



Waiting: A Nonbeliever's Higher Power

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For those who don't believe in God—or don't know whether they believe—*New York Times* best-selling author Marya Hornbacher offers an insightful, moving approach to the concept of faith.

Many of us have been trained to think of spirituality as the sole provenance of religion; and if we have come to feel that the religious are not the only ones with access to a spiritual life, we may still be casting about for what, precisely, a spiritual life would be, without a God, a religion, or a solid set of spiritual beliefs.

In *Waiting*, Hornbacher uses the story of her own journey beginning with her recovery from alcoholism to offer a fresh approach to cultivating a spiritual life. Relinquishing the concept of a universal "Spirit" that exists outside of us, Hornbacher gives us the framework to explore the human spirit in each of us--the very thing that sends us searching, that connects us with one another, the thing that "comes knocking at the door of our emotionally and intellectually closed lives and asks to be let in."

When we let it in and only when we do, she says, we begin to be integrated people and can walk a spiritual path. There will be many points along the way where we stop, or we fumble, or we get tangled up or turned around. Those are the places where we wait.

Waiting, you'll discover, can become a kind of spiritual practice in itself, requiring patience, acceptance, and stillness. Sometimes we do it because we know we need to, though we may not know why. In short, we do it on faith.

Waiting: A Nonbeliever's Higher Power Details

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From Reader Review Waiting: A Nonbeliever's Higher Power for online ebook

Adam Wahlberg says

Marya's brain on a big topic -- what bigger topic is there than God? -- and it still ain't a fair fight.

Edmund Davis-Quinn says

This one I read very out of order and it took forever to finish.

Fascinating though as someone who is a pagan theist, i.e. I do believe in higher power if not necessarily traditional God.

I am lucky not to have addiction, although I do have bipolar disorder. In fact Marya Hornbacher's "Madness: A Bipolar Life" was my favorite book last year.

I know twelve step programs are incredibly common. I also know they don't work for many people. A book like this could help. There is more than one way to be healed.

Fascinating work. I am also very curious about her book "Sane" which is not available at the library.

Elizabeth Martin says

I'm not sure if I'll finish this or not -- when I read it was about an atheist's take on AA, I didn't expect it to feel quite so New Age-y spiritual. Hornbacher is a weak or negative atheist, who would probably feel more comfortable with the term "agnostic" -- at least as that term has been appropriated by non-philosophers. I'll give it another go tomorrow before I make a final decision.

Erin says

This is a technically well-written book, but I found it a chore to get through. It seemed to lack in narrative voice (a primary strength of Hornbachers other three nonfiction books). There was also a vagueness that caused me to keep drifting off into other thoughts as I read ("To whom should we be of service? Anyone. The world's need is very great. How? In any way we can."). So really, reading this book was sort of like meditation. My mind would wander and I had to tell myself to keep coming back.

I'm glad she tackled the topic, and there were some useful nuggets in here. I got the most out of the sections where she bolted down the abstract concepts with specific personal examples and anecdotes, and I wish she'd done more of that. Most of the material she presents here are ideas I've read elsewhere.

The thing about 12 step living is that it's a program of ACTION, and most official program literature

prescribes actions about relating to a deity (specific prayers and meditation topics, for example). I feel like she missed the opportunity to provide detailed personal narrative describing the actions an atheist/agnostic can take to work their program. She frequently recommended "spiritual practices," but never said what those practices might be. In fact, she included an entire chapter called Spiritual Practice, managing to write the whole thing without really describing a single one.

So while I respect the writing (and the effort), I just felt disappointed.

Gregg says

To say this book is life-changing is the absolute truth. I felt like she wrote this TO me; I identified with everything she wrote about and observed. Marya has an amazing mindfulness with what she's experiencing and feeling that is very impressive. This is the kind of reading experience I will most likely never duplicate! I've never been compelled to meet an author but this time I am. I want to let her know what an impact this book has had on my life :)

Laura says

Horbacher reveals herself as a philosopher within these finely written pages. As an atheist myself, I've often wondered about how to find some sort of satisfying spirituality even with the absence of a god. Waiting helped me put into words some of the things I'd been feeling.

Though I am not familiar with AA or in need of its services, Waiting made the introduction for me in a friendly, straight-forward manner. For anyone who is a part of AA, Waiting would be a great book to take a look at.

Richard Pomeroy says

Very thoughtful and very well written exploration of the god question in the context of a person working the AA 12 Steps who does not hew to the traditional notions of God as their higher power. I came at this book looking for more insight than I found but recognize that is more likely on me than the author. My rating could as easily have been four stars rather than three but three was where I landed. A worthwhile read if the topic is of interest to you.

Jan Pliler says

One of the most profoundly written books I've read containing pure truth. It is scripture like in its message to humanity. It will be purchased and find a permanent home in my library of resources to go to in time of need. This woman's turmoil with addiction and other experiences in her life has fortunately resulted in an understanding of our responsibility as human beings in proximity to the world we live.

Her experience and message, in my opinion, is a gift from God to the nonbeliever and believer alike.

Brilliant! Touching. Humble. Truth.

Mcfynnanaol.com says

An Atheist/Agnostic or free thinker's guide

This is told from the perspective of an agnostic or atheist's perspective on traversing the 12 steps. The only part I was ambivalent about was the author's meandering at the beginning of each chapter, some I liked, some seemed like aimless filler. I loved it the rest of it. I felt a lot of similarities between her journey and my own. I agree that a path to emotional sobriety and a higher power is love and service to other beings on the planet. This does not require belief in a supernatural being. It does require becoming a part of the communities around us, stressful though it may be. Personally, I enjoy secular meditation and it's more than merely listening...depending on the type of meditation. You can cultivate compassion, serenity and healing. Insight timer app is a free resource to begin a bit of exposure.

Luna says

Incredible. I can't wait to read the rest of Marya's books, I've never related to an author as much as I relate to her.

Favorite quotes:

"I just get up and go out into the world, do as much right as I can, fix all the things I do wrong as soon as I'm able, and feel an overwhelming gratitude that the war I was fighting is done."

"There is always reason to care. There is always reason to give. It is what we are here to do."

"We may doubt. We may still be profoundly grieving our loss. But we are no longer trapped in the torturous cycle of turning *to* addiction in an attempt to comfort the despair *of* addiction."

"The longing to be someone else, to re-create oneself, is a relatively common human wish. We want desperately to escape what has happened, what we've done, and who we have been."...

"And we do it for such simple reasons: We want to be respected, and we want to be loved. And we believe that we, as we are, do not justify either respect or love. We so often believe that in order to be loved, we must be perfect. Better than human. Not flawed."

"There is great joy in loving the world and its occupants as they are, in loving one's life as it is. There are spiritual riches in being ever-present, ever-aware to the simple grace--perhaps the sheer luck--of being human, with so many flaws and so much to give."

"To me, an acceptance of my humanness-- my unknowing, the fact that I am irrevocably tethered to the ground, that I am not much more than a fleck of matter in an infinite cosmos, but an *integral* fleck-- is a spiritual practice. Accepting my humanness, I am put in my place; I am able, in the place, to feel the overwhelming spiritual wonder at the mysteries of the world."

"I sit quietly tangled up in the slipstream of this moment, sipping my coffee, grateful beyond measure, madly

in love with it all."

"The nature of addiction is retreat from the world. We slam doors as we go, walking further and further into the heart of a labyrinth for which we have no map and from which many people never emerge." ... "We lose faith in all we'd begun to trust, and we start holding onto things again, gathering up the burden we'd gratefully set down, hauling it with us as we remove ourselves from the world. All our old habits return, and our minds and emotions start to warp. Our spiritual lives dry up. Soon, we're stuck back in the heart of the labyrinth, quite alone."

"The sense that we are only the sum of our parts--whatever we achieve, however we appear, whatever we own, however we try to prove ourselves--is not a good sense. It's an existential crisis. Do I even exist? If you take away the masks I wear, is there only blank space underneath? We do not only wonder whether there is a void out there, in some great beyond. We fear there is a void within."

"I have always loved the fact that time is a construct, invented for our convenience and probably our comfort. We take comfort in order; we are anxious little creatures and like for things to be meted out in minutes, exactly so many minutes for everything, when in fact time goes sprawling in every direction in space, bends and bounces back, takes light-years to reach one destination and reaches another at the speed of light."

"November morning. The sky turning from indigo to violet blue, the curly oak sketched in black on the sky. Steam rising off the lake. I sat in absolute stillness, absolute peace. This, too, is prayer."

"I sit in silence. I sit feeling tiny. Infinitesimal, a speck of a thing, a mote of light. It is the feeling of wonder. Of awe. This is not the part of the story where I say I felt the presence of God. There was no sudden thought of Who made all this? Where did this come from? There was no question of origins or ends. There was wonder, there was awe, in the fact of all I do not know, all I cannot understand, all that is truly infinite, has neither origin nor end. Has no name, no face. Has no hand that will reach down and touch my own. And I felt peace seeping through me, just as the barest beginnings of light began to seep up the sky."

"I express gratitude. To whom? Doesn't matter-- it doesn't have to be to anyone. The assumption that gratitude must be directed to someone or must be for something is, I think, quite false; I practice gratitude as a habit. I try to maintain a constant state of thankfulness; this is something I've learned from people who've found a great deal of serenity in their lives. There's a religious concept here that is useful: the notion of grace, something that is given without reason, something for which we can be thankful just because it is. There is so much in my life, and in the world, that seems to me an expression of grace, that I feel it's only sensible I should be in constant expression of thanks. I give thanks, often enough, for the sheer good luck to be human in this difficult world, here and now, with what I have."

J.P. says

I picked this up in an effort to combat the AA's Big Book's over-religiosity and general poor writing. It is a very dense book. I enjoyed Hornbacher's introductions to each chapter - for example, when she talks about a friend who writes her from the desert trying to lure her out there and begin recovery - more than the bulk of each chapter in which she discusses each Step. I found a lot here to mull over and for such a small book, it is

packed.

I had an AA friend said that he didn't like the book because it seemed rather repetitive, but I felt it was very much like an AA meeting in which someone starts a topic and that topic is repeated again and again but from the perspective of each person at the meeting...so though it was indeed repetitive, I did not mind it.

Mary Beth says

I can not tell you how amazing this book is. Along with Sane, this book is such a asset to those suffering with co occurring disorders and addiction. For those of us with Spiritual beliefs but not belief in God, or a different understanding, or even atheism, this book opens up the 12 steps in a different light. Hornbacher is an amazing writer, and she brings that to this book. It does not read like a self help book and neither does Sane. I earmarked and highlighted and just savored every page. It goes beyond a book for those in need of help for addiction but even those needing to take stock in their ability to take control of their need to control. I can't get enough of Hornbacher at the moment and although I read Wasted years ago and can't revisit that book now as it is to painful at present, where she is now in her life is so inspirational.. I can't say enough of about this book and Sane, and her current works and reads.. (see her website)

AJ says

A really interesting look into spirituality for atheists. Written for alcoholics, I think this book is relevant for those without substance abuse issues who are interested in the idea of a godless spirituality.

Mark says

Quit after a couple of chapters. Just never grabbed me. Mentioned alot about an inner spirituality although no God - just finding our own "spirituality." I did like that at one point she said our connection with others and our ability to communicate was that spirituality but then she abandoned that thought to go on talking about it in vague terms - something there for us to find.

Mary Johnson says

Marya Hornbacher has found words for things I thought but didn't know how to say. Her interpretation of the powerful 12 Steps of AA challenges and encourages nonbelievers to approach the steps in a way in which they can be comfortable. I would have preferred a few more details about Hornbacher's own journey, but am grateful for the insight she shares so unstintingly and with such a ring of honesty.
