

SPIRIT WORKS REVIEW

Reviewed by Angela Hutchinson
Spirit-Works.net

One Breath at a Time is a book about surrendering and transforming a life that was uncontrollable and destructive, to one that is now trusting and authentic. Kevin Griffin is a man who, through much spiritual and emotional searching, found his way back from the depths of alcoholism and addiction with the help of two life altering systems of thought, the Twelve Steps and Buddhism (Theravada/Vipassana). Griffin's interest in meditation is what saved his life. He began to make correlations between the Twelve Steps and his own Buddhist beliefs and found them to be compatible and beneficial.

Griffin begins with Step One, the need to surrender. "Before we can begin to realize our potential, we must break out of limiting concepts of who and what we are and what we think is possible." Many spiritual paths begin with the basic act of surrendering one's own will, which does not usually promote inner peace, to a Higher Power. "We must first look down, into the darkness of our souls, and see and accept our shadow before we attain an honest and authentic spiritual life." The author begins One Breath at a Time, with an honest look at his journey into sobriety and the challenges he faced. He humbly opens himself up in a very personal way so that others may better understand his experience. Griffin attributes his personal successes to meditation. "Meditation makes it possible to see your thoughts more clearly, and when you see your thoughts clearly, you can consciously decide how to respond to them." It acted as a friend that followed him from his addictive behavior to his sobriety. He was not able to fully come into his spiritual growth when he was using, but it did give him the hope of one day attaining enlightenment, and it seems that hope was his life line.

Steps Two and Three acknowledge a Higher Power and call on the program participant to turn over their will to that Power. There is a Christian inclination in the Twelve Step Program; however, there is room for personal interpretation of God and individual spiritual paths. Griffin has managed to find his interpretation and is careful to consider other viewpoints, realizing the importance of sobriety first. Griffin shares the teachings of Buddhism, such as the Precepts, and the Four Noble Truths, and the reader begins to understand how Buddhism supports

recovery work.

One Breath at a Time is also about emotional pain in addition to Buddhism and alcoholism. I was impressed with Griffin's self reflection and his willingness to see the good, the bad and the ugly. He was on a healing journey and complete honesty was vital to transform his own life. He speaks of his need to gain acceptance from spiritual leaders and this need put him at risk and made him emotionally and spiritually vulnerable.

Steps Four and Five are about making an inventory of all the hurt you have caused and sharing that list with another person, such as a sponsor. "The Buddha says that recognizing our mistakes, and admitting them is how we develop our spiritual life....setting the intention to do better in the future is the way to deepen our spiritual life."

Steps Six and Seven require a readiness and a request to have your Higher Power remove the "defects" of your character. These steps are about the willingness to change, and the "actions that allow for that change." The Buddha teaches "We are a process; we are possibilities; and we constantly change." Griffin sums up major character changes in recovery, "Sobriety is finding a new way of living that involves engagement where there was withdrawal; generosity where there was self-centeredness; community where there was isolation; joy where there way bitterness; trust where there was cynicism."

Steps Eight and Nine include a willingness to make a list of those we have harmed and finally to make amends to them, as long as it doesn't cause harm. This is a doozy. It takes a strong person to admit his shortcomings, but then to make amends is to gain authenticity as a person. This is about forgiving and healing.

Step Ten is an ongoing personal inventory of misled behavior. It is one that continues to be worked and worked. I find it important to state here, this isn't about guilt and shame, but rather a freeing of energy and a "sign of humanity". Compassion is a foundational concept in healing and growing, as well as a base for most spiritual paths, and it begins at home.

Step Eleven is what drew Griffin to the Twelve Steps initially, praying and meditating. It is important to consistently face our thoughts and to

remain mindful. His passion in meditation is apparent as he speaks of techniques, retreats, and the development of his own meditation experiences. His words served as a wonderful reminder to me that consistency and discipline are cornerstones to mindfulness, and that it isn't always about what we "feel" like doing. It is our connection to our inner lives that nourishes our soul.

Step Twelve is about service. To serve others and to show compassion is a central theme in the Twelve Steps as well as Buddhism. It continues us on our spiritual path as well as helping others in time of need.

One Breath at a Time reminded me of many life lessons. It is a book for those recovering from addiction, a book for those interested in Buddhism, and a book for those who know what it is to struggle. It is a book of one man's voyage to freedom. Many will be touched by its message and lives will be forever changed.

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