The Missing Element: Inspiring Compassion for the Human Condition

Debra Silverman  
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Psychologist and astrologer Debra Silverman’s *The Missing Element* encourages spiritual journeying and deep introspection about reasons for being. A guide to self-awareness, the book is designed to inspire both confidence and compassion.

*The Missing Element* is both an exploration of the four elements that make up every person—water, air, earth, and fire—and an exhortation to discover “the missing element”—the “Observer,” or as Silverman also puts it, “the part of you that can stand outside of judgment and see yourself with a more wise and compassionate approach.”

Using a combination of explanation and storytelling, Silverman examines the four elements individually, demonstrating how each represents a broad personality type. She includes a brief test that provides the reader with insight into the makeup of his or her own personality. For each element, the author presents a section that first tells a compelling story about a person who characterizes the element, and then details a four-step program to understand the element’s qualities. Finally, she offers first-person vignettes from women and men who best represent the element in question. This approach serves to encapsulate each element as a self-contained unit, thus making it easy to digest the material without becoming overwhelmed.

Silverman also spends some time discussing the notion of the Observer, which she sees as a key to unlocking self-awareness. Understanding the Observer, writes Silverman, allows us to “move beyond our personal drama and tend to selfless acts of service in a world that needs help so badly.” Ultimately, Silverman believes it is necessary to embrace one’s own failings and human frailty in order to become a stronger, more complete human being.

Steeped in spirituality, *The Missing Element* is an enlightening perspective on the elements that make up our world and each of us, as well as an honest assessment of the human condition. It is Silverman’s often soaring prose, however, that adds an uplifting quality to the work. The end result is a book that is candid yet entirely optimistic about people’s ability to learn from pain and find ways to achieve a personal sense of peace and happiness.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (Spring 2016)

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