

Belief in God

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The Question

In a series of emails, Bob Fesmire and I have been discussing whether we believe there is God, whether He/She/It is a real being rather than an attribute we ascribe to the universe like “love.” Is there a Being, perhaps transcending time and space, and/or immanent in every part of our Universe like a “Ground in which we live and move and have our being?” Does this Being, a Mystery beyond our powers of description or imagination, know or care about us? Can we have a relationship to It?

Bob vehemently rejects the wrathful God of the Old Testament that orders the Israelites to kill all the women and children of Israel’s enemies. He finds it highly unlikely that if there is a transcendent and immanent God, It cares for us or wants a relationship with us. The idea of a Great Spirit, similar to the one he called on in AA is, if not likely, at least possible.

Pushed to define my own belief, I quoted something I had written several years ago, *“Belief is not so much an opinion about the existence of God as a commitment to a relationship with him.”* But what does that mean as an answer to Bob’s question? The best way to answer that is I think to start with a concrete example of my faith in action. Then try to infer from that what I believe.

A Concrete Example: Omer Day 3: (Wed 7/29)

I try to start each day with a QT, a quiet time of centering and meditation. I often do a reading from some religious tradition to help me get started. Right now I am following the Omer¹, as suggested by Rabbi Levy. His exercises, he claims, draw on the Kabbalah tradition. We go on a 49 day journey reflecting the 49 years the Jews spent in the wilderness.

Opening Prayer (Standing)

May the delight of God be upon us.

May the work of our hands be supported.

May the work of our hands bring forth God. (Psalm 90:17)

¹ Rabbi Yael Levy, Journey Through the Wilderness: A Mindfulness Approach to the ancient Jewish Practice of Counting the Omer.

Blessed is the mystery that flows through time and space. You infuse us with holiness and call us into connection through the counting of the Omer.

Today has the spiritual quality of **Balance Within Love**. To love the world so much that every day something breaks open our heart.

Practice

Pause three times today to notice and name something beautiful. It can be something you see, feel, hear, taste, touch. Breathe the beauty into your body and let it rest upon your heart.

Reflections

My walk this morning (in Aspen) took me along the path on the north side of campus, behind Greenwald Pavilion up to the parking lot on the east side, then south around the music building, the big parking lot, then west among those building and back to the Reception area through the lovely man-made garden in the center of the meadow.

Once past the dormitories I was in the wilder meadow and noticed the hardy small white and yellow flowers among the tall green grass. There was a snarly bush almost blue in color that had staked out a space it was defending in the meadow.

I came to the planted and watered flower garden along the path, very different from the wild meadow. The automatic sprinkler was on and the flowers here were large, brilliant, white and yellow. Some were sunflowers, others looked like giant pansies on tall stalks: pink, purple, light blue, dark blue.

Coming back I went through the heart of the meadow. In the center was a spot where the lawn is manicured. In the midst of the lawn are perfectly round mounds. Channels of flowing water feed into a still pond. In the center of this pond is another perfect circle of grass and stone. Large blue balls punctuate this clearly man-made, almost opulent, beautiful piece of nature art.

Both the wild and manicured were beautiful in different ways. In the coolness of the morning, the sun coming in over the mountains to dapple parts of the meadow, I could almost feel the beauty. I don't know what it means to have "beauty break your heart open" but it did feel as if the beauty was flowing through me.

Today I will be moderating and interacting with all the fellows gathered from around the world. My prayer is captured in the Psalm below: mindfulness, awareness of the wonders around me, thankfulness for the work I've been given, peace knowing I am only passing through.

I open to this service bestowed upon me:

To live mindfully

To open my eyes and behold the wonders

To know that in every moment, I am only passing through (Psalm 119:17-19)

Closing Prayer.

Source of all, you called us to count the Omer in order to clear us of all that is in the way of our growth and service. Through my counting today, may there be cleared any debris that is in the way of light shining through. May I be cleansed and sanctified with the holiness of above and through this may abundant bounty flow into the world. May abundant radiant light come through and heal our layers of body, mind and soul sanctifying us with the holiness of the Most High. Amen. Selah.

My Belief

The QT described above is an important and meaningful part of my day. I think it helps me go forward into the day more focused and mindful; I think it makes me more effective as a Moderator in the Aspen Global Leadership Program. I think it makes me less selfish and more generous, reminds me that it is not about me, it is about them.

When I read “Balance Within Love” or “breaks open our heart” or “sanctified with the holiness of above” an inner voice in me says *This is too mushy, what the hell does that mean?* However, another inner voice says *Let your imagination free, you might experience something new!*

The language stimulates images in my mind and doesn't trigger negative connotations from my past. “Mystery that flows through time and space,” “call us into connection” are phrases almost new. I love the imagery of the closing prayer that suggests the flow of spiritual power, light and healing through us and the resulting “growth and service.”

So when I tell Bob *I believe in the existence of God* I'm

- 1) Asserting a belief in the existence of God and the existence of a spiritual dimension to reality,
- 2) Owning that I have a mental model of a Being who both transcends our time/space universe and is immanent in it.

- 3) Recognizing that my mental model is bound to be woefully incomplete and could in fact be dead wrong, a total illusion,
- 4) In spite of doubts, though, I'm choosing to "act as if" such a Being exists, cares about me, and can be a source of wisdom, energy, love and health in my daily life. I'm seeking a relationship with this Holy Spirit that makes me a conduit for good in the part of reality I inhabit.