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Karen Armstrong's memoir Spiral Staircase offers me something I can identify with. A true believer who wanted an experience with God, but fell into unbelief after her experience did not give evidence of God's presence. Then though academia came around to an appreciation of religious experience even if she never fully embraces a belief in God. I can relate because I started as an unbeliever (evangelical vs. catholic). Found experience wanting and embraced atheism. But never comfortably so. I always felt that some of the experience of "God" or "spirit" was real human consciousness. Not all imagined or delusional. The feeling of oneness or extra/super natural did happen, so how to explain it in natural/human ways.

This led me to a humanism that encompasses both religious and secular expressions of similar phenomenon. Religious humanism on the one hand and secular humanism on the other both using different languages to express the same experience and not negating the other.

What I felt when I thought of God was feeling of expansiveness. As sense of connection to that which extends beyond my consciousness. I still get that feeling but today I understand it as an expression of my sense of the natural world and my own interdependence to that reality. The experience is not a fiction, or fabrication, but a lived felt reality.

Karen Armstrong was a teenager when she entered the convent to initiate as a nun. I was a teenage evangelical who dreamed of becoming a religious music minister. She struggled to reconcile her lack of experience with a God and her community which professed constant communion with a deity. I was taught to interpret my internal dialogue as a conversation with God. She lost her faith over her time in the convent as she made it into her mid twenties. I too lost faith in the evangelical vision of a personal God as my experience did not sink with religious orthodoxy. She embraced a critical atheism and moved through a series of jobs trying to find her place. I too fell back into a critical atheism and passed through a series of majors, jobs and not finding one that spoke to me. She fell into a job that required her to use her analytic skills to explain religious historical phenomenon. This became her career: religious historian. I too fell into a practice that helped me define who I was. I found mindfulness as both a method for living and a passion for helping others to live a more centered healthy life.

She had to battle health issues that were undiagnosed for years. Her health issues severely hampered her professional performance. I too battled mental health issues that drove my addictive behavior and eventually sent me to prison. She treated her illness and it allowed her to blossom professionally. I addressed my mental health issues and hopefully that will lead to professional success as well. I know I feel for the first time I have something to say that is based on my lived experience (not just something out of my head).

We shall see what happened, I am focusing on living the life I plan to live on the outside. I am studying and sharing mindfulness practice and ideas in small groups and one on one. I am creating a set of life sustaining activities and network of friends that can sustain me through tough times. We shall see.

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