

PREFACE

This book was thirteen years in the making.

In the fall of 1999, I had a vision of assembling under the cover of a single book all that men and women have uttered about God during the past five thousand years. I hoped that it would help us overcome our prejudices, most of which were born out of unfamiliarity.

That same year, I finished reading Samuel Huntington's 1996 classic, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. The realist in me was terrified by the prospects Huntington portrayed. But the poet in me rebelled and wandered into the wondrous world of imagination, for I believed what Albert Einstein once said: "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

I hypothesized that God, a universal force present in the consciousness of all humans, can become the unifying force for our world if we can deepen and widen our understanding of God.

I imagined a *Friendship of Civilizations*, which can be nurtured by connecting the dots of all religions that found expression in the words of the men and women of all centuries and all continents. However, I didn't want to write a scholarly tome with lengthy interpretations of the "words" of historical men and women; rather, I planned to capture their "true voices" by quoting them directly and create a "living history" by arranging the quotes chronologically.

My ambitious project progressed slowly over the next two years, as I pored over thousands of pages of scriptures as well as ancient and modern literature. To my great satisfaction, a fascinating story of the fundamental unity in human thought patterns on God started to emerge in my mind. Different religious scriptures lost their individual isolation, and I came to realize that the multifarious human words on God, written over a period of five thousand years, carry not merely information, but a transcendent harmony that unites all of humanity.

Then, suddenly, came the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, instantaneously changing the whole world. God and religion took center stage in human interactions, after a nearly hundred-year lull in the face of unprecedented advancements in science and technology during the twentieth century. We had come to believe, at the end of the millennium, that religious fundamentalism and religious wars were things of the past. However, the tragedies of September 11 grotesquely challenged that belief. The human "voice of violence" submerged God's "voice of compassion" and thrust the entirety of humanity into an endless debate about the "the good, the bad, and the ugly" sides of different religions. It alerted us to a grim reality: the potent danger of closing our minds to religions and cultures not our own.

This book tells a story of God, who transcends all religions and cultures and binds all humanity in a luminous unity of truth through the words and ideas of God and humans.

It is my earnest hope that this book will help open billions and billions of windows in our minds, for peaceful coexistence through a deeper interreligious understanding.

I also hope that every page of this book will give you something worthwhile to enjoy and ponder.

El Dorado Hills, California

December, 2012