

Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham (2014). *Experiencing Spirituality: Finding Meaning through Storytelling*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Penguin. \$25.95 (hardback), 340 pages.

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## Spirituality and Recovery

A new book, *Experiencing Spirituality*, co-authored by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, has just been released. It will find a broad and appreciative audience and will be of particular interest to addiction professionals, recovery support specialists, and people in recovery. It is not a treatise on how to recover, but it offers profound insights about how to live one's life in recovery. Brilliantly conceived and beautifully written, *Experiencing Spirituality* is one of those rare books readers will return to again and again as a balm for old and fresh wounds and as a meditation on how to live a life of greater balance, fulfillment, and self-acceptance.

Kurtz is best known to readers of this site for his classic text, *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Ketcham for her co-authorship of *Under the Influence* and *Beyond the Influence*. In 1992, Kurtz and Ketcham co-authored *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, which used classic stories to explore the spiritual legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous. *The Spirituality of Imperfection* is one of my all-time favorite books. For years, I have returned to its pages and recommended it and sent copies of it to friends facing major challenges and life transitions. Our collective appreciation for what the book offered at critical junctures in our lives created hopes for a follow-up book by the authors. Now, more than two decades later, that long-awaited follow-up has arrived.

*Experiencing Spirituality* continues the use of carefully selected, well-crafted stories drawn from diverse cultural and religious traditions to reveal profound truths about the human experience. The stories operate at two levels—the enjoyment and meaning contained within each story and the topical juxtaposition of stories within the book that creates larger breakthroughs of perception and understanding. The stories are used by the authors to explore tragedy, grief, hate, wrath, envy, and pride, and to elevate us through discussions of awe, virtue, gratitude, listening, forgiveness, fidelity, justice, loyalty, humility, humor, prayer, recovery, and community.

If asked, “What do these vulnerabilities and virtues have to do with addiction recovery?” some would say, “Nothing,” while others, including myself, would declare, “Everything.” The corruption of character is a near-universal dimension of the addiction experience, making the reconstruction of character, identity, and interpersonal relationships central tasks within the long-term recovery process. *Experiencing Spirituality* vividly illuminates these tasks, relying on the inherited stories of those who previously traveled such journeys of personal metamorphosis. No reader will appreciate *Experiencing Spirituality* more than those in the process of healing and rebuilding their lives. Recovery is ultimately a process of recasting one's own story—weaving new meaning into the past while transforming imminent tragedy into redemptive drama. Readers in such circumstances will find this book a source of hope and light.

There is also an aged simplicity and solidness to *Experiencing Spirituality* that readers will find deeply comforting. The stories and lessons Kurtz and Ketcham have selected are ones that have withstood the test of time. Reading *Experiencing Spirituality* will provide continual opportunities for self-reflection, but, as one will discover in its pages, spirituality is in its essence something quite different than self-exploration. It is about helping us, in an age of obsession with self, to connect with resources and relationships beyond the self. It is in that leap out of self and self-consciousness that one finds the potential for authentic connection and communion and the path through experience and knowledge to wisdom. My deepest thanks to Ernie Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham for offering us maps to guide us on this journey.