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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SELF-HELP

The Healing Power of Connection: A Simple Path to Self-Discovery and the Joy of Belonging

Robert R. Randall
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Looking beyond the drab cover of this slender volume may require a leap of faith, but those who make it will be rewarded with a nonjudgmental exploration of the power of connection for healing emotional wounds. Like a favorite uncle or, for that matter, a good therapist, Robert R. Randall exudes compassion as he describes persistent feelings of anger, fear, sadness, guilt, resentment, and depression as among the maladies for which connection is a soothing balm.

Randall, a veteran of twelve-step programs and a self-described spiritual traveler, puts his master's degree in communications and his longstanding practice of mindfulness meditation to good use in this engaging guide. The fourteen well-organized and well-written chapters walk readers through a series of steps for finding ways to reconnect—first with oneself, then with others, and eventually with a higher spiritual power. Refreshingly, Randall emphasizes that the higher being need not be affiliated with any particular faith, thereby widening the appeal of this book to agnostics and perhaps even dissatisfied atheists.

The author draws heavily on inventories, guilt lists, and other methods that have proven effective in twelve-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Emotions Anonymous. Along the way, Randall offers encouragement in the form of well-placed quotes and anecdotes from individuals with whom he has worked. Having seen and heard it all, Randall isn't afraid to use humor to shake people from their inertia. For instance, when talking about the value in finding a confidant, Randall employs gentle self-deprecation to urge readers not to be too picky: "The perfect candidate for me would have been extremely intelligent, sophisticated, kind and wise, gentle and forgiving—perhaps an old priest—better yet, a deaf, mute, dying old priest who, in any case, was soon moving out of the country."

A critical reader may be tempted to poke holes in the precipitative reasoning that leads Randall from the manifestation of the problem (troublesome feelings) to its source (a vague and ill-defined feeling of difference or apartness) and to its solution (connection with oneself, others, and God) in just a few pages. Fortunately, Randall's message isn't contingent upon such academic concerns. He emphasizes that expending too much energy on understanding and explaining sucks people into anxiety-inducing loops of questions. He instead implores readers to bypass the analysis and simply benefit from the experience of connection: "the sense of belonging on the planet [that] brings with it a recognition of ourselves in others; a sense of Divine order, self-acceptance and spiritual purpose, and feelings of genuine peace and love."

Randall himself first glimpsed what he calls "the real power of connection" during a spiritual epiphany in which he realized that the "feeling of apartness" that plagued him his entire life was "the source of virtually all [his] discontent." With *The Healing Power of Connection*, Randall not only connects with his readers but also gives them a warm, avuncular embrace.

JENNIFER MOORE (November 9, 2012)

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