

Not a Book for Everyone

*...a few words from the **Introduction** to Faith Beyond Belief. (the **Table of Contents** appears below the Intro)*

This book may not be for everyone. If the questions below and the ensuing discussion threaten your view of reality or make you feel defensive, then this book—especially the discussion parts—may not be for you. If your religion brings you needed comfort against a world filled with fear, if your specific religious beliefs are holding your world together, please read no further. Similarly, if your atheism defines your existence, you may want to do the same.

On the other hand, if you welcome a challenge that takes you past the typical believer-versus-nonbeliever divide—if the questions below leave you curious to know more—I invite you on a tour through the Faith Beyond Belief perspective. I point the way to a common human faith process by which religious (and atheistic) righteousness, divisiveness and triumphalism, are replaced by the “higher” goals of inclusiveness, unity, and love. It is an endpoint available to us all.

Are you tired yet of the warring between religious believers and non-believers? (Have you noticed how some, especially in our political arena, fan the fires of this battle?)

Did the “New Atheist” writers, Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, speak clearly to your rational mind, yet leave your heart still yearning for some greater spiritual reality?

Does the challenge of a more sophisticated understanding than either the religious believers or the nonbelievers typically put forth excite you?

Prospective readers of this book who are merely inquisitive about people’s spiritual decisions can sit back and just enjoy the entertainment value of these stories. But receptive readers seeking something more—those responsive to the three questions above—will also gain the opportunity to view religious and spiritual maturity in a different light. This new complexity will open fresh ways of appreciating our shared humanity and arm these readers against some particularly short-sighted outlooks that are threatening to insinuate themselves into our general culture.

Anyone paying attention can see how winning out over the other guy has become way too

important in our society. In much of the business world, little thought is given to what might constitute “right conduct” beyond what brings the most monetary benefit. Reckless behavior on Wall Street has caused millions of dollars in personal losses, and has led many to lose their homes. In healthcare, major decisions are made by “bean counters” at huge insurance conglomerates whose primary allegiance is to corporate profit motives. Often those motives supersede concern for the medical well-being of those they were established to serve. Where profits are concerned, the welfare of customers, clients, and patients receives far less consideration than it deserves.

When winning becomes too important, it blurs concern for the way our actions affect others; it necessarily sets up someone on the opposing side who must “lose.” The win/lose mentality prominent in our society is a symptom of a much larger problem—a spiritual problem, in fact. A contagious societal myopia blinds us to the ways that strictly self-serving actions harm the overall society. As the most spiritually developed humans are aware, we are all part of a greater whole. What is done to the least member of that whole, harms everyone. The short-sighted, spiritually myopic actions of ruthlessly determined “winners” have a far-reaching effect that goes little noticed; they also harm the winners themselves.

This spiritual myopia is even more evident in the political arena, where the need to win has been distorted entirely out of proportion. Contenders particularly desperate for power have reduced the concepts of truth, honor, and dignity to their most superficial meanings. Pundits and political rivals hijack terminology to their advantage and misinterpret events in a frantic effort to place opponents in a bad light. They twist truth to fit their convenience, at great cost to civility—and with no concern for how their actions might harm the larger society.

How is it that our culture has allowed this spiritual myopia to progress uncorrected to this extent in the political arena? How is it that even some otherwise sophisticated citizens have fallen prey to their tactics? The most desperate contenders have enlisted the aid of a special weapon: God. They call upon the Bible, God, and their own particular religion to fight their battles for them. Their spiritual myopia consists in the fact that they invoke these entities only in their most superficial connotations. Does their sense of righteousness really only extend as deep as following the Bible? Does the God they invoke really only support the efforts of Christians? Gullible listeners fall prey to these religious simplifications only because we, as a nation, suffer from a similar myopia.

However sophisticated we may be in other aspects of life, our spiritual views are stunted by literal connotations that keep us focused at the provincial level. We remain unaware

of a well-defined process of spiritual development; many in the general public do not recognize what constitutes spiritual maturity.

But this is not a book about politics, or even the spiritual myopia that pervades the general culture (as portrayed in our mass media). It concerns only the one form of myopia that lies at the base of so many of the others. At the individual level, good, honest people are doing their best to live a meaningful life. Necessary to a meaningful life is the opportunity to live in truth. If our would-be leaders are distorting our reality by spouting mistruths, we must detach ourselves from their influence.

Treatment for the political, religious and spiritual myopia of our society entails a perspective-broadening pair of glasses disclosing a wider truth. The spiritual development process leads us away from such divisiveness and the winner-take-all mentality. The truth it delivers is one that works for all people.

Using very plain terminology, this book discloses a particularly paradoxical form of religious truth. It is one that is easily missed without careful attention and study. Amid the win-or-lose attitudes of our society's messages, it has been missed by all but the most diligent. If political groups claiming religious authority are showing the divisiveness and self-protecting, winner-takes-all symptoms of a pervasive cultural and spiritual myopia—and if our culture condones this—it must be that we have all contracted the disease. We must find a cure.

In this book, ten real-life stories, of two very different kinds, address the above questions. They illuminate steps in a faith journey that is well known in certain circles, but receives little attention in our larger culture. Though not coming right out and saying it in so many words, various experts have described a surprising and particularly counter-intuitive set of steps that lead a person away from the winner-takes-all stance and the divisiveness and triumphalism most of us fail to recognize as spiritual immaturity. The spiritual-development process leads people toward a maturity founded on a deeper appreciation of the goodness values; it unites rather than divides...

Taken together with the surrounding discussion, the stories offer an overarching explanation for the atheist/believer controversy itself. This explanation disallows dividing people up into good versus bad, right versus wrong, or even right versus left. It shows how any such black-and-white distinctions deny the complexity of which human reason and spirituality are capable and are necessarily inadequate when applied to humanity itself...