

Three Simple Questions: Being in the World, But Not of It

Charlie Horton

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This concise, practical book of spiritual advice proposes three questions that can guide daily decision-making for people of any faith.

Despite having lived with a disability for nearly three decades, Charlie Horton declares, “The world I live in is rich, and my spirit is young.” His first book, *Three Simple Questions: Being in the World, But Not of It*, documents how he has dealt with depression and physical limitations through guided meditations that bring him closer to God.

Horton, trained as a social worker, was diagnosed with cerebellar degeneration in 1988. He discusses the first years of his illness in a chapter revealingly titled “Dark Night of the Soul.” To escape depression he had to look beyond the physical and develop a connection with God. Three questions inform his everyday decisions: Would I do it in front of God? Is it my responsibility? Will it “increase the integrity of the universe”? If you are proud to associate yourself (and God) with an action and it is motivated by love, it is positive, the text concludes.

The book is organized into three parts—one for each question. Within each section, Horton chooses pertinent themes like “The Absolute,” physical healing, serving others, faith versus understanding, and listening to the truth beyond “brain chatter.” He ends each chapter with a long set of related exercises, labeled “Practices.” These are prayers, meditations, or visualizations that aim to help readers accept their lives as they are and recognize the links between everything and everyone. Some of the practices are quite inventive, such as “visualize your fears as a red colored dragon” that you hold hands with to acknowledge and pacify.

Although the author has a Christian perspective, he writes about spirituality in such inclusive terms that his work should speak to people of any faith. There is deep psychological knowledge underpinning the book. For instance, Horton discusses his “anti-social or shadow side” and claims it can be kept at bay through regular spiritual practice. Through brief anecdotes from his past, he shows how failing to deal with emotions can be harmful: he held onto resentment of his distant father and his high school vice-principal for many years before realizing that he was only poisoning himself.

Each chapter is like a concise topical essay, with the meditations (printed in bold) taking up about the same length as the foregoing text. It is easy to see this book being useful as a bedside devotional. Horton may advocate finding a spiritual guide, but a book like this might do the job almost as well. The subtitle doesn’t have much relevance within the context of the whole book, however, and the cover design is bland in comparison to the text.

Even though the author insists his writing is terse and not poetic (he repeats this assertion nearly word for word in the introduction and in the “My Journey” section), his straightforward style works well and ensures that there is no waffling or irrelevant material. Readers of Anne Lamott and Richard Rohr will especially enjoy *Three Simple Questions*, but it could be of practical help to anyone who wants to take a more spiritual approach to life.

REBECCA FOSTER (December 14, 2015)

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