

Stepping Stones for the Heart: Awakening with Jesus

Ann Paulson

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Alongside its tour through three past lives, Stepping Stones for the Heart is a mystical memoir that issues a broad introduction to a heavenly realm bursting with angels, saints, and other divine presences.

A sprawling work of high mysticism, *Stepping Stones for the Heart* is Ann Paulson's love letter to the divine.

Paulson describes a series of mystical experiences, beginning in 1999, that left a profound mark on her life. These experiences center on Jesus, referred to herein as Jeshua, who appears as a figure of unadulterated warmth and compassion. Jeshua fulfills more than just a comforting role in Paulson's life: he also introduces her to a broader "heavenly realm" bursting with angels, saints, and other divine presences who become guides for her in the following years.

In her experiences with divine beings, Paulson also claims to have uncovered three of her distinct "past lives": as Miriam, the cousin of Jesus; as the thirteenth-century Saint Rita; and as Asenath, the wife of the biblical patriarch Joseph. The book chronicles Paulson's fleeting memories as each of these past personalities, ending with a litany of positive affirmations derived from the heavenly figures she encountered.

The book makes bold claims and isn't concerned with winning over skeptics. From the beginning, it assumes readers' trust in its assertions and only makes a general concession toward unconvinced readers, with declarations like, "If you say my story is hard to believe, that's okay. I would say the same thing, except I lived it and experienced the feelings and emotions of it." Some of the experiences described are so fantastical that they still demand some form of verification, though, or at least some further explanation, which the book seldom provides.

The attractiveness of the book's visions offsets this lack somewhat: its model of spiritual reality is humane, pluralistic, open-minded, and grounded in the concept of universal love. Even so, the book often speeds through, or glosses over, moments of profound consequence, and the matter-of-fact way in which it handles complex supernatural topics strains credulity. The book uses familiar spiritual idioms too often, with frequent appeals to "light," "energy," "love," "peace," and "chakras." And for all the novelty of the book's individual mystical experiences, its insights into human nature and spiritual reality are repetitive and derivative.

In addition, the book's grammatical blunders and run-on sentences are frequent, and they spoil the seriousness of the book's most transcendent moments, especially when these mistakes are attributed to Jeshua or other all-knowing spiritual beings. And whereas the book has a coherent structure built around Paulson's three mystical past lives, its sections are padded with miscellaneous secondary "revelations" and descriptions of conversations with divine beings that act as digressions from the main narrative. As a result, the book is unmoored from a narrative throughline.

Stepping Stones for the Heart is a work of mystical devotion that shares curious insights into the supernatural and its significance for contemporary lives.

ISAAC RANDEL (July 27, 2024)

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