

The Gate of Tears: Sadness and the Spiritual Path

Jay Michaelson

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“Don’t worry. Be unhappy. It’s what humans do sometimes,” writes Rabbi Dr. Jay Michaelson. “Life is generally unfair. Illness and death exist. And there will be no explanation that explains it away.” Blending teachings from Buddhist, Jewish, and humanistic traditions, Michaelson ventures into the heart of sadness to reveal it as a powerful gate to healing and wholeness.

The ordinary sadness that is a normal part of life “is often stigmatized, shamed, deemed as a kind of American failure,” he writes, and even religion often acts as though it were possible to erase it, if not now, then in some life after death. But fully living life involves experiencing it in its darker colors, too, and coming to accept and even love the minor chords in its symphony. Michaelson advises that surrendering to our sadness, rather than suppressing it, brings relief, and that the absence of self-deceit that this surrender involves can be a source of joy.

Teaching us how to distinguish sadness from depression and sorrow from despair, Michaelson shows us how to walk through the “gate of tears” into a territory “full of the promise of healing and redemption.” His book is an invitation to awaken to and accept the fullness of our human experience, in which joy and sadness, rather than being opposites, coexist in the complex harmony that is life on Earth.

KRISTINE MORRIS (Spring 2016)

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