachings and practices, people can cultivate a positive and holistic attitude and elevate the vibration of their innermost attitude in the direction of pure, altruistic love and harmony. As a result, they can be people of high self-esteem and confidence and find deeper purpose and meaning in their lives.

The Interspirituality of Okada's Teachings

Of particular interest in this time of prominent interspiritual, integral, and holistic movements is the major premise of the message from Okada's teachings concerning all religions rediscovering their common origin. Another is Okada's insistence on emphasizing, in a direct manner, teachings concerning the profound interconnectedness of everything, not only in what we know from modern science, but in emphasizing the direct experience of the contemplative or mystical dimension of human consciousness.⁴ For Okada, and the Sukyo Mahikari tradition, this means truly holistic and integral approaches to all aspects of life and living. It is these aspects of Okada's teachings that are so fully in tune with the entire landscape of modern holistic movements such as Integral, Spiral Dynamics, Whole-World View, Prosocial, Good of the Whole, and so many more seen around the world today. Readers of Okada's works and commentaries on them from across his movement are often surprised by

the similarity of his language and worldview with modern interspiritual and integral writers like Wayne Teasdale and Ken Wilber.

Okada's direct manner of how to view spiritual experience defined his stated mission—to give people, through their connection with their experience of God, the opportunity to utilize the practice of True Light.⁵ Because of the consistency between ancient Shinto teachings and those that had arisen independently through Okada's personal experiences, Sukyo Mahikari gained respect within the historical understanding of Japan's rich religious heritage. The fact that the revelations confirmed by the ritual tests were identical to those received by him was a surprise to the Shinto priests. However, this became part of a new and general direction in the understanding of new religious movements in Japan among modern religious scholars. A larger landscape has emerged in which Sukyo Mahikari and a number of other modern religious movements in Japan—because of their implicit historical and cultural relationship to the larger history of religions in Japan—are today often generically identified by religious scholars as the New Shinto religious movements. In Okada's case, indeed, these independent tests of him and his teachings by the traditional Shinto communities later proved to be an important factor in persuading many influential people in Japan to accept Okada's vision and collaborate with him.

Sukyo Mahikari in Further Perspective

It is not a surprise to find yet another global movement whose principles and visions mirror the emerging sense of an arising Interspiritual Age as envisioned in the interspiritual work of Wayne Teasdale and many other modern interfaith and interspiritual writers and leaders. Modern interfaith and interspiritual communities recognize over fifty such pioneers over several centuries whose works emphasize the commonalities between them all.⁶ Kōtama Okada's message mirrors that of all the major interspiritual pioneers. *Sukyo* itself means

“the universal laws established by the Creator at the time of the Creation so that all things in the universe can prosper eternally,” and *Mahikari* (being a combination of *Ma* which is Truth and *hikari* which is Light) means “True Light,” the Light of the Creator which purifies all things.

Because the objective of Sukyo Mahikari is to help people awaken to universal (or divine) principles, and to encourage them to respect and practice these principles in daily life, it is an example of today’s global trend toward expression of universal truth and the hope for a healthy global civilization. Typifying the vision of the entire pantheon of historical interspiritual pioneers, the movement built on the vision of Kōtama Okada is one of holistic interspiritual principles, joining in one universal cosmology the realms of science, religion, education, history, politics, and the many other things that people pursue in order to make the world potentially a happier and better place to live. Interestingly—but not surprisingly, given the vision of an Interspiritual Age—Sukyo Mahikari originally sprang from the roots of one culture, indeed the ancient wisdom traditions of Japanese culture. It is precisely because of this ancient rooting that it simultaneously represents something born anew—by the universal views of its founder. This has caused Sukyo Mahikari to succeed worldwide. We hope we can look toward Sukyo Mahikari, among many other movements like it worldwide today, to lead humanity toward the kind of sustainable, ethical, and moral world for which everyone in their heart of hearts yearns.

Dr. Kurt Johnson, 2021

Chapter 1

Giving and Receiving True Light

The spiritual path of Sukyo Mahikari is compatible with many religious paths. If one meets the practices of giving and receiving True Light as a Christian, one may remain Christian along the path. If one meets the practices of giving and receiving True Light as a Hindu, one may remain Hindu along the path. If one meets the practices of giving and receiving True Light as a Muslim, one may remain Muslim along the path. If one meets the practices of giving and receiving True Light as a Buddhist, one may remain Buddhist along the path. And so it goes for all spiritual paths and practices. If one meets the practices of giving and receiving True Light with no specific religious or spiritual path, one need not adopt a specific tradition to encounter God on the path of Sukyo Mahikari.

Following a spiritual path develops the mind's reflective capacity to shift our innermost attitudes from material-centeredness to spirit-centeredness. As a result, we more easily perceive the deeper meaning in our experiences and others' experiences. This helps us become more conscious of the connection between the true self, in the depths of our minds and bodies, and God. We

are also better able to empathically connect with others' experiences and true selves, making others feel deeply seen and heard. Our relationships with others are enhanced, contributing to our well-being. Such development of our human core nurtures our sense of connection with nature (and its stewardship) and with humanity.

Not only do tangible benefits flow to those individuals who integrate spirituality in daily life, but also—as more and more people do this—huge benefits will accrue to humanity as a whole, to science, and to nature. The shift from material-centeredness to spirit-centeredness broadens the human heart and mind, bringing to consciousness the genuine, deep, and meaningful connections between humans, as well as deep harmony between humans and nature. People who discover their true selves will develop the motivation to fulfill their true purpose. These inner changes manifest externally in countless ways, including restoration of the environment, adoption of less toxic agricultural practices, and production of less contaminated, healthier food.

Becoming conscious of our own connection to God makes us conscious of others' connections to God as well. Because all human beings are born into divine connection, we recognize that we are all spiritual siblings. Our increased feeling of love toward others makes it easier to foster true harmony and peace in our daily lives. War, conflict, and forceful taking from others become less tolerable for us. We recognize the significance and value of each person's contribution to the well-being of the whole. By integrating spirituality in daily life, we participate in the improvement of the overall condition of humanity.

Everybody's Spiritual Journey Starts Somewhere

It's fascinating to hear peoples' stories of how they took their first steps on a path of daily spiritual practice. Some people describe a deep shift in perspective caused by a global event, like the tragic day known as 9-11, or a natural disaster

like the 2011 tsunami, or even a deeply personal loss of a loved one. Others are moved by a poignant experience with nature, a sunset that spoke directly to their soul, or a pilgrimage to a significant spiritual shrine. Others may not be able to pinpoint the exact moment they decided to devote themselves to daily spiritual practice, but instead, over time came to recognize they had joined millions of other spiritual practitioners by simply walking in their footsteps toward a life well-lived.

I share my story with you not to impress you with its significance, but to befriend you through its authenticity. With his permission, I'd also like to share with you parts of my friend Roger Beck's story as he has shared it with me. While he and I hold much in common as people whose lives have been transformed by our dedication to spiritual practice, our stories begin in very different places. And to add to the diversity of the larger story of Sukyo Mahikari, I'd also like to share snippets of stories from a handful of friends and family who, when they heard I had begun to write about my experience giving and receiving True Light, generously offered their own reflections.

Everyone's spiritual practice starts somewhere. It's humbling to know that we are all really beginners, in the sense that developing a spiritual practice is a process that reveals itself progressively. By this I mean the farther we go on the spiritual journey, the more we realize how far there is to go! But it is a joyous journey, one definitely worth considering. I think most of us can look back into our earliest childhood memories and remember spiritual moments or insights that came to us organically. For me, times spent with my grandparents hold many such memories.

In 2002, during a particularly busy time in my life, the intermittent seasonal allergies I had suffered since young adulthood took a turn for the worse. While I'm grateful my extreme hay fever was not a life threatening disease, it was a life altering chronic condition that was limiting my ability to engage in life as I wished to. During a particularly severe bout, my doctor prescribed a course

of steroids. The medicine had the desired response of reducing inflammation and managing the symptoms of my allergies, but my body spoke to me in very clear terms as the corticosteroids entered my system. It was as if an internal fire alarm went off warning me of extreme toxicity. I didn't fully appreciate the significance of this moment, but I did recognize my body's response to this drug as a spontaneous moment of deep spiritual insight. It was as if I was seeing through the window of my soul. And so, I resolved that no matter how allergies might plague me in the future, and despite the pressure of being a professor of psychology, consulting psychologist, wife, and mother of three small children, I would not ingest such toxic medicine again. It was a pledge to myself made in a moment of deep clarity. Although I did not realize it then, it was also a pledge to honor and preserve the sacred gift of my true self, in both mind and body.

Looking back, I'm deeply grateful a relatively benign health crisis was enough to get my attention. Countless memoirs have been written by people who were awakened to the spirit-mind-body connection through extreme suffering or even near death experiences. What is extraordinary about my story is its beautiful ordinariness. I am not some chosen being who was singled out by fate to walk a rarified path. Quite the contrary. I'm an ordinary person who was blessed enough to be paying attention to the subtle yet clear message that forever changed my life.

But my allergies persisted. Without the steroids to keep my nasal passages, sinuses, and lungs clear, I sneezed and dripped my way through another season of hay fever. The beautiful flowers and trees of my Southern California home taunted me as I juggled clients, students, and family with one hand while reaching for a handkerchief with the other. So when a sympathetic colleague looked into my bloodshot eyes and asked me if I would be willing to participate in an experiment that might alleviate my symptoms, I was enthusiastically receptive. But this time it wasn't a drug. I was introduced to the spiritual practice of True Light taught by Sukyo Mahikari.

The first time I received True Light, I experienced profound connection with the infinite. It was an experience of coming alive to the depths of truth, love, and harmony within. It was powerful! I felt as though I had been laboring up the mountain of my daily life and then suddenly I was given a drink of water from a mountain spring—so pure, so thirst-quenching, and deeply refreshing. The energy and experience were so powerful it was like being fully immersed in water I was simultaneously drinking. On the physical plane, while I did not ask for water it was suddenly given. On the spiritual plane, it felt as if all my life's efforts and those of my forebears had been undertaken ultimately to reach that mountain spring.

I think so many of us are walking up mountains like this every day. When my colleague offered to help me with my allergies, I was grateful to explore something beyond what doctors had prescribed, something different from all the other holistic methods and remedies I had tried. But it was truly my colleague's love, care, and attentiveness as a person that opened my mind and heart to the transformation available to us all. Sukyo Mahikari is simply the messenger. It's the True Light that truly transforms.

I now know it was pure compassion that motivated my colleague Lorri to introduce me to True Light. Lorri was the kindest of people to work with—always thoughtful even when our work was challenging and stressful. I remember the day Lorri suggested I receive True Light. I was feeling small and tired under the burden of my ongoing allergies and an exceptionally difficult caseload. As a consulting psychologist at a Southern California non-profit where more and more high risk, substance addicted, developmentally challenged babies, children, and adults were being served, it was easy to become discouraged. That day I was catching up on paperwork at Lorrie's office, which was in a lovely old Spanish-style adobe mansion with a red clay tile roof and a stand of palm trees towering above. Lorri strode into the room dressed in a long, flowing coral-colored suit jacket and black silken slacks. Her eyes shone even brighter

than the fine jewelry that accented her stylish wardrobe, filling the room with beauty, optimism, and hope. The energy of the room immediately shifted when Lorri arrived—like a ray of sunshine, as they say. When she saw my tired face and weary smile, she leaned over and, gently touching my shoulder, said “Why don’t you receive some Light today?” Without hesitation I followed her into an adjoining room with warm wood-toned wainscoting adorning the lower walls and soft white upper walls and ceilings that drew my eyes toward the rustic tin chandelier that hung over a massive walnut conference table. Lorri introduced me to her friend Eiko, an older, shorter woman dressed in a plain skirt and top similar to what I was wearing. I immediately sensed Eiko’s warmth, and soon thereafter recognized a loving presence about her that was quite immovable. I took a seat at the table with very little idea of what was about to happen.

I knew Lorri and Eiko had been good friends for many years and that they were both members of a spiritual community with a name that sounded Japanese to me. I trusted Lorri, and although I had just met Eiko, I settled in the chair in front of her and within a few minutes felt relaxed and comfortable in her presence. When Eiko invited me to receive Light, I was entirely ready to experience something new. I didn’t know what it would be, but I was open. Facing her with my eyes closed, I listened as she chanted a powerful prayer of purification asking that I be purified with True Light. Then she radiated invisible energy, True Light, from the palm of her hand held about a foot in front of my forehead. She radiated True Light first to my forehead, then to the back of my head and neck, then to my lower back in the vicinity of my kidneys. The process lasted for about half an hour. At the end of the session, we each offered a prayer of gratitude to God, and thanked each other.

I felt dynamically activated inside, but was speechless at first—unable to articulate this experience which was truly beyond words. How could I communicate the pristine, powerful silence inside me? Slowly, by the end of the

day, my energy level rose and my breathing became clear and unencumbered by the allergies that had been plaguing me. I cycled through the same experience several times over several months. When professional and family life challenges would cause my stress levels to rise, my immunities would fall and I would begin sneezing and my sinus passages would become totally blocked again. Then I would be lucky enough to receive True Light for about half an hour. Again, by the end of the day I would not only be free from hay fever and sinusitis, I would be energized and refreshed. I would feel happy and healthy.

Although my husband David was skeptical of invisible energy, surprisingly, he encouraged my exploration of Sukyo Mahikari. As an optical engineer, David tends to be more focused on the concrete than on the esoteric, yet he noticed early on the correlation between my spiritual practice of True Light and my allergic responses beginning to subside. When he would notice me getting stressed and coming down with allergies, he would sometimes ask “Have you received Light lately?” This would remind me to reach out to a Light giver to do so. Over time, his skepticism abated somewhat, as he could not deny the change he noticed in me. His engineering mindset caused him to test causation theories with an analytical approach. After much scrutiny, he was able to prove to his own satisfaction the connection between my well-being and receiving True Light.

After receiving Light for the first time, never again would I pursue the practice merely as a way to heal my allergies. I knew right away that there was a greater purpose. The conscious reconnection with the divine was so blissful that my first and most powerful impulse was to further pursue this reconnection. My next impulse was to learn how to offer this same gift to others. That would come soon enough! But first I would devote my efforts to receiving True Light as a way to begin to unite my life on spiritual and physical planes.

Roger Beck's Early Encounters with True Light

I've met some amazing True Light practitioners along the way, many of whom have become dear friends to me and my family. When I began to feel called to write a book about my experiences giving and receiving True Light, initially I thought I would just tell my own story. But when I talked with Roger Beck about it, I knew his story was also integral to this book. In fact, that encounter is a story in and of itself!

In Sukyo Mahikari there are professional groups in which people of similar backgrounds gather and form relationships of support and encouragement—educators' groups, health practitioners' groups, and scholars' groups, for example. I was invited to be part of the scholars' group, which was an interdisciplinary gathering available to serious practitioners where Roger was already a long-time member. The first time I went to the scholars' group, it was a small gathering of about eight or ten people. At one point I was sitting beside Roger and learned that he was an economist with a deeply profound practice of giving True Light. He had been practicing for quite some time at that point, whereas I was fairly new to the practice. As I sensed the depth and authenticity of his practice, I asked him how he was able to share the practice of giving True Light with his colleagues in his academic field—something I was eager to do. He responded quite matter-of-factly, "I have not been able to pass on my practice to any of my colleagues." This was astonishing to me. I could tell, having just met him, that Roger is one of the most pure souls on the planet. If he can't share the practice, how would I?

As I've gotten to know Roger quite well over the years, I have seen time and time again that he is indeed what I would call "a clear spring"—a person with an especially pure character. Many years ago he and I participated in a scholar's meeting in New York where I was speaking about self-reflection. I remember how quickly Roger engaged in an exercise in which I asked the group to call

upon a childhood memory. Everyone engaged, but I remember vividly that Roger had immediate access to his own soul memories. This comes through as a joyous, childlike quality in him at times, which makes him very accessible as a scholar and quite endearing as a friend. I expected that his family and friends would see and admire this and want to at least borrow some of Roger's "divine spark" from him. But no. He told me that none of his family and friends had received the gift of giving True Light as a result of his example. Perhaps this was the moment that, unbeknownst to me, a seed was planted in my mind to share Roger's beautiful story through the book you now hold in your hands.

When I traveled to Japan to take an advanced Sukyo Mahikari course at the World Shrine Suza in Takayama in the Japanese Alps, Roger was there reviewing the course. After the course was complete, a large group of us traveled by bus to a very sacred Shinto shrine called Ise. Along the way, we stopped at the Sukyo Mahikari center where we were welcomed very warmly. People were paired up to give and receive True Light, and somehow, Roger and I were assigned to one another. As we gave each other Light, I recognized that this was part of a divine arrangement.

The Ise shrines are where the Japanese emperors receive covenants from God before a new reign begins. Toward the end of our time at Ise, we were taken to the sanctuary of the princess who had been given the responsibility of finding this sacred place by her father. Princess Yamatohime-no-mikoto's shrine was a beautiful forested area, which we walked through in deep serenity. As twilight fell and we were preparing to leave, I looked back at the gate of the princess' shrine and saw the setting sun streaming through in radiant beams. I wanted to capture the moment on film, but my camera was full. So I asked one of my traveling companions if she would be willing to take a photograph for me on her camera. She told me her camera was also full but, in a light-hearted way, she suggested we ask the princess for help. As she successfully snapped the photo, we both laughed and beamed at our good fortune. At that moment,

I noticed in the corner of my eye Roger smiling too. He had quietly observed us enjoying the natural beauty of this sacred space, with a genuine appreciation for the divine at play. When I noticed that Roger had smiled as he observed our wondrous experience, I was inspired to ask him to join me in writing about this beautiful spiritual path we share.

I asked Roger to begin by sharing with me his very first experience with receiving True Light. He responded by giving me a bit of his background story, beginning in the fall of 1979 when he was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Because he knew people who were badly impaired by arthritis, his diagnosis both shocked and frightened him. He was determined to do everything in his power to avoid the debilitating grasp of arthritis. Similar to my initial approach to my health issues, Roger's first step was to set up a medical team to help him manage this disease. But when all the medical community offered him was over-the-counter pain medication to treat the symptoms, which really didn't help at all, he began to explore non-pharmaceutical solutions by connecting with a wide variety of alternative health practitioners.

Over time, Roger experienced gradually worsening joint inflexibility, sometimes with mild pain, in his hands and feet. This gradual worsening was punctuated, every year or two, with severe but, thankfully, brief bouts of arthritic pain in other parts of his body. And, just as I had experienced, Roger told me that these widely spaced experiences with severe symptoms were always associated with unusual physical or emotional stress. Roger was especially good at tracking the cause and effect relationship between increased stress and increased pain. He noticed a pattern wherein within twenty-four hours of the stress experience, acute pain would follow. He told me about a time he had experienced intense arthritic pain in his shoulder within hours of dragging a boat across the sand to the water's edge. That amount of exertion was enough to trigger a major pain episode that might last up to a week.

As you can imagine, this caused Roger quite a bit of concern. He remained frightened by the possibility that his arthritis might ultimately bring him to a serious, painful, and debilitated condition. But rather than let his fear debilitate him, Roger used it to spark his intention to find a solution. For a period of about seven years, Roger engaged in an earnest, intent, wide-ranging, and open-minded search for a solution. He read widely and tried a variety of remedies including the Kelley Program (which emphasized detoxification), vitamin and mineral supplements, a macrobiotic diet and other dietary modifications, Transcendental Meditation, and herbal supplements. Nothing cured his arthritis—or even began to diminish it. While each of these remedies had solved an arthritis problem for others, none of them helped Roger. But what he did gain from this exhaustive study was an awakening to the critical importance of food quality in promoting health generally. Roger and I share this appreciation, and he has taken it to the point of growing much of his own food.

In August 1986, Roger took a trip to visit some friends in southeastern British Columbia, far from his Edmonton home. The day after he arrived, he experienced a massive arthritic attack—despite the absence of any extreme physical or emotional stress. He experienced severe inflammation in his right arm from wrist to elbow. Just moving his arm was intensely painful. He felt simply horrible from head to toe and spent the day in bed. When he told his friend about his extreme pain and suffering, his friend asked a simple question: “May I offer you True Light?” Roger knew his friend had become a member of Sukyo Mahikari, but he had no idea what that meant. Knowing Roger now, I’m not surprised to hear that he accepted his friend’s offer, but Roger assures me that his positive response was surprising even to him at the time.

Before Roger’s friend began to offer him True Light, he told Roger he needed to understand two things: “First and foremost, whatever happens is up to God, and second, I am not trying to cure you of any disease.” Roger remembers his

friend's words verbatim because he found these caveats so very unhelpful and incongruent with his worldview at the time. In his mind, his arthritis obviously needed a cure; that's why he was willing to receive True Light in the first place! But even more significant to Roger was the fact that he had been an atheist for more than twenty years. He didn't even believe in the God his friend claimed would control what would happen when he received True Light. Roger and I both laugh now as we reflect on how amazing it was that he was willing to receive True Light despite these troublesome "flaws" in his friend's thinking. But laughter aside, the truth is Roger was desperate for help. His fear of the effects arthritis might have on him was truly crippling.

Much to Roger's surprise, his friend radiated True Light from his hand to Roger's forehead, then to the back of his head and neck, and then to his lower back above the waist. He wondered why True Light was being directed to these parts of his body when the pain was in his arm. It would be some time before Roger came to understand the importance of purifying pain-free areas of the body in addition to painful areas. But even in that first time of receiving True Light, as his friend held his hand above his swollen arm, Roger felt a physical sensation unlike anything he had felt before. And he was amazed.

Roger recalls that the next morning he felt somewhat better. So that evening, when his friend offered to give him True Light again, he humbly accepted. His friend began by probing Roger's swollen arm, which felt like it was made of stone, with his fingertips. After his friend gave him True Light for about thirty minutes, Roger was surprised to find his arm had regained some degree of suppleness. By the next morning, Roger noticed further improvement in his overall condition. Somewhat stunned and speechless, Roger awkwardly thanked his friend for helping him in a way he could not begin to comprehend. As Roger prepared to head home, his friend told him how to contact someone in Edmonton in case he ever wanted to receive True Light again.

As if to underscore the difference between Roger's experience in British Columbia and his previous acute arthritic episodes, there was no improvement in his arm during the next three days when he did not receive True Light, even though historically his acute arthritic episodes normally reflected day-by-day improvement once past the peak of pain. Still not convinced that True Light was the cause of his relief, Roger couldn't deny that something inexplicable had happened when his friend had offered him that invisible gift.

About a week after he returned from British Columbia, Roger phoned his friend's Sukyo Mahikari contact in Edmonton, assuming that he would make arrangements to receive Light again in a few weeks. When he reached out to Dominique, who had established a temporary Sukyo Mahikari center in a house she rented not far from Roger's home in Edmonton, she was very persuasive in convincing him not to wait. So, a day or two later he arrived at the center. It was just a regular-looking suburban home in a middle class neighborhood, but even as Dominique welcomed him inside, he noticed that the house was sparkling clean. He could practically see his reflection in the dark gray tile floor in the vestibule.

Upon first meeting her, Dominique struck Roger as a strong person in every way. Roger guessed she was in her mid-thirties, and when he learned she taught ballet classes at a local dance studio, that explained her physical strength. But he also noted that she seemed strong in character as well—an all-around solid person. In a slightly French-sounding accent, Dominique welcomed Roger to the center and then immediately cautioned him that his goal of recovering from arthritis did not align with the purpose of receiving and giving Light. She could say nothing about whether there would be an impact on his physical condition. Rather, the purpose was spiritual purification which would allow him to grow closer to God—which, of course, Roger didn't believe in at the time. Discouraged by Dominique's insistence on the centrality of divine will, Roger weighed the benefits of what he had experienced in British

Columbia with his own desire for relief from pain and potential disability, and in so doing, allowed the scant possibility that giving True Light might actually have some spiritual significance. Clinging slightly less firmly to his atheism, but remaining fully committed to overcoming his arthritis, Roger concurred with Dominique that he would receive True Light in the way she had sincerely described it. Her dedication and expertise earned Roger's respect, even if he didn't agree with her belief in God.

When Dominique began to give Light, Roger was struck by the power of her practice. Her voice was loud and clear as she began to recite the prayer of purification. She was indeed a skilled Light practitioner, but because Dominique had dedicated her house as a temporary Sukyo Mahikari center, she was also practicing in a sacred space. Receiving True Light at a Sukyo Mahikari center would be a much more intense experience for Roger than receiving Light at his friend's house in British Columbia had been. He said it was physically unlike anything he had experienced up until that point in his life. He tried to describe the sensation he experienced while receiving True Light on his lower back, but he couldn't find any words other than "wonderful!" He said it was almost like he had entered an altered state of consciousness. Even though he still didn't know how he felt about spirituality, he kept coming back to the temporary Sukyo Mahikari center to receive True Light from Dominique two to three times per week.

By the end of September, Roger was still uncertain about Sukyo Mahikari and unable to fully wrap his mind around what was happening to him as he received True Light. But he felt that receiving True Light without being able to give True Light was too one-sided, so he asked if he could learn to give True Light—which would mean taking the primary spiritual development course. There was a primary course scheduled at the Sukyo Mahikari center in Seattle in mid-October, but to attend the primary course, Roger needed the approval of the person in charge of the Seattle Sukyo Mahikari Center. Looking back

on this, Roger laughs at how unprepared he felt going into that telephone interview. His mind was still in turmoil with regard to his professed atheism and he really had no idea what he believed. But the Seattle director did not require him to accept any particular beliefs. Roger was welcomed to attend the primary course because his desire to give True Light to his family and others was grounded in pure altruism.

Roger was attentive throughout the three-day primary spiritual development course, but he now admits, at the time, he really didn't feel as though he had absorbed much or achieved much clarity of mind from listening to the teachings. But on the third day, when he received his *omitama*—the divine pendant that allows practitioners to give True Light, something shifted in Roger. Metaphorically, an *omitama* is like a magnifying glass that concentrates the sun's rays—except it concentrates God's True Light. In physical form, the *omitama* is a small, circular golden locket which hangs on a chain and is placed in a white cloth pocket sewn inside a practitioner's undergarment. It is handled with reverence and clean hands each time it is put on or taken off. The spiritual leader of Sukyo Mahikari creates an *omitama* for each practitioner so each person's *omitama* is their own. Having an *omitama* connected Roger to God by a spiritual cord, allowing him to radiate True Light, despite any impurities he may have accumulated over many lifetimes.

By the time Roger completed the primary course, he no longer identified as an atheist. Looking back on his visit with his friends in August of 1986, Roger once told me with tears in his eyes “I can see how God reached down, picked me up, and turned me around 180 degrees” as he described his introduction to Sukyo Mahikari as the loving redirection of his life.

You will notice throughout this book that we often use the verb “to allow” when describing events, large and small, in our life stories. This is quite intentional, as it reflects a humble acceptance that even while we are thoroughly engaged and active in our lives, we acknowledge the divine arrangements by

which all things are allowed to transpire. With this awareness, we begin to partner with God in working toward transformation of self and the world, with God as a loving companion guiding all things toward the good of all.

The primary spiritual development course teaches that if we practice giving and receiving True Light we will gradually come to understand the divine principles behind and within the experience. But we also have spiritual experiences that help us gain wisdom. Roger went to the center and gave and received True Light two to three times a week and began giving True Light at his home. He had many spiritual experiences as he gave True Light that could not be explained within normal sensory-based thinking. Roger told me of a time when giving True Light alleviated his wife's extreme pain. She was rolling from side to side in bed, clutching her sides in an unexplained agony, so Roger offered her True Light. After several minutes of receiving Light her pain disappeared completely. Roger was dumbfounded. Yet he continued to give and receive True Light even though he did not understand it.

Roger was amazed to find that, mysteriously, the prediction that he would come to understand the divine or universal principles through giving and receiving True Light (and further study of the principles) proved to be correct. As he made spiritual progress, concepts he had been conscious of but did not understand suddenly became clear to him, one after another.

After two years, Roger attended the secondary spiritual development course. Although he was still hoping for a cure to his arthritis, he was no longer frightened by it. He was able to leave the question of his arthritis in God's hands and accept whatever outcome God arranged. After another two or three years, his arthritis symptoms simply disappeared. He was deeply moved by this change, which filled him with a profound gratitude that fuels his desire to repay God for this great blessing.

“I hope that this book will be an inspiration to the many who make their way along their spiritual paths.”

His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama



Ordinary people experience the extraordinary when they commit to a life of deep, authentic spiritual practice. Leena Banerjee Brown brings this message to life through the profound practices and principles of Sukyo Mahikari. She extends a warm welcome to people of all faiths to become instruments of divine peace by giving and receiving God’s Light in an inspired, disciplined practice of pure benevolence.



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**Kusumita P. Pedersen, Professor Emerita
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“I, for one, have no doubt that Sukyo Mahikari has helped many people, and that those who are helped often seek to help others. We can all rejoice!”

**John Cobb, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Claremont School of Theology,
elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences**

“Leena Banerjee Brown has been able to fulfill the vision of a spirit-centered family rooted in loving care that can be a living example of the foundations of a spiritually-grounded society. Her prayer that youth will cultivate the same elevation of mind that they wish for the planet is also my prayer.” **Xiye Bastida, climate activist and co-founder, Re-Earth Initiative**

“Before we can truly serve our communities on a larger scale, we have to become people who can see beyond ourselves as individuals, who understand the meaning of interdependence. This book shows how spiritual practice makes this possible, not just for monastics and sages, but for us all.” **Mira Ambika Banerjee Brown, social justice advocate and project coordinator, J3 Foundation**

Leena Banerjee Brown, PhD, is a Sukyo Mahikari practitioner of nineteen years. For her there is no work more urgent than the elevation of human goodness, virtue, and spiritual condition through disciplined spiritual practice in daily life.

