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ARE YOU THERE, PEOPLE? IT'S ME, GOD

Posted by Jay Martel



Here's my problem: I don't believe in people. To me, human beings and their world are nothing more than the product of our collective imagination, a sad manifestation of our need to feel important beyond our actual existence. I also can't help feeling that our lives would be better if *no one* believed in people; only then would we be able to truly deal with our problems without nursing the delusion of a universe that's completely dependent on us.

The bottom line is that there are no easy answers to the questions we all have about life. Why are we here? Why are we all-seeing, all-knowing and immortal? How are we able to be everywhere at the same time? I don't pretend to know. I do know, however, that these questions are not made easier by believing there's a planet of people somewhere out there who depend on us to land their planes safely.

Like most of us, I was raised by parents who believed in the existence of people. Before every meal and every bedtime, we would sit quietly, "listening" to their prayers, and every Sunday morning I was awakened early so we could all go sit on our heavenly thrones for an hour, pretending to be worshipped. How ridiculous that all seems now! At the time, though, I never questioned any of it. In fact, for most of my teens, I spoke to a person named Moses who I believed was completely dependent on my advice. I now realize, of course, that this was nothing more than a delusion I needed in order to break free of my cloying parents and *their* needs.

As I grew, persistent questions nagged at me. I asked my father: If we have ultimate power over peoples' lives, why can't we just make them perfect and alleviate their suffering? That way, they wouldn't need to pray anymore, and we wouldn't need to listen! My father shook his head with a long-suffering look as if he'd caught me playing with his best lightning bolts. He explained to me that of course we couldn't intervene in peoples' lives like that, because then how would they grow

and become purer souls? It's hard to believe that I actually believed this. Absolutely crazy—the idea that we created people just to torture them!

After rejecting my parents' faith, I dabbled in different forms of people-belief. For a while, I believed that people became happier when they killed animals for me. Then I believed that I buried a gold tablet for people to find. I even flirted with even flakier religions, believing that the peoples' sun wouldn't rise in the morning if I didn't haul it up with my chariot (I was on anti-depressants at the time). Then, at perhaps my lowest point, I imagined that I had a son who I sent to the people to do with as they wished—some kind of bizarre loaner, I guess.

Then I had a breakthrough: Why did the people I believed in need me so badly? If I truly had dominion over every aspect of their lives, as I was led to believe, why were they so screwed up? I was familiar with the arguments of theologians—that somehow peoples' sorry existence was further proof of their need for me. But I just couldn't buy it anymore.

Since throwing off the shackles of believing in people, it hasn't been easy living in a culture where everyone seems to think they've talked to some guy in a desert. When I recently tried to get medical help for my now-senile father—who actually believed that dead people with wings had come to live with him—I was told that my father was “comforted” by this delusion. When will we realize that there is nothing comforting about ignorance?

I'm frequently asked: Don't you sometimes, late at night, at your lowest moments, wish that you were worshipped? When the chips are down, when you feel completely worthless, don't you wish you could hear the prayers of billions of people asking you for help and comfort? And I would not be completely truthful if I didn't say that sometimes, I do. After all, I'm only a god.

Illustration by Joost Swarte.

Read more: <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/shouts/2012/12/atheist-god.html#ixzz2JUiu60i3>

Thoughts on the Article

Modeh Ani: Who's Faith?

Modeh Ani is the first prayer said at the beginning of the day. We thank God for returning to us our soul and allowing us to live another day.

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם, שֶׁחָזַרְתָּ בִּי נְשָׁמָתִי בְחַמְלָה. רַבָּה אֲמוּנָתְךָ

I gratefully thank You, living and eternal king, for You have returned to me my soul with compassion- how abundant is your faith.

The language of modeh ani says, “You returned my soul to me with compassion, how abundant is your faith.”

What does this mean?

- ❖ How can we say that God has faith? What does God have faith in? Surely it is for us to have faith and not for God?

God has faith in man. God trusts in man, He gives him the gift of life, the ability to choose good and bad and the capacity to make changes in the world. We thank God for His abundant faith in US! No matter what transpired the day before, each morning, when we wake up, we thank God for his continued faith in our future.

Raising Your Voice in Prayer- Lack of Faith?

The Talmud in Berachos states:

גמ' ברכות כד: המשמיע קולו בתפילתו הרי זה מקטני אמנה.

Anyone who raises his voice in his prayer, such an action shows little faith.

Why does raising your voice show a lack of faith?

Some commentators explain that the person who raises his voice may be indicating that God is hard of hearing.

Seriously?! Would anyone think that? How does this make sense?

R. Zadok of Lublin (Sefer Zichronos, #1) relates a different, quite powerful approach: The fact a person is raising his voice and is crying out does not mean that he doesn't believe in God or that he somehow thinks God is hard of hearing. Rather, the fact that he consistently cries and scream in prayer is an indication that he (or she) has fallen into despair and hopelessness feels his only resort it to constantly cry and despair in prayer. He has lost faith in himself and his own ability to make a difference through prayer. This despair and lack of confidence is the lack of faith that the Gemara is talking about. Of

course a person should pray with emotion. But a person must also pray and live with a sense of serenity and confidence that they can change and improve their life situations. Someone who *always* is raising their voice in prayer lacks faith in themselves.

Conclusion

כשם שצריך אדם להאמין בהשם יתברך כך צריך אחר כך להאמין בעצמו
-צדקת הצדיק ס' קנ"ד

"Just as a person needs to believe in God, so too, afterwards he must believe in himself."
-Rav Tzadok of Lublin

Faith is not a simple one way system. It is not merely about humans believing in God.

On a deeper level, faith and belief is about God believing in us and it is about us believing in ourselves.