

09 July 1999

Gordon Blitz

Do you believe in God? Can you imagine if that was the first question you were asked when you came through the doors of BCC? What if the application for membership included this question.? I know this is a very personal area that I'm exploring. I want to take you on a journey about faith. We'll look at our beliefs or non-beliefs. Who knows—this might be the type of sermon that Billy Graham or Katherine Kulman would give if they were Jewish.

The dictionary uses the following language to define God—a being conceived as the perfect originator and ruler of the universe, the principal object of faith and worship in monotheistic religions. The force —an illusion to Star Wars, effect or manifestation or aspect of being. The single supreme agency postulated in some philosophical systems to explain the phenomena of the world, having a nature variously conceived in such terms as prime mover, an immanent vital force or infinity. You can count on the dictionary to come up with such a cold, non spiritual definition of God. Our context of God tonight is much different.

One of my incentives for coming to Friday night services is to reaffirm my belief in God. The sense of community along with a public and private declaration of my belief in God helps give me an anchor for the coming week. I think it's vital that we re-evaluate the reasons we come to BCC. Belief in God is a difficult and controversial subject. We're afraid to talk about God for fear of losing some atheists. It seems that speaking about God reminds us of preachers—T.V. evangelists. Especially for our Gay and Lesbian brother and sisters—Christians tend to use God and the Bible as support for homophobia. For Jews, it seems more politically correct to refer to the Torah and not get too hung up with whether congregants believe in God or not. For many of us, talking about God pushes buttons. God is thought of like a parent that you want to rebel against. Even though it is expressly forbidden to make people into Gods, many times instead of worshipping or having faith in a

higher being, we start a relationship with someone who we put on a pedestal—who becomes a God to us. Unfortunately this type of worship leads to disaster because no one can live up to a Godlike image. We talk about Doctor's acting like God because it seems to us they are controlling life/death and can be miracle makers.

Some people are very visual and their image of God could be Charleton Heston from the Ten Commandments or George Bernard Shaw on the cover of the Original Broadway Cast album of My Fair Lady. I think as Jews we tend to avoid images of God because of the way Christians tend to idolize the image of Jesus through paintings, artifacts, statues etc. God can be thought of as a spirit. An all encompassing being that just merely exists. God can be a part of nature—an earth mother. Sometimes looking into someone's eyes you not only peer into their soul but you might be looking at God. God can even be perceived as part of our psyche. The way we visualize God depends on our own creative minds. On a recent Friday night, the rabbi quoted a study that concluded that unless we mature spiritually, the image we have of God at age six stays with us throughout our lives. The visualization is not very meaningful. It's not the images of God that create faith—it's how we feel about God. It's our relationship to God that determines faith.

The recognition of miracles is one of the strongest elements of faith. You might call it fate, a coincidence, or destiny. I call it a miracle. I've had back problems and any day I'm pain free I would consider a miracle. There are moments in my life when everything seems to make sense and I have this overwhelming feeling of peaceful happiness. The fact that I can recognize this and take the time to enjoy those moments I would call a miracle. When I'm able to cry because of a movie, play or book seems to me a miraculous event. This pure emotion seems to be proof that a God exists. The love I feel for my family, friends and my partner Neal are part of the tapestry of life that I think a higher being must somehow have created. Experiencing a full moon, a devastatingly beautiful sunset, a clear blue sky in L.A. after it rains are just a few of the wondrous events that I like to acknowledge that prove to me that there is a God. Interesting how people will go to a psychic or channeler to make sense of their life. Is it easier to believe in them or ghosts—or aliens from the X-files? . There are magical events happening every day and yet some of us have become so jaded and bitter that we wouldn't notice them even if it hit us in the face. I challenge you to acknowledge them on a daily basis and resist gravitating toward the cynical and negative.

Now you'll ask about the horrors and nightmares that the world produces daily. Throughout history events happen that we find bewildering. We ask the questions—how could there be a God and let this happen—the Holocaust, dropping an atomic bomb, babies dying, Littleton, war in Yugoslavia. You look at me and question why my lover Scott died of AIDS or why my dad died shortly after I was Bar Mitzvahed. I don't look to God for answers. My life has been fraught with danger. From the time I started attending school I was made fun of for being effeminate, walking like a girl, being poor at sports. I was called a Sissy, faggot, queer, girlie etc. I was ashamed of who I was. I'm not going to tell you that God subjected me to this cruelty to make me stronger. I can't proclaim that I was protected by God because I've never been gay bashed. I wouldn't pretend to explain that God is responsible for me testing negative for HIV despite having lived and loved with my lover Scott for 16 years who died of AIDS.

I've only really learned to accept myself since I started attending BCC. BCC gives me an environment where I can have an open dialogue with a higher being. My belief in God is strengthened by sharing my hope and fears with a community that loves and accepts me totally. It's a self actualization that I've been able to accomplish. Believing in God is merely an acceptance of my life and how I connect to the universe. My prayers are for the most part a Thank You for all the treasures that have been bestowed upon me during the last 47 years.

Now everyone doesn't have a strong belief. For some Judaism is a culture rather than a religion. Here at BCC, culture and religion are both encouraged equally. Stepping through these doors on a Friday night does not come with any conditions. There is no assumption that we all have the same degree of faith. Just like being Jewish doesn't mean that it is required for you to come to services to pray. Being agnostic or atheists doesn't exclude a person from attending services or becoming a member. A sense of belonging and community in a spiritual environment is what BCC is all about. If you took a survey of the upper intelligencia, you might suspect that a higher percentage would be atheist. Yet Albert Einstein had a profound belief in God disputing the myth that God is a concept only the non-intellectual can easily grasp. God can be an idea, an inkling that there is a purpose and order to our day to day existence. I hope that I've initiated a new beginning for those of you who want God to be a more significant and compelling part of

your life.