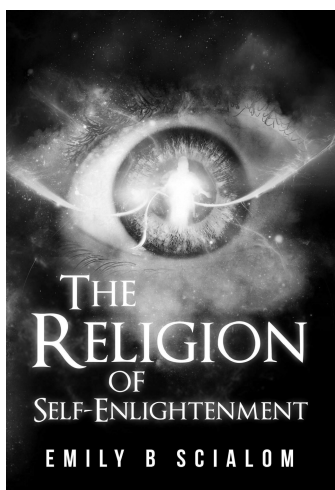


Book Reviews



The Religion of Self Enlightenment

Emily B Scialom

Olympia Publishers 154pp £6.99

This is the story of a perfectly normal man, Carrick, whose world is turned upside down by a near death experience. As a perfectly normal man, he is alienated, emotionally closed down and self centred. He drags himself through life unfulfilled and disconnected in every possible way. Just as normal as countless other men, punching out the clock of their lives. Then he dies.

Carrick dies and is brought back to life in the operating theatre; and the life he returns to is not the life he knew before. Everything that he has previously accepted as normal no longer works. He is reborn to a world where all received habits, opinions, beliefs and actions seem bizarre and ridiculous. One of his initial problems is that his relationships with friends and family break down due to his inability to filter what he says. Carrick tells people of the pain and confusion he can see they experience, which of course makes people steer clear of him.

Carrick is sent to a psychiatrist to cure him of this supposed mental illness and initially the meetings are fraught with misunderstanding and discomfort. The psychiatrist is busy trying to diagnose the problem and Carrick is busy trying to defend himself against the psychiatrist's clumsy intrusions. But slowly a relationship develops, where the psychiatrist begins to understand that he is watching his patient piece together a new life. "...I know why I am here. I know what I want to do. And I want more than anything to do it. But it is being taken away from me." "What is it you want?" "Nothing, to be free to be whatever I would like to be. To not know a plan, and so always be at peace knowing that I will never fail with nothing to achieve but living the best I can from moment to moment.."

Carrick can no longer recognise certainty and sees that most human beings need to artificially create certainty in order to cope with living. That certainty might be religion or it might be science, it might be democracy or it might be sport - any structure will do to stave off truly experiencing life in all its wonder and connection.

So Carrick writes a manifesto: The Religion of Self-Enlightenment. The manifesto explores the fragility and coercive control of beliefs which create separation. And in its conclusion, the manifesto states: "The idea of heaven is shown by the experiences of those who have died and returned....A limitless state of love and light is experienced by those returning from dead states...Their experiences are the best evidence people have about life's purpose. The message from this divine realm is to love one another and the wider world.."

This book is a classic of Near Death Experience literature and one suspects that the author herself has gone through such an experience. It is also a classic of spiritual emergence - how conventional reality breaks down and one is confronted with the liberation of not knowing. And how not knowing turns into being able to trust inner knowing and thus begin to follow one's path.

The Religion of Self Enlightenment demonstrates that the world we have constructed as modern human beings is built on extremely shaky foundations of unconscious belief. And it for us to step out of those restrictions and constrictions into a world of warmth, colour, intensity, enjoyment and love.

Mike Jones