

Higher Power

My concept of a Higher Power (I am okay using the term “God” - it’s shorter) is in flux. When I came to OA, I was an angry atheist. I felt that life was not fair, there was too little justice in the world, and there was much senseless pain and suffering, so therefore there could be no reasonable God. This came from my life experience, of course, as well as the constant horrible news that we hear about almost every day. I felt that I had suffered in ways during my life that were not fair, while other less-deserving people had not. I was angry that God had not delivered me from suffering despite my prayers for relief. What kind of God was that!

The mere mention of God made me “bristle” (like the Big Book describes in *We Agnostics*). I thought anyone who spoke of God was a weak-minded lunatic. Prior to coming to OA, I considered becoming a Buddhist of the Sokka Gokkai persuasion because I sensed, on some level, that I had to find some spirituality in my life. What attracted me initially was the idea that you did not have to believe in God! But, after participating for a while I rejected this Buddhism because they were praying to someone or something that they believed would respond to them. And, they believed in karma, i.e., justice prevailed - if not in this life than the next. So, for example, those who died in the tsunami a few years ago had done something in this life, or a previous life, to deserve what happened. I could not accept that.

When I came to OA, I learned pretty quickly that I was going to have to not only find a Higher Power, but surrender to him and trust that he would do things for me that I could not do on my own. Damn, that is a tall order! So, I asked others about their HP. I read a book by an AA called *Waiting* (the author is a sober agnostic). Initially, I used the fellowship as my HP. This appealed to my logical side, as it seemed reasonable that a group dynamic could allow me to do things I had been unable to do on my own (psychological/scientific grounds for success). And, if I came to believe in God, he could work through others in the fellowship to get to me that way (leaving room for a spiritual basis for success). *We Agnostics* says you must only be willing to believe to get started, and I was willing to be willing. If God felt like getting off his duff and showing me that he was worth believing in, I was game.

I have come to realize that in life you can never rely 100% on any one person. People can and will fail me, to one degree or another. That leaves me to rely on God. The thought terrifies me, because what if I rely on God and he fails me too? Believing and surrendering takes a giant leap of faith. I think I am scootching, rather than leaping. But that’s okay, as long as there is movement in the right direction. At the end of the day, the proof is in the pudding - I am making progress and I am doing things I was unable to do before I came to OA.

When I thought about how I might come to believe, the two concepts that sustained me were my awe of nature and how the world works (electrons, etc.), and an inborn respect (brain washing?) around the idea of Jesus (whether he was God’s son or just a really wise man). When I came to OA, I hated God for sure, but I always liked what I believed Jesus to be. :)

I figured I could use those things to increase my conscious contact with HP. I have tried to pray more often. I have tried to look for, accept and recognize Grace when I experience it in my life. While I do not believe that everything happens for a reason, I have decided it is

healthier and better to not to view *all* events as happenstance. Without being superstitious, I can accept some things as moments of Grace.

So, for example, almost two years ago I got a new job. It's a mixed bag for sure, but one of the benefits is that it is easy, not nearly as demanding as my previous job. It also brought me to New York (also a mixed bag, but I digress). The bad news is, I don't care as much about my job. The good news is, in not caring so much, I have learned a much more balanced approach to my work! I don't work or worry nearly as hard as I did before, and you know what? The job gets done anyway! The sequence of events that allowed me to learn this was Grace.

And, since I am in the city, I decided to strengthen my conscious contact by embracing the religion of my birth. Since the Buddhism didn't work, I figured I might as well try to make being a Catholic work. I have not lost my mind, or become "born again," but I have made a conscious decision to focus on what works and what is fine about the religion and, frankly, ignore the rest. My Uncle Desmond goes to church almost every day. He is a gay man, never really out of the closet. I asked him once if the church's views on homosexuality bothered him. He answered that he took what is good and ignored the rest. This impressed me. By doing so, he kept the value of a religion in his life, and he did not get himself all worked up about backward idiots who have not yet figured out that the world is not flat. He made that choice, so I figured I could too.

So, I ended up at a particular church in the city, taking a class for adults who had not been confirmed. I was very nervous at first that they would be a bunch of zealots, but that has not turned out to be the case. There are a couple coo-coos in class, but isn't that the case everywhere? The attitude is relaxed and not at all judgmental. What a nice surprise! And, the Catholic Church also has a new Pope who can only be described as a breath of fresh air. It is easier to embrace the institution under these conditions. And it was at this church where I recently heard the idea that God is not Santa Clause (if you're good you get presents and if you're bad you get punished). I was blown away by this idea because I realized that I had held that exact view, without realizing it. That view did not serve me because it made me upset. Therefore, I had to realize that the view was incorrect. God is not Santa. One of my jobs as a recovering person is to keep digging until I find the answers about God that *work*. Being an angry atheist did not work. And if I allow myself to fall back into that, it will lead me back to the food and depression in no time flat. So I must not be lazy! I must reject the ideas that don't serve me and my recovery. I must work to find new ideas that foster a healthy spirituality and then keep working to stay in contact. It does not hurt to look around and see what others wiser than I have figured out. That's what I am doing now.

I am left with the age-old dilemma of suffering in the world (including mine!). I listened to an Anglican Pastor recently on TEDTalks discuss how the tsunami shook his faith in God. He concluded that God was therefore not all powerful. I conclude that God is not all-powerful in the childish way we would hope for, e.g., the power to stop forces of nature at will.

But deciding that God does not give a shit if millions of people are swept away in a tsunami does not serve me, my spirit or my heart. Rather, what serves me is to believe that while God could not intervene by reaching down and stopping the wave, he was there with each person

who died and each family member who mourned, feeling grief right along with them. I choose to believe he was there, and while he could not stop the wave, he can and will heal peoples' hearts. If one believes in an afterlife (mostly I do, depending on that day), the victims are taken care of.

Making room for God means praying if someone is sick. God does not reach down and cure all illness. People die. Shit happens. But if I conclude he *will not* intervene, it makes me crazy. If I accept that he *cannot* intervene in the way I would like him to, that is easier to accept. But, isn't he still potentially "all-powerful" in that he can give the sick person the strength to face the illness and death, and give the people left behind the strength to move on despite the loss? This doesn't happen every time, but it is possible.

So, who is this God that I can believe in? Well, he is love. His is my own higher self, rather than my base self or my sick self. He is the part of me that makes room for the good things in my life. He is there when I recognize amazing people and amazing events. He is something we may return to when we die. God is subtle, but I think if I look for God and make room for God, he will come in. Quietly perhaps, but nevertheless there. I have a way to go, but I am trying.

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