

REVIEW OF ROBERT V. TAYLOR'S *A NEW WAY TO BE HUMAN*

In his new book, *A New Way to Be Human: 7 Spiritual Pathways to Becoming Fully Alive*, Robert V. Taylor advocates an astonishing and simple truth: learn to be more fully yourself in order to add to the goodness of the world and to the spiritual life of others. This book radiates joy and passion as Taylor boldly asserts the potential for people to move beyond the persistent anxiety of our time. Taylor proffers more than soothing spirituality; his new way of being human is accompanied by an adventuresome spirit and an imperative to name and confront difficulties head on. Taylor honors the complexity of the human spirit, acknowledging that the endeavor to be fully alive involves work, diligence and continued effort. The opportunities he envisions for his readers demand the "willingness to do the work that transformation offers." Taylor extends in an open hand the genuine hope that others may discover the life-giving awareness that he has experienced.

In a refreshing move in this era of self-help guides, Taylor does not offer a quick fix for all the ills of the world. Rather he encourages his readers to engage in a process of self-examination and learning. His seven pathways are just that: pathways. Taylor's book does not proscribe sequential steps that when strictly adhered to guarantee a specific result. Rather this book is an invitation, an opportunity, with guideposts along the way and multiple approaches encouraged.

When it comes to transformational work, Taylor knows of what he speaks. Both a delight and strength of this book is Taylor's own story, beautifully written and honestly shared. From boyhood illness to astonishing encounters with the Holy to life-changing confrontations with the dehumanizing violence of apartheid, Taylor's life illumines a personal narrative that again and again navigates beyond fear and oppression to embrace compassion and expansive renewal. The risky invitations and hairpin turns that he unfolds for his readers are his own. He does not just tell his readers that this kind of transformation is possible; he has lived it.

Nor does Taylor rely solely on his own life experience to chart the waters of spiritual restoration. Each chapter unfolds with story after story of others whom Taylor has encountered who have struggled with life and discovered their own pathways to becoming fully alive. In these myriad examples, from parenting to addiction to difficult work situations, readers will connect with familiar threads as they engage their own learning and introspection.

Anyone who seeks to connect everyday life with the Holy and to take on a more authentic way of being in the world will encounter a treasure in this book. Parents in particular will find Taylor's book an invaluable touchstone as they engage in one of the most important and difficult jobs of all. Not only will parents learn how being fully alive transforms their lives, they will also discern the opportunity to offer this gift to their children. The more self-aware and self-differentiated parents are, the more they will be able to raise children who honor gratitude, love and dignity. As Taylor asserts, knowing your own story and connecting it with others is essential to spiritual growth; it is also essential for healthy parenting. Raising compassionate children requires that parents are diligent in minding their own spiritual lives; Taylor's book uncovers the stepping-stones and provides spiritual practices that make such mindfulness possible.

Intentional parenting includes breaking through enclosures and encountering the thin places Taylor describes, as well as unexpected meetings with the Holy. Parents will appreciate not only how Taylor's story intersects with their own lives and work, but also how his guidance to an "integrated life grounded in compassion" is something for which they have yearned, perhaps without even knowing it. Whether used for individual reflection or in a parenting group, Taylor's book provides a practical and refreshing companion on the parenting journey.

-Anne E. Kitch

Author of *Taking the Plunge: Baptism and Parenting* and *Bless This Way*