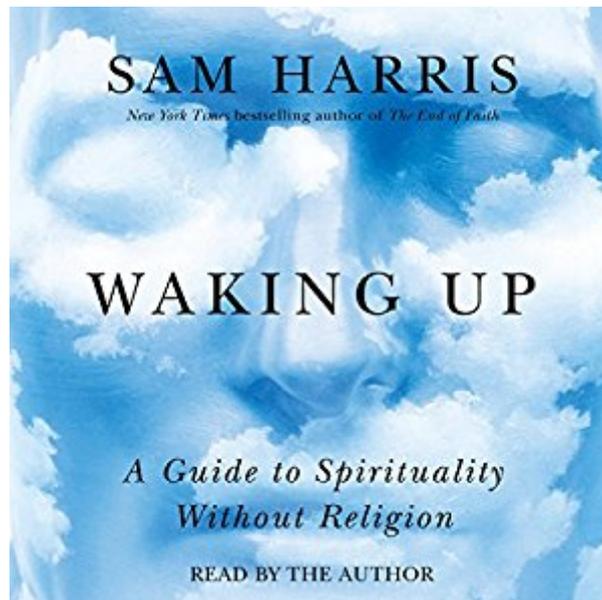


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Waking Up: A Guide To Spirituality Without Religion



Synopsis

For the millions of Americans who want spirituality without religion, Sam Harris' new book is a guide to meditation as a rational spiritual practice informed by neuroscience and psychology. From multiple New York Times best-selling author, neuroscientist, and "new atheist" Sam Harris, *Waking Up* is for the 30 percent of Americans who follow no religion, but who suspect that Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Rumi, and the other saints and sages of history could not have all been epileptics, schizophrenics, or frauds. Throughout the book, Harris argues that there are important truths to be found in the experiences of such contemplatives - and, therefore, that there is more to understanding reality than science and secular culture generally allow. *Waking Up* is part seeker's memoir and part exploration of the scientific underpinnings of spirituality. No other book marries contemplative wisdom and modern science in this way, and no author other than Sam Harris - a scientist, philosopher, and famous skeptic - could write it.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 5 hours and 53 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Audio

Audible.com Release Date: September 9, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00M9KEFY6

Best Sellers Rank: #1 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Sociology #17 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Religion & Spirituality > New Age & Occult #25 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science

Customer Reviews

This is an important book in many ways. Perhaps most important because Sam Harris has, for the past several years, been a strong and outspoken critic of organized religion of all stripes. And one thing Harris can do better than almost anyone else, is make his case both clearly and powerfully without any added garbage. If you've watched his many videos on YouTube, you know the man can make an argument and stand his ground without wavering one iota. And the depth of his research is impressive. If Harris kept his message in this same vein, he would stay safe and continue to be

accepted as a credible spokesman for the atheist perspective for a long time to come. But did he do that with this book? Not on your life. Harris, makes a whole different argument here, one that many may not be familiar with (but that is on display on his blog posts). Religion may be bunkum, he asserts, but spirituality (which may be the foundation of many religions), is a truly worthy pursuit. No doubt that a great many atheists are not going to like this one little bit. After all, atheists can sometimes be as narrow-minded as believers. For many, spirituality is seen as practically equivalent to religion. But in this book he makes a strong case that nothing could be further from the truth. And he doesn't make his arguments in a detached, completely intellectual way. Some might say that Harris has bought the spiritual kool-aid hook, link and sinker. Harris is a long-time (25+ years) meditator, seeker after wisdom, student of a variety of spiritual practices and disciple of various teachers and gurus in several Eastern traditions. He most closely aligns himself with the school of non-duality or the direct path to awakening.

If anything uncontroversial can be said about Sam Harris, it's that his work never fails to inspire strong and colorful opinions from just about everyone who encounters it. Depending on whom you ask, he may be one of the more brilliant thinkers around, a complete hack, or any of a mind-boggling array of subtle gradations in between. All of these views have arguable merit, and there will be many who go into *Waking Up* with a panoply of preconceived notions about what they might find here. Much has been made of Harris' long-known affinity for meditation and Eastern spirituality, and his perpetual insistence that even the staunchest, most skillful rationalist neglects these at some considerable peril. Another Harris mainstay, most notably exemplified in *The Moral Landscape*, is a tendency to sharply challenge the conventional wisdom on where the boundaries of scientific inquiry truly lie, in what may at times strike some readers as a maddeningly quixotic attempt to reverse the long-standing unfashionable status of a rather comprehensive form of positivism. It will not shock anyone familiar with the author that *Waking Up* brings all of these threads together, and the reader's satisfaction with the result, or lack thereof, will follow somewhat predictably, but it would be a mistake to avoid the book on that basis alone. For those unfamiliar enough with Sam Harris to make much of the preceding paragraph, this volume can be summarized simply enough: it is a warning that most of us are missing important basic facts about how to live well, presented for the rationalist.

Waking Up: Harris' Compilation of Personal Memoirs First off, I'm a huge fan of Harris; he was single handedly responsible for spurring my 'awakening to original nature', which basically means stepping

outside of the 'self' and experiencing reality from an entirely new perspective, free from the mental stress that assails us all since birth, while retaining intellectual integrity. So why 3 stars instead of 5? Well, I have high expectations for Harris and I would have expected a tour de force, detailing the exact mechanisms for "waking up". What we get is more of a conversation you would have at a coffee shop with a few smart friends and less of a scientifically rigorous and methodical resource. Although he makes a compelling argument that is epistemically true, it is too big of a leap for a non-awakened person to make. Since he is a neuroscientist, I expected more of a brain-based explanation for why we're not "awake" and how exactly we can awaken, which seems to be conspicuously missing. Instead, what we get is simply a compilation of what he has already written in his blogs and talked about in a few interviews, anecdoting more about his personal journeys than detailing how one ought to see through the veil of self. The self is definitely one of the most pernicious illusions of all, but it is also the most personally vivid, intimate and decidedly persistent of them all. Tackling this head on is a difficult endeavor, requiring an established and mature spiritual practice and extensive experience.

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