

411 Spirituality, the Sam Harris way (*this is an edited version of my blog 411 - and don't miss blog 855*)

I have just finished reading *Waking Up* by Sam Harris. I read the book in two sessions, for six hours right after I bought it on Saturday, and another six hours on Sunday ... I only just could put it down for meals and toilet-breaks. Sam Harris extols spirituality without religion, which is very much the subject of my book *en.light.en.ment* ... a notion I had been familiar with since *The Book of Atheist Spirituality* by André Comte-Sponville. As I read *Waking Up* I had ever so many 'aha' moments, where I found myself in agreement with Harris' ideas. However, Sam Harris is a neuroscientist and his chapter on consciousness was hard work for me; furthermore, he has studied Eastern philosophies and religions deeply and adapted the Buddhist tenet that the self is an illusion, belief in its existence (or indeed a soul) is unwarranted and attachment to the self can be overcome in meditation. The Eastern concept of spirituality is that all is one and no duality exists ... as opposed to our belief in a soul and/or self (which I extend to the belief in a universal consciousness). So that is the point where Harris' and my paths diverge. I believe in an inner life, centred around my soul; though - somewhat paradoxically, perhaps - I do take on board that the notion of soul is a mind-construct (as is that of the existence of God, since there's no scientific proof they exist). But this is the thing: I find the esoteric doctrine of the oneness of all mighty unhelpful, since I experience duality daily on a practical level, because on the one hand I can pinch myself and know of the reality of flesh and the material, and on the other hand I think, meditate and feel compassion ... which I consider to be non-material activities (I know, according to the doctrine of the oneness of all things, those activities are seen as on par with what I deem material, because they are merely electronic impulses whooshing around the brain between neurons; to boot, the theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking says, on a quantum level everything is energy anyway; how remarkable that apparently Buddhists have had this insight for some two thousand five hundred years). So, I must concede I have not evolved to the enlightened state of oneness of the all; but the point is, I see enlightenment in a different light, where it is neither a religious nor an esoteric process. One may ask now: Who is right? Myself with my duality, or Sam Harris and the Buddhist teaching of all is one (which - after all - is supported by science)? I said before the concept of God is a mind-construct; this means all religions (and necessarily all philosophies) are created in the mind. Does that include Buddhism? Now, if one meditates all day, does the time ever come when one realizes the insignificance of whether duality or oneness of the all are the correct (or more desirable) doctrine? Are the two exclusive of one another? If the oneness of all is a dogma one can't give up, could one accept duality may exist as some sort of a sub-doctrine? Are you with me, or have I lost you? I have an essay DUALITY. Nevertheless, I found much good stuff in *Waking Up* (I assume the title refers to the definition of Buddha as 'the awakened one') ... including the concept that living in the moment has the potential to put our mind at peace, and meditation is the process best suited to achieve just that.