

Book culls from decade of spiritual thinking on PBS program: *The Life of Meaning*

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A new book based on interviews from the PBS program *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* finds a spiritual hunger beneath the secular veneer of modern culture, with many searching for something beyond the material world.

The Life of Meaning (Seven Stories Press) was edited by the show's executive editor and host, Bob Abernethy, and longtime journalist William Bole. Essays in the book were drawn from interviews conducted by Abernethy, who founded the show 10 years ago after four decades as an NBC correspondent, and by other *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* correspondents and producers.

Bole has written for many publications, including the *Washington Post*, *Commonweal* magazine and the *Century*.

The book groups essays into such sections as "The Meaning Makers," "Evil and Suffering," "Prayer and Meditation" and "Paths up the Mountain." Filled with ideas of people from scientists to writers, the book dismantles the myth that postmodern thinking offers little room for faith.

"A lot of people have this feeling that there is something more," said Abernethy.

Bole said he learned from both the religious figures and those without formal religious affiliation. "The people in this collection, they are good noticers," he said.

"Anne Lamott makes the point that just paying attention is about as spiritual as you can get. Anything that brings you into the now, the present moment, is a gift," Bole said. "My kids notice more things than I do. I'm an unreconstructed philosophy major. My mind wanders at church. Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of being mindful of everyday things like walking and breathing."

Historian and religion scholar Edward Linenthal explores the myriad memorials found at places such as the sites of the Oklahoma City bombing and the 9/11 crash of United Flight 93 in the rural serenity of Shanksville, Pennsylvania. “We look for the sacred in lots of places now,” Linenthal says in the book. “We consider ourselves a secularized culture. . . . But I don’t think there’s been a secularization of consciousness at all.”

The contributors range from rabbis Irving Greenberg and Harold Kushner to Buddhists such as the Dalai Lama. They include a veritable who’s who of writers interviewed on the half-hour show—Barbara Brown Taylor, Studs Terkel, Thomas Lynch, Phyllis Tickle, Rachel Remen, Martin Marty and others.

“You can sample and choose from an enormous variety of perspectives,” said Abernethy. *—Religion News Service*