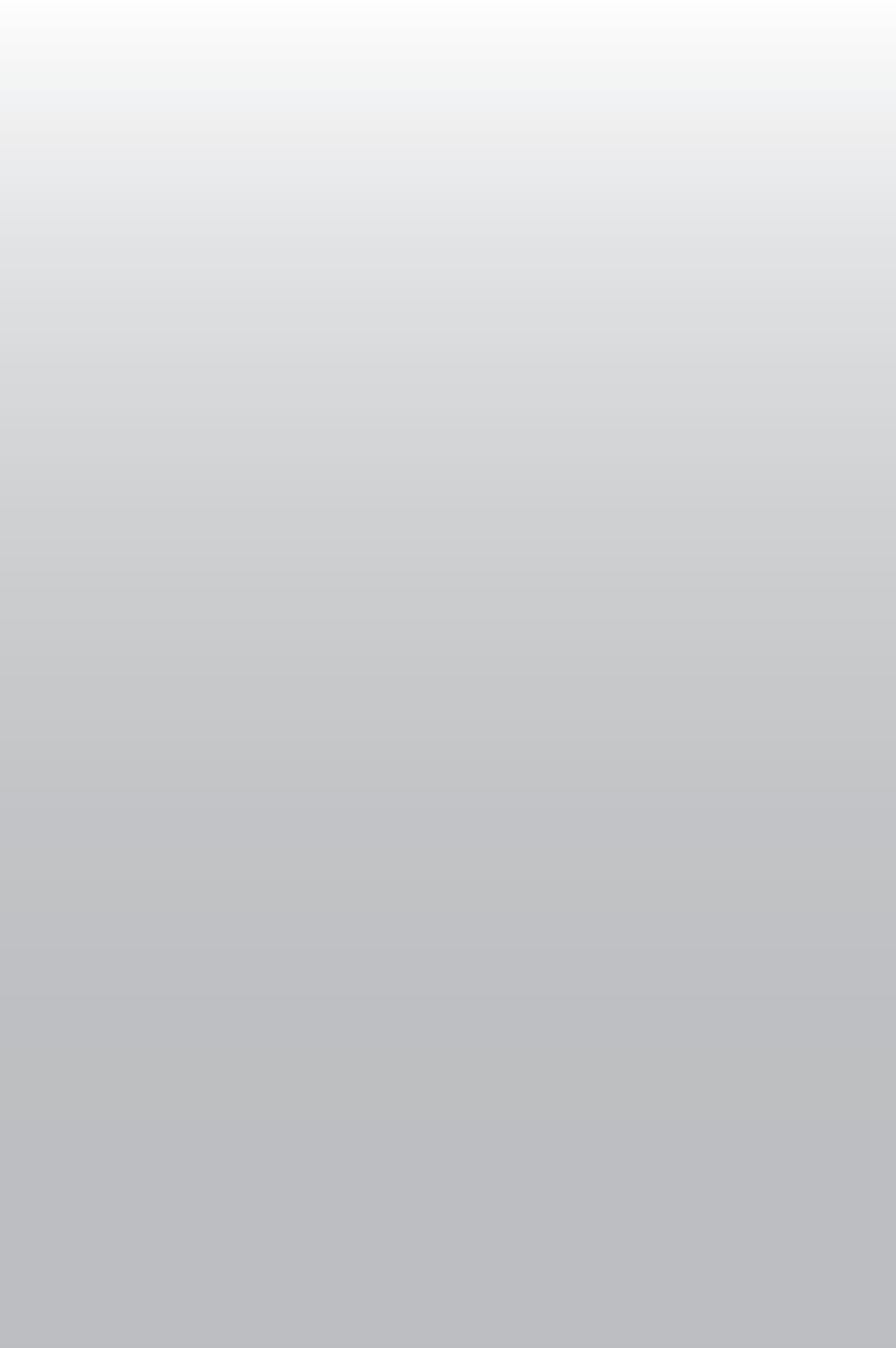


GO HIGHER



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**Five Practices for
Purpose, Success,
and Inner Peace**

Sean “Big Sean” Anderson

SIMON ELEMENT

New York Amsterdam/Antwerp London
Toronto Sydney/Melbourne New Delhi



SIMON
ELEMENT

An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, LLC
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

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First Simon Element hardcover edition January 2025

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Interior design by Jason Snyder

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-1-6680-7638-5

ISBN 978-1-6680-4575-6 (ebook)

*For my younger self, and in honor of
the infinite potential I see in others,
including my son, Noah.*

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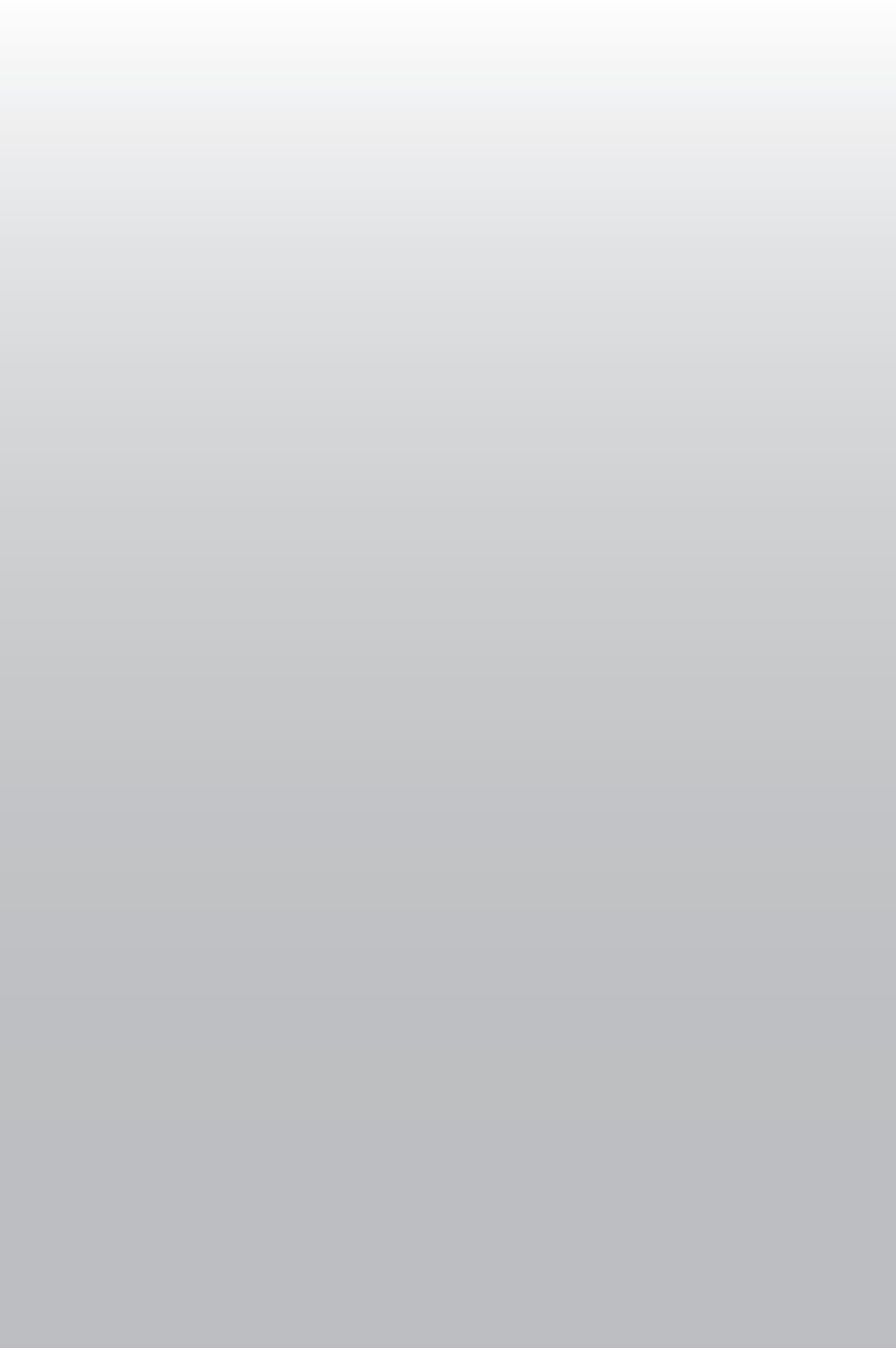
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Foreword

JAY SHETTY

BEFORE I EVER MET SEAN, I'd heard from so many people that "you guys should know each other. You'd really get along." As it turned out, he was hearing the same thing about me; one friend of his who believed in reincarnation swore we were brothers in a past life. Clearly, we were meant to connect.

And, sure enough, when he came on my podcast a few years ago, we wound up having an incredible conversation—so much so that we had to do a part two. To this day, so many people I bump into tell me how powerful an impact those exchanges had on them. Listeners said they cast Sean in a whole new light, and self-help in a new light, too. That's when I first told Sean he should consider writing a book.

I'm thrilled that not only has he written a book but the book is so personal and powerful. You all know Sean for the talented lyricist and rapper that he is; here you'll meet the human behind it all who meditates, journals, and goes to therapy to navigate the ups and downs of life. What he shares is lived experience, tried and tested and what he personally practices. Sean's insights have not only helped him manifest an incredible career and inner peace but also allowed him to feel real joy.

FOREWORD

I think there are preconceived notions about both rappers and self-help practitioners. Sean shatters both of those clichés. He shows how actually taking care of your soul and working on yourself are things that are accessible, practical, and relevant to everyone.

As Sean says in the book, he's found himself in a dark place more than once. Working on himself helped him to find success, rise from depression, and become the father he wants to be for Noah. The fact that he's been able to use these positive strategies at so many different points in his life is a testament to their power and impact.

There are so many forces at work pulling us down and bringing us lower. I'm grateful that Sean is using his platform to encourage people to Go Higher—to reach higher ideas, frequencies, relationships, and ways of living. *Go Higher* is full of joy, light, and love—just like my friend Sean.

With love and gratitude,

Jay Shetty

Author, coach, former monk

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author

Host of the *ON Purpose* podcast

Cofounder of Juni Tea

Chief purpose officer at Calm

INTRODUCTION

The Five Practices: Accept, Strategize, Try, Trust, Manifest

WHILE MOST PEOPLE KNOW ME as a successful rapper, the truth is that, above all else, I'm on a path of self-knowledge and spiritual development. And I wouldn't be where I am today if I hadn't discovered ways to take care of myself emotionally and mentally.

I believe that we need to maintain our spiritual health the way that we would our diet, car, or an exercise program. It all goes under the category of taking care of yourself. You need to get oil changes and annual checkups; so, too, you need to spend quiet time looking within yourself, asking hard questions, and finding your path to inner peace.

What if we started doing the work on ourselves before we hit a low point? What if we treated our spiritual health the same way we did our physical and financial health? What if we made it part of our daily lives? There's no wrong time to start your journey of self-improvement. If you can do the work proactively, you'll be in a much better situation when you run into difficult times, as we all do. It's a lot easier to become stronger when you're not in crisis. What I mean by crisis is when you have your back against the wall and everything's going

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wrong. You can still do that self-work then, but it's easier when you're coming from a place of strength. And, by the way, this isn't "work" the way a day job is work. It doesn't take energy—it gives energy.

I've spent years honing my skills of self-reflection: meditation, journaling, and therapy. To become better at all these techniques, I've met with countless spiritual leaders and studied books like *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, *The Four Agreements*, and *Ask and It Is Given*. I've done Dave Asprey's 40 Years of Zen program. I know not everyone has time to do the deep dives I've done, so I'm here to share my favorite lessons and how they've helped me on my quest to become stronger.

I've always wanted to write a book. When I sat down and tried to figure out how to talk about what can feel like pretty out-there topics, I asked myself: *As a student of self-knowledge, what could I contribute to the conversation that might feel new?* Looking back on my life and the work I've done, I realized that everything that's worked for me could be boiled down into five practices: **accept, strategize, try, trust, and manifest.**

Most of the experiences that I've learned from and that have helped me become my best self clearly demonstrate one or more of these five ideas. In this book, I'll tell stories from my life that I hope will illustrate the ways in which these practices have played out. You'll see relevant practices listed below the title of each chapter, and you'll see some of my related song lyrics, too. These aren't steps where you finish one and then move on to the next. As you'll see throughout the book, each practice is meant to be part of an ongoing process of learning about yourself and always going higher.

I learned all of this the hard way. When I was in high school, I met

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Kanye West. After months of sending me beats that I would work on and send back to him, he said he wanted to sign me.

What the fuck? I was a nobody! I was seventeen! Still in high school! This was my number one favorite artist at the time! He wanted to work with me? Getting signed was my ultimate goal, and here it was!

That was like the poster on my wall coming to life. When that happened, I figured my life was made, you know? I was beyond ecstatic. I was thinking my dreams had been answered . . .

Then I didn't hear from him for almost two years. That situation led to my first bout of depression. I didn't want to kill myself, but it was bad. The more time went by, the more I felt like I was in quicksand, sinking deeper and deeper. I felt worthless. I felt like I'd failed and let everyone down. My thought wasn't that I wanted to die exactly—I was just *over it*. I thought, *I don't want to deal with this shit anymore*.

In hindsight, these were growing pains that shaped my character. Growing pains can make you a greater version of yourself. Always keep that in mind when you're going through a tough situation and you feel like things aren't going your way. It's all temporary.

God got me through that. My family got me through that. More than anything, doing the work on myself got me through that. When I was younger, we went to church every Sunday. I was taught to accept that there was more to life than we could see. And I've experienced so many miracles. I've dodged figurative and literal bullets and beaten the odds by a billion. I've been saved by love and dedication.

Part of why I rap about it now is because not everyone has unconditional love in their life like I had from my parents and my

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brother. I want everyone to know that you can always turn things around and find inside yourself whatever love you don't have from others. I make music for people who can relate to what I'm saying. I focus on that and don't pay attention to the other stuff. The game is always changing, and there's no point in focusing on what you can't change.

Pulling myself out of my darkest moments took real work—and every situation was different and required different tools. As I said, I see that work as being in five parts. I'm sharing them here for whoever wants to do that work, whether they're struggling or just want to get to the next level.

Here's how I've applied the five practices in my life: I learned how to **accept** the situation I was in, **strategize** a way out of it, **try** every day to do the best work I could, **trust** my instincts and that the right people would appear in my life, and get myself into the right headspace to let me **manifest** a beautiful future. I realized that being inspired and inspiring others—through music or any other means I could—was the most important thing to me.

When I was coming up, I would hear artists talk about loss or depression, but never what to do about it. I'm not saying that wasn't there, but in my world, I wasn't seeing it. I make songs and write about these things in the hope that there are other people out there now who might need it, too. Again and again in my life, I've seen how talking about problems has helped solve them. Communication is the bridge to salvation.

I enjoy success today because, when I was struggling, I shared what I was going through, refused to give up on myself, and took my

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healing seriously. My goal is to encourage others to do the same in their own way.

I just became a father for the first time. Part of my goal in writing this book now is that I want my son, Noah, to grow up in a world that values mental and emotional well-being and the work that goes into being a whole person.

I've included a glossary of terms to help clarify what I mean when I talk about things like vibration and affirmations, and a list of resources at the back of the book in case you'd like to research these topics further.

I'll also offer journal prompts at the end of each section as a way to help you think through how these practices are already at play in your own life, and how you could become even more intentional about living the life you want to live, whether by offering forgiveness, taking risks, or believing in your own power.

This is a book of reassurance and opportunities. Like all of us, I've been through a lot, and I've found ways to think and act that helped me grow. From this new place of strength, I feel so lucky that I get to share strategies for growth that will give you an advantage in every part of your life and help you expedite your destiny.

Whenever people used to tell me, "Take the time to work on yourself," I'd say, "What time? There is no time to take." The last thing any of us wants to hear is that we have to work harder—especially if you already have two jobs, or a family, or a side hustle. But focusing on your internal well-being will give you more time and more energy. Once you've done the healing work on yourself, everything you want will be possible.

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Your purpose is to do what makes you happy, and to do it out of love. If you act in a way that doesn't harm others or come from a bad place, if you do what comes out of genuine love and passion, you're fulfilling your destiny. If you happen to impact others in the process, then that's incredible and an extra bonus. But the judge of how you're doing in life has to always and only be you.

The business of trying to please everybody else is a business you'll never be successful at. Even if you do please everyone, then you have to ask, will *you* be satisfied? Everyone is such a unique person that things apply to some people and don't apply to others. So it's important to focus on what you can control, which is the inner work, without worrying about what will come of it. Express yourself, write your poems, play your instruments, paint your pictures, tell your stories, play your sports, et cetera. Whatever it is you do, there's an art to it. There is an art to being a doctor. There's an art to being a lawyer. There's an art to being a truck driver. There's an art to being a hairdresser. There's an art to raising children and managing a household. Do you, be you, and worry later about the details.

For me, another governing philosophy is *Nothing lasts forever*. Before you even start thinking about whatever you're going through and whether or not you're in crisis right now, I urge you to remember that *it's going to end*. That's what I've learned above all else in dealing with losses and pain: when you know it's temporary, it's possible to survive anything. And everything is temporary.

One practice that's given me peace is acknowledging that it's up to me what energy I bring to my obligations. I can say "I *have*

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to” or I can say “I *get* to.” I used to see everything as a chore, one more demand on my time. Now I see each task as something that I’m allowed to do. I get to wake up with my baby son in the morning. I get to go into the studio to finish an album. I get to write this book. I don’t say “I have to go do this show in Vegas”; I say “I get to go to Vegas to do a show, and even if the schedule is tough, that money opens up space when I’m back from the trip so I can focus on writing a book and making an album.”

I’m aware that some of these situations are unique to my life as a performer, but the point is, we all have responsibilities in life. Changing your perspective can make it so much easier to fulfill them. It only takes seconds to adopt a more positive outlook, but it can be a make-or-break moment for your sanity and productivity.

This isn’t going to be complicated. It shouldn’t feel like homework. Yes, when you’re present in your own life, you’re going to have to uncover and forgive some harsh realities about your damn self. That’s hard, but good-hard—the difficult part that pays off, like cleaning your house.

Life is tough, but we get to choose our struggles. Do you prefer the hard work of exercising and eating right to stay fit now or the harder consequences of poor health later? When the result isn’t what you want it to be, do you choose to dwell on it or learn from the experience?

In doing this inner work, I had to get familiar with all of the parts of myself. It took a lot of work to understand that I couldn’t live my life for others but that I needed to live it for myself. I was getting so

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much of my validation from outside myself: awards, money, praise. But it was only when I began to validate myself that I started to truly experience a different high. Discipline and consistency are what lead you to greatness. You have to do the hard and uncomfortable inner work in the fierce pursuit of loving yourself and setting boundaries. That's how you achieve true greatness.

Depending on your environment and where you're at in your life, doing work on yourself might not be as hard for you as it is for some of us. You might be at a point where you're so receptive it clicks right away, or you might need to let these things simmer for a while until they reach a boil. There is no such thing as failure, only lessons. You find a reason to keep going, to keep moving forward.

The first stage of working toward growth is understanding where you're starting from. We all start at different places, and everybody hits roadblocks at some point. Some of us start our journey of self-actualization at rock bottom. I hope to inspire you to begin your journey whether you're struggling or thriving.

Writing this book is the next step on my journey as an advocate for introspection and taking care of every part of yourself (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual). Besides it being a lifelong goal of mine, I especially wanted to do this book because I felt an absence of conversations around the emotional well-being of black men and people of color.

Here's a question I like to ask people: *What's your life's purpose, and how did you find it?* I think people get the idea of "purpose" wrong sometimes. They think it needs to be something you blast to the world to show you're making a difference. But I've come to realize

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that making a difference in yourself—just in your own life—is already changing the world.

Self-care is not selfish. If you're happy with the way you are, or even if you've accepted the way you are, you are working to improve this greater consciousness. As you become "better," whatever that may mean for you, that helps the people around you become more conscious of themselves and aware of their own potential.

The world, especially the Western world, has taught us to believe that we exist as individuals and nothing more, but the truth is that we are all part of some kind of collective, family, or team. We are all interconnected. In a family, you can be the family member who is weighing the rest of the family down, or you can be the family member who is helping everyone—the way my grandmother did by creating a haven for us in her home.

If we can make self-work part of our daily routine, then when we go through tough times, we will already have the armor and the tools to recover. It's about figuring out your version of success, which might have nothing to do with a career or money.

Not everyone is on the same frequency as me, so not everyone is going to like me or what I do. The point of life isn't to get everyone to like you. Again, no one has ever been successful in the business of pleasing everybody. I've realized that, for me, the point of being a creative person is to express myself and to do it with dignity and confidence, and to make something I'm proud of. And those are things that are totally within my own control. Each of us has our own goals, and with the help of these five practices, each of us can go higher.

THE FIVE PRACTICES

I. **Accept**

One of the most important things to do in life is to **accept** your fate as it's been revealed to you up to this point: who you are, what you have, what you've done so far. You're not living in a dream world or in denial. You're **accepting** yourself, your desires, your background, your talents, and your faults. You're **accepting** the world you live in as it is and not obsessing over how you wish it could be. You might have to **accept** that what you want and what society seems to want for you could be at odds, or you might have to **accept** that society could be wrong in how it's viewed you until now. And you're **accepting** that everything can change at any time.

Acceptance means seeing clearly where you are right now and also acknowledging that you have the power to change any situation that you're in, no matter how possible or impossible other people say that is. We have the power of a whole universe inside of us. There's a parallel between the cells in our body and the stars in the sky.

When you face the reality of how things are, when you see it all clearly and without shame or regret, that's when you become ready for change. That's when you can start asking new questions, like "Are you satisfied with where you are?" If you're a person who knows you're made for more than what you're experiencing now, that you're made to do something that fulfills you more, then once you've done the work of **acceptance**, it's time to figure out what that bigger thing is and how to do it. But you have to **accept** reality first.

Part of **acceptance** is appreciating what you have before you

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think about what you'd like to change. That's what makes the next gift possible—it may be something you can't even imagine yet. But at least when you **accept** what's come before, you're opening up space for new information to present itself.

II. Strategize

One of my favorite questions to ask is “How could it get any better than this?” If you feel that you're in what you would consider an ideal situation—which is not how the majority of us feel at any given time—ask yourself: How can it improve? What else is possible? If there is already a ceiling, how do you go through the roof? There are no limits to how much the universe loves you. There is always more to offer if you desire it. And there's enough for all of us.

There are so many different ways that humans **strategize**. Some of us research things on the internet; some of us have mentors who can help us. Personally, when I **strategize**, the first thing I ask myself is “How can I expedite this thing that I believe is destined to happen? Who can help me go higher?”

It's also important when you're **strategizing** that you see what works best for you. Some people are more analytical and love digging through articles. Some are more sensory and have to go out and experience things firsthand. There are so many ways to **strategize**. See which one works best for you. This isn't school; this is your life.

You may not have the answer, which is okay. To me, when you're putting the energy of *How can I?* into something, it's almost like talking to God or the universe, saying, “Hey, I'm asking for your help now. How can I accomplish this?”

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And once you do that, you're in a place to actually put together a plan, with to-do lists and action-oriented goals for making that plan a reality. One thing to remember when you ask the universe for help is that the help may come in a way that you least expect it, or it may come in the form of being able to empower yourself.

III. Try

This is where a lot of people who have big dreams fall off. They have an idea that they're going to **try** something and be great at it immediately, but that almost never happens. You have to **try** and **try** and **try** some more to get really good.

Yes, I have a lyric about doing rather than trying: "Fuck trying and not doing because not doing is something that I'm not doing." I acknowledge that *doing* is the key thing, but I feel like you have to **try** first.

Einstein said, "You never fail until you stop **trying**." Someone somewhere could probably pick up a basketball and be a revolutionary player starting with their first shot, but most people, including Michael Jordan, had to work hard. We all know the story about how Jordan got cut from his high school team before he became the greatest player of all time.

When you see someone performing at a talent show or opening up at a concert or picking up a basketball or studying for a degree, that's **trying**, and we need to respect the effort regardless of the results. We have to be aware that all of us on this plane of existence are trying in some way, shape, or form, even if it's just by waking up to face the day.

Back when I first started to have the courage to **try**, I would show up to open mics, lunchroom rap-battles, and talent shows. I'd

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perform every chance I could get to show what I had and to sharpen my sword, no matter how big or small the venue. I'd show up even as a last-minute sub without letting it hurt my pride that I hadn't been asked first. I just wanted as many chances as possible to improve.

Occasionally, I'd have some good luck. A friend would say, "I know somebody who knows somebody who has a connection at a studio."

Why did that happen? Because I put myself out there. When you're **trying**, the universe respects it and shows up to help you on your way.

IV. Trust

Right in the middle of **trust** is the letter "u"—and that's the main person you have to **trust**: yourself. Now, I've experienced situations where I **trusted** other people more than I **trusted** myself. There are times when it actually worked out. But sometimes I listened to other people's advice and it was a mistake. When it didn't go well and it wasn't my own idea, that hurt so much more. I felt that I had failed in the situation and failed to listen to my own better judgment. But one of the questions that made me ask was "What is more important to you—listening to yourself or accepting that if you listen to other people you're going to feel terrible?"

Trusting yourself is like working out any other muscle. The more you **trust** your instincts, the more you learn to take what other people say with a grain of salt. Then it's always your own decision, even when you listen to others. Even if you make mistakes, it's still better when you're being true to yourself. You can say, "At least I stood up for my own belief." That's a win on its own.



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If you don't **trust** yourself, then you have to ask yourself why that is. Do you think you're not good enough? Do you think you don't deserve to get what you want? Are there ideas you may have inherited that are making you think this way? Have you become a self-sabotager? Is a lack of faith holding you back?

Trust is one of the hardest things to maintain because it gets tested all the time by the world and all the experiences that come with it. But I'm here to tell you that we all have the willpower to make anything we desire happen. I want people to realize that: you must **trust** yourself, and you must **trust** the universe, too.

V. Manifest

Have you ever been on a road and noticed how everyone is moving in time with one another? We move in synchronicity, like cells in a body. When I'm driving on the freeway, I always notice the patterns: white lights coming toward me, red lights going away, like white blood cells and red blood cells, as though I'm in the middle of a vein. As I look around, I see so many signs of our interconnectedness and harmony. The key thing is learning how to be part of that flow without fighting against it.

Once you're more in alignment and more intentional with your energy, you begin to **manifest** your goals. It doesn't always happen on your terms. God gives you what you need more than what you want. Sometimes what you want is what you need, and sometimes what you don't want is what you need. You don't realize that until after you've made it to the other side of whatever it is you're going through. But I

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believe the universe has a plan for us and that when we're vibrating at the right frequency, we'll be able to attract what we need.

When I decided that I wanted to be a rapper, I ended up meeting some people on my block who rapped. It was like we were magnetically drawn to one another. You start attracting the right people in your life when you're intentional with your energy. It's like tuning the radio to the right station.

GLOSSARY

In this book, I use some terms people might not be familiar with. Here are definitions for a few words you might encounter.

Affirmations are like daily pep talks. I say or write mine in my journal every day. They could be something as simple as one of the following: *I have everything I need to face this day. I am peaceful. I am happy. I am grateful. I am limitless. I am unstoppable.*

Agreements are deals that you make between yourself and the universe. Unlike affirmations, you don't need to renew these every day. They're more like New Year's resolutions that you can update as needed. An example might be "I am present for my family" or "I am making music that I can be proud of."

Ego refers to the conscious part of yourself. This is your public image, your sense of pride, your ambition. If you don't do the inner work that balances the ego with the soul, this is the part of you that will run the show and can get you in trouble.

God/universe/source energy are terms I use interchangeably. I acknowledge that different religions use names like Allah, Yahweh, and Brahman, and while respecting everyone's beliefs, I hope to talk about a universal divine energy that we can all encounter outside of any particular religion or belief system.

Journaling is simply writing in a notebook, whether once a day or once a week or a dozen times a day. Some people I know carry their notebooks everywhere to write down thoughts or lyrics or interesting things people say. Others keep them by their bed and write down their dreams first thing in the morning. Some use a standard composition notebook; others buy fancy leather journals. There's no wrong way to do it.