

**“THIS BOOK WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE.
AND, IF ENOUGH OF US COMMIT, IT WILL CHANGE THE WORLD.”**
—PHIL STUTZ, AUTHOR OF *THE TOOLS*, FEATURED IN NETFLIX DOCUMENTARY *STUTZ*

ANCIENT WISDOM + MODERN SCIENCE

ARETÉ

ACTIVATE YOUR HEROIC POTENTIAL

MOVE FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE TO MASTERY

VOLUME I

BRIAN JOHNSON

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
ARETÉ

“I wish this book was available fifty years ago when I was just starting out on my own life journey. I wholeheartedly recommend it.”

— **John Mackey**, co-founder and former CEO, Whole Foods Market

“Optimization for the sake of optimization is ultimately shallow. Brian Johnson draws from profound ancient wisdom, activated with powerful modern science, to provide a deeper alternative: the cultivation of heroism. This book provides the answer for those who are asking that most basic of questions: What should I do with my life?”

— **Cal Newport**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Digital Minimalism* and *Deep Work*

“This book will unlock the recesses of your true capabilities. Brian Johnson shows even the most successful leaders that there is more in the fuel tank to reach even greater heights. An absolute must-read for those who want to reach the Mount Olympus of leading superstar-performing teams.”

— **Mike Manazir**, Retired U.S. Navy Admiral, Top Gun Pilot, bestselling author of *Learn How to Lead to Win*

“This is a must-read for anyone looking to take their game of life to the pro level!! The wisdom from Brian in this book is unmatched and it will unequivocally change your life!”

— **Sean Casey**, New York Yankees hitting coach, 3x Major League Baseball All-Star

“Mark my words: Brian Johnson is going to change the world, and this book is his ultimate manifesto. I’ve seen it over and over—when people connect with

the Heroic movement they flourish. And flourishing is contagious. One purpose-driven hero impacts others, and within just a few iterations, the world. The science is solid; the history goes deep. *Areté* will elevate us all.”

— **Susan Peirce Thompson, PhD**, professor of brain and cognitive sciences, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Bright Line Eating*

“From the beginning of this book Brian Johnson sets up incredibly high expectations, promising us the best, most heroic version of ourselves. And then, with each word, metaphor, story, and research, Brian proceeds to overdeliver on his promise. You have in your hands a life-changing masterpiece.”

— **Tal Ben-Shahar, PhD**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Happier*, taught largest class at Harvard

“As a close friend and mentor, Brian’s insights and guidance have had a profound impact on my own personal growth. His unwavering dedication to making a positive impact on the world motivates me to be a better human being each day. Brian’s burning passion for living life through the concept of *Areté* makes his noble mission a cause to relentlessly support. We all want a better world for our kids and future generations. Many of Brian’s tenets of character and leadership have been woven into the very fabric of our world-class warriors in Naval Special Warfare during their basic training phase. Brian has been extremely gracious to the families of our fallen heroes, for which I will always be grateful. Brian Johnson is an exceptional individual that comes along once in a lifetime who possesses the wisdom, leadership qualities, and love of humanity that are necessary to make a lasting difference in our world.”

— **Mike Magaraci**, former Force Master Chief of the Naval Special Warfare Community

“In *Areté*, Brian Johnson masterfully integrates time-honored wisdom with contemporary science, creating a road map for increased well-being. This will sound cheesy, but it’s more than just a book—it’s a call for all of us to unearth our untapped potential. Brian offers practical, tangible tools for turning our

greatest challenges into fuel for resilience and personal transformation. His new book is essential reading for anyone seeking to harness their heroic potential and influence the world in a positive way.”

— **Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD**, Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside, bestselling author of *The How of Happiness*

“Every hero needs a guide. But when they hand you the playbook to leading a life of meaning... it’s the ultimate gift! This book won’t leave your nightstand.”

— **Todd Herman**, bestselling author of *The Alter Ego Effect*

“This book is your next read AND your training template for a life well-lived. Philosophy, ethics, and morality in our modern world have devolved into relativism and opinion, with little action to back up the blather. It wasn’t always this way. In ancient Greece and Rome, the Stoics understood that a personal philosophy not backed by powerful action and habituation of virtues simply displayed a lack of character. Brian Johnson is a Stoic reincarnate. Not only does he have a deep love for marrying ancient with modern wisdom, but also has a passion for embodying such wisdom in his own life—through daily discipline and effort. In short, he is willing to do the work of self-examination and character refinement espoused by the Stoics, Yogis, Taoists, and other philosopher-practitioners of the past. In *Areté: Activate Your Heroic Potential*, Brian shares this wisdom with us so that we, too, can be men and women of character and deep integrity. It is a message that is both timely and urgent. Thank you Brian for this important work.”

— **Mark Divine**, Retired Navy SEAL Commander, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Unbeatable Mind* and *The Way of the SEAL*

“I have followed Brian Johnson’s work for over a decade. He is the coach of coaches. The impact he’s had on me and, as a result, those I coach, is immeasurable. If you’re looking to level up every aspect of your personal and professional life, this is a must-read.”

— **Brian Cain**, mental performance coach for MLB, UFC, NFL,
PGA & NCAA champions

“Brian is the most Stoic guy I know. When I’m in a jam, when the universe is turning my life upside down, Brian is the man I call. Every Spartan in the world should read *Areté*.”

— **Joe De Sena**, CEO and founder of Spartan

“Most of us have read our share of self-improvement books. *Areté* is something else entirely—a self-illumination book. Each page sheds light on the undiscovered capacities that have been too-long hidden away within each of us. Brian’s genius lies in holding out these golden finds for us to recognize as our own, while simultaneously unleashing the untapped stores of purpose-driven energy we need to wield them well. This book will serve as a daily devotional for many. For those willing to dig deeper, it will serve as a treasure map, dog-eared pages and highlighted passages marking a clear trail back to our own best gifts.”

— **Pilar Gerasimo**, award-winning health journalist, podcaster,
and author of *The Healthy Deviant*

“This book is a life-changing masterpiece that will leave a lasting impact on anyone who reads it. If you’re searching for a roadmap to a meaningful life, look no further. The wisdom Brian shares in *Areté* is the compass that will guide you towards a life of purpose, happiness, and the realization of your true potential.”

— **Brandon Guyer**, Los Angeles Angels mental toughness coach, founder of
Major League Mindset

“This book threatens to be one of the all-time best and most timeless masterpieces of personal productivity and self-development. From ancient wisdom to modern science, training the body, mind, and soul, optimizing energy, love, sleep, work, and beyond, it is a profoundly thorough treatise on everything you need to live as a full and complete human. Shove aside any books you’ve been planning to read and move *Areté* to the front of the line. You’ll thank yourself forever if you do.”

— **Ben Greenfield**, founder of Kion, bestselling author of
Boundless

“Brian Johnson’s virtues of zest, service, and optimism are only matched by his kindness, generosity, and love. These virtues were embodied in Brian making Heroic available to the corps of cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point. These future Army officers now have access to tools to assist them in leadership development, self-mastery, and antifragility. The beauty of this is not just the self-development aspect of cadets using Heroic, but that upon graduation and commissioning, they will take these virtues and skills to their platoons of America’s finest young women and men. This book gives heroic leaders from all walks of life access to Brian’s wisdom. I highly recommend it.”

— **Scott Parsons, PhD**, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Character and Ethics Development at Texas Tech, former Character Development Integrator at the
United States Military Academy at West Point

“I’ve known Brian Johnson for over twenty years, and I’ve never met anyone more focused and dedicated to making a difference in the world. He lives an authentically heroic life by constantly challenging himself to grow and learn, by unapologetically eliminating all distractions, and by never giving up on his dreams. With Heroic, Brian has created a powerful and inspiring company to help us all live our lives to the fullest. *Areté* is a must-read for anyone who wants to be a hero.”

— **Kelly Perdew**, general partner of Moonshots Capital, winner
of *The Apprentice* Season 2, West Point graduate,
Airborne/Ranger trained, JD/MBA

“No one is doing more in our time to bring practical wisdom to the world than Brian Johnson. He searches through ancient philosophy, modern science, and the best thought of our day to find the insights and tools we all need to propel our lives upward and forward with true excellence. He finds all the best stuff and brings it to us in a powerfully actionable form in this new book. It’s an amazing achievement. I’m hoping that millions of people will benefit from Brian’s great

work in these pages. We need it now like never before.”

— **Tom Morris, PhD**, public philosopher and author of over thirty books, including perennial bestsellers *True Success*, *If Aristotle Ran General Motors*, *The Oasis Within*, and *Plato’s Lemonade Stand*

“Brian has alchemized the wisdom and teachings from the greatest thinkers on the planet. His teachings have created a framework for my own peak performance and leadership.”

— **John Herdman**, Head Coach, Toronto FC, former Head Coach of the Canadian Men’s National Soccer Team

“There is arguably no book more capable of accelerating your path to fulfilling your potential than *Areté* and no person more qualified to write it than Brian Johnson. Brian is a true modern-day philosopher who has distilled and consolidated wisdom from the greatest minds in history so that you can use it to create the life you desire and deserve.”

— **Hal Elrod**, international bestselling author of *The Miracle Morning*

“Prepare to have your mind expanded and your heart opened by Brian Johnson’s remarkable new book. *Areté* is a masterpiece that is certain to be read and revered by millions, and passed down from generation to generation. In a world where shallow superficiality seems supreme, Brian’s book is a beacon of deep truth, wisdom, and inspiration—a call to arms for anyone with the courage to pursue their dreams, no matter how audacious they may seem. Put every other book away and dive headfirst into the pages of *Areté*. You’ll emerge with a renewed sense of purpose, a deeper understanding of yourself, and the tools you need to make a lasting impact on the world.”

— **Jim Huling**, Executive Coach, former Global Managing Consultant for FranklinCovey, bestselling author of *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*

“Brian is an exemplar of humility and stewardship. He’s given us an innovative platform to optimize our internal work across the foundational human pillars of mind, body, and spirit to create balance and optimal performance. I highly recommend *Areté* for everyone looking to activate their Heroic potential.”

— **Hugh Wyman Howard III**, Retired U.S. Navy Rear Admiral,
former Commander of U.S. Naval Special Warfare and Naval
Special Warfare Development Group

ARETÉ

ACTIVATE YOUR HEROIC POTENTIAL

BRIAN JOHNSON



**HEROIC
BLACK
STONE**
PUBLISHING

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This book is dedicated to YOU,
the hero we've been waiting for.

And...

To my wife, Alexandra,
our kids Emerson and Eleanor,
and your families and kids.

Heroic families unite.
It's time to raise the next
generation of heroes
and change the world together.

PHIL STUTZ SAYS...

FOREWORD

I've been a psychiatrist for forty-five years. That's a long time doing the same thing. Many of my colleagues have retired, worn down by the grind. What keeps me going is my patients. I've been fortunate enough to have a practice comprised of unusual people. They are not unusual because they've succeeded in conventional terms—even though most of them have.

They're unusual because they refuse to be defined by any single accomplishment. Their identity is based on a process of endless possibility. They don't stop creating. Working with these people can be profound but it's also a lot of fun.

Because I live in L.A., many of them are in show business—which also means they are famous. Eventually that rubbed off on me and I was designated as the “shrink to the stars.” I cringe when I hear that phrase. Yes, I have treated a lot of actors but I've treated a lot of others in business, politics, the arts, medicine, etc. They all wanted the same thing: to unleash as much hidden potential as possible.

Just the way a seed holds inside it the potential to become a tree, every human being has a soul that holds inside it a vision of a future self. But that vision won't emerge by itself. Your soul has to be trained until it is strong enough to have an impact on the world. My job is to guide and encourage my patients as they move through this soul training. Rather than being the shrink to the stars it would be more accurate to call me the “shrink to the soul.”

You're about to read an extraordinary book written by an extraordinary person: Brian Johnson.

I say that without hesitation because I have worked with Brian every week for years. At each meeting, I poured into him the totality of everything I had learned over forty-five years on any topic. I had done this with many others but no one even approached his ability to absorb information at dizzying speed and then make it his own.

But that's only half the story. Training the soul is mostly a process focused on

the individual. Brian is also a genius at connecting people and nurturing a collective soul force.

In short, I know greatness when I see it and Brian's greatness just keeps on growing.

Brian has a profound impact on everyone who crosses his path. In today's digital media world he's considered an "influencer." But when I hear that term I think of someone with a lot of Twitter followers or someone who is plugged into the design and fashion worlds. The driving force for that kind of person is the fear of not being "cool," which is ultimately the fear of being left out.

Brian had no interest in working on this superficial level—it barely scratches the surface of what a human being is capable of. He would accept nothing less than the unlocking of the hidden potential in each human being. And just the way this potential goes unexpressed in each of us, the entire human race has its own hidden potential.

Brian's goal was to uncover this collective potential. Without it our survival as a planet is severely compromised.

But to guide our whole species to its highest potential is a daunting task. It requires no less than the ability to inspire every single human being. This may sound grandiose, even impossible, when you read it in the pages of this book. But when you're in Brian's physical presence you can feel a boundless, almost supernatural enthusiasm that makes anything seem possible.

Brian is a dreamer and he dreams big. What sets him apart is that he is disciplined and practical in pursuit of those dreams. Most self-help books are products waiting to be sold. They have little ambition beyond catching the attention of potential readers. We read them to give ourselves a non-specific sense of hope. Brian doesn't criticize others but he would never publish a book with such modest goals.

Especially now. Because right now we face a challenge so all-encompassing that it puts our very existence at risk.

The challenge comes from an enemy that wants to destroy us. This enemy is invisible but its effects stare us right in the face. Take a hard look at the institutions that form the foundation of modern society.

Government, education, the church, science, finance, media, medicine, the judiciary, etc. In every area there is a lack of discipline, leadership, and transparency.

This is a picture of a world that is falling apart. A world of chaos, fear, and darkness. And only if we put that world back together again will we be strong enough to defend ourselves. Sounds bleak and overwhelming. Enter: Brian Johnson.

He didn't know it, the world didn't know it, but he had been preparing for this moment all his life. The moment when the two sides of his soul, his two major talents, would work in harmony to defeat the enemy that had turned our world into a living hell. A force that could overcome evil.

Here are the two sides of Brian Johnson.

1. His drive to bring out the HEROIC potential of the individual. The state of functioning you'll need to reach if you want to do anything big and frightening. He presents this as a modern form of the hero. In a war the hero runs toward the battle. The more conflict around him (or her) the more inspired the hero becomes.

2. His drive to UNIFY the human race. As a unified whole the human race is capable of anything. The problem is that evil works to prevent unification. It focuses on the differences between us, not the common ground.

Brian has proven to me (and to his thousands of followers) that you can stay focused on the unique path toward your personal potential and at the same time live within a structure that applies to all human beings. He calls the values and habits that have this universal relevance "Virtues." The cardinal virtues Brian leans on have been present throughout all cultures across all time, including: Love, Courage, Wisdom, and Discipline.

This is only the foreword, not the book. I couldn't begin to cover all that you'll find as you read further. But understand the opportunity that you (and I) have been given. We are present at the inception of a new way to work with human beings that is exactly what is needed right now. Its timeliness comes from the extraordinary amount of conflict, confusion, and fear spreading without resistance over our world.

What Brian has developed is much more than a bunch of coping mechanisms for the over-stressed modern person, although that would be an improvement for most of us. He's developed a training program for the soul.


Commit to this training and you will gain the ability to transmute your biggest problems, your darkest days, into unstoppable courage, endless enthusiasm, and an unshakable faith in the future.

This book will change your life. And, if enough of us commit, it will change the world.

PHIL STUTZ, MD

Los Angeles, California

KNOW THE ULTIMATE GAME

- 
- I KNOW THE ULTIMATE GAME**
 - II FORGE ANTIFRAGILE CONFIDENCE**
 - III OPTIMIZE YOUR BIG 3**
 - IV MAKE TODAY A MASTERPIECE**
 - V MASTER YOURSELF**
 - VI DOMINATE THE FUNDAMENTALS**
 - VII ACTIVATE YOUR SUPERPOWER**

NICE TO MEET YOU

IT'S DAY 1. LET'S GET TO WORK!

Hi, this is Brian. I appreciate you taking the time to open this book. I wish we could spend some time together so I could get to know you more.

What I do know is that we're both busy and I like to share more wisdom in less time, so let's get straight to work.

I want to start by telling you a little story.

But... First, let me briefly introduce myself and give you a little context.

In addition to being the Founder & CEO of a company called Heroic Public Benefit Corporation (which I'll tell you more about), I'm the proud dad of a couple of kids (Emerson and Eleanor) and married to my best friend, Alexandra.

We live on a little ranch in the country outside Austin, Texas with three dogs (Zeus, Zap, and Wags—two of which adopted us), a cat (Heroic the Stoic, who also adopted us), and nine chickens (including Happy the Rooster and his hens).

Now... My ten-year-old son Emerson recently got into chess. And, when I say got into chess, I mean he REALLY (!) got into chess.

Less than a year ago we were introduced to a great website called ChessKid.com that features one of my all-time favorite teachers (Mike Klein, also known as FunMasterMike) who has figured out a way to teach chess while helping kids have fun and fall in love with the game.

We home-school Emerson so he has a lot of time to spend studying chess. And... Over the last ten months, he's spent HUNDREDS and HUNDREDS (!) of hours playing and practicing and all that.

To put it in perspective, he watches the Chess World Championships with the same enthusiasm I watched Major League Baseball's World Series when I was ten!

In short: He absolutely (!) loves everything about chess. He won the Texas Chess State Championship for his division and his current big dream is to become a chess Grandmaster.

That's the context.

I'm writing this on a Saturday afternoon. I'm putting the final touches on the book and thinking about how I want to introduce you to the concept of *Areté*.

I think THIS little sequence of events from this morning might just be the THE best possible way I can bring this wisdom to life.

So... Without further ado... Let's get to work.

P.S. Before I forget and so you know... The word *Areté* (we'll define it in a moment!) is pronounced "ARE-uh-tay."

Say it with me now:

Areté

=

ARE-uh-tay

P.P.S. Speaking of spending time together and getting to know one another more, I'd love to connect with you on our Heroic social training platform.

You can connect with me (and the rest of our Heroic community!) and get a bunch of other goodness by visiting:

[HEROIC.US/ACTIVATE](https://heroic.us/activate)



ARETÉ

EXPLAIN IT LIKE I'M 10

I'm a pretty disciplined guy and have a pretty structured way I approach every day of the year.

This morning, I cut my normal morning work protocol short to focus on my love protocol.

The special occasion?

A chess tournament with Emerson at the Austin Grandmaster Chess Academy.

So... I leave my office early and step into the kitchen all fired up about the day ahead.

And... Emerson tells me he doesn't want to go.

Me: "Really? What's up, buddy?!"

Emerson's wilted-flower posture response: "I don't know. I just don't want to go."

Me: "Hmm. Interesting. How about we go on a quick walk and talk about it?!"

Emerson: "Okay."

We head out to hit the trail on our property.

Eleanor and Mommy follow.

Before heading the opposite direction on our little trail, Mommy says: "He says he doesn't want to go because he doesn't think he will win! You might want to talk about that."

Me to myself: "Fascinating. We'll definitely want to talk about that."

I reach out to hold Emerson's hand as we start our walk.

I squeeze it tight and tell him "I love you" in our little made-up language we call squeeze-eze.

He tells me he loves me back via a little squeeze.

Me: "So, Mommy says you don't want to go because you're not going to win the tournament?!"