

Last year I came up here to explain how I became a Unitarian. Since my grandmother was an active member of the Fresno UU church this was not, in my mind a big step, I was joining an organized religion which was a good way to spend your Sundays and be social. I joined at the age of 32 after finding security in my beliefs as a Deist, a conclusion I came to by the time I was in my late teens.

As I said in my brief presentation last year, I still consider myself Jewish in that I was born into that group and to the extent that it is an ethnic group or culture I am still associated with it. While Jews have the concept of faith, they do not define themselves along those lines. If I was to define my religion based on faith then I am not Jewish. This was the big Come to Jesus change in my religious life.

What is Deism?

In the Dictionary Deism is defines it as:

- 1. belief in the existence of a God on the evidence of reason and nature only, with rejection of supernatural revelation.**
- 2. belief in a God who created the world but has since remained indifferent to it.**

Last week Minister Bob Miller said that most concepts are defined by their opposites, the part about rejection of supernatural revelation is the opposite of Theism:

1.the belief in one God as the creator and ruler of the universe, without rejection of revelation

The part about belief in God is of course the opposite of Atheism:

1. the belief that there is no God.

Note that all three are beliefs or points of faith. They are not theories and can never be proven points. Trying to persuade someone to change is not a practice of debating skills but changing ones viewpoint

To a Theist God is nominally at the center of the world but in fact man is at the center of the world. God reacts to people's actions. If enough people believe the right thing or do something or not, God will bring forth salvation, the Jewish messiah or Jesus will come, or come again or the mandate of heaven will come, or the end of days or the rapture. To a Theist miracles come directly from God as divine interventions, people pray to God for deliverance from danger and when this happens they give God credit for it. God is constantly bombarded with these requests, and so much of it must be going to the spam box. Tim Tebow, this being Super bowl Sunday, epitomizes this, giving God credit for a touchdown achieved by his team vs. the opposite team. Gods interventions are supernatural and the end of days is when the laws of nature change drastically- the dead come to life. To quote Isaiah:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.
(Isaiah 11:16)

All supernatural. God is acting against nature, nature is the default while supernatural interventions are the manifestation of God

Deists put God truly at the center. Just like the earth revolves around the sun and the sun has much influence on the earth, indeed the end of the world in the end, we are told is when the sun will expand into the earth, the earth has little to no effect on the sun. One could say the sun is indifferent to the earth. Humanity is all on one small planet revolving around one medium sized star in an average galaxy, I liked the presentation a few months ago where the Ashears discovered God somewhere in a NASA photograph God is somewhere out there but not answering our calls.

Deism is an unorganized religion, there are no ministers or clergy or authorities on the subject at all. Asking Dr. Google you will find websites which I find to be a bit chauvinistic, in the sense that they put down others. Like many chauvinists they are quick to claim many historical figures such as George Washington, never mind that he on many occasions prayed for deliverance, Deism is not an organized religion so that anyone can make claims to it, this is why I feel I need to take some time in explaining what Deism is.

Nevertheless, some figures are acknowledged Deists. The 'saints' of Deism agreed by all to be Deists include Thomas Paine. He said of Deism:

"It is the duty of every true Deist to vindicate the moral justice of God against the evils of the Bible."

And also

"The creation is the Bible of the Deist. He there reads, in the handwriting of the Creator himself, the certainty of His existence and the immutability of His power, and all other Bibles and Testaments are to him forgeries."

Thomas Jefferson, also a Deist, on the other hand went through effort to recreate the life of Jesus Christ by editing out all supernatural events and claims from the New Testament. He wrote of his book:

"There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man."

He was quite open about this project and when he thought he had no time to do it justice he wrote Joseph Priestly who founded Unitarianism in Britain. Jefferson thinking that Priestly was the most well suited for the task. This the second UU link I came across. While preparing for this talk.

So with respect to the Bible I'm more of a Jeffersonian than a follower of Paine. I'm not a fan of re-inventing the wheel so I am open to great works of humanity which have been refined almost to perfection on many counts, such is the bible.

How did I reach these conclusions?

My religious experience as a child, in an orthodox Jewish household was that there were

lots of rules, separate dishes for meat and dairy, no traveling or turning electric power on or off on the Sabbath. These rules were just accepted just like my parents rule of no eating in the living room. The rules are so ingrained into every day that they are taken for granted. Of course one of these was praying three times a day, which I did not. I did attend Friday night services at the synagogue, this was incidentally the time which I most dedicated myself to the religious slash faith side of Judaism. No sermons were given in synagogue. Instead, the cantor leads everyone along a set of well established prayers, setting the pace. These short prayers are about a half a page in length, you read them quietly or mumble them to yourself, reach the end of the prayer and wait for the cantor to sing allowed the last line, then you go on to the next prayer. The Friday night service is especially melodic and lasts for about 40 minutes. It is made up of two parts, the first is a series of prayers mostly chapters from the book of Psalms that deal with the glory and majesty of God. The second is the more routine every day evening prayers, the meat and potatoes if you will. Before and after these two parts there are three poems or hymns which are sung by the entire congregation. I will get back to two of these in a minute.

An example of God in Psalms said once a week on Friday Nights:

*The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning.
The voice of the LORD shakes the desert
The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare.*
(from Psalm 29)

The meat and potatoes of the service, is the same as that of any weekday service. Some of these are the ones I found to be most objectionable.

The Jewish motto: “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD*” (Deut. 6:4)
Said twice a day. I rank this as a 3 out of 10 on the Tilden scale of Chauvinism.

The part of the prayers thought to be the oldest is a group of 19 short prayers one of which is

And to the slanderers and the snitches and sectarians let there be no hope, and may all the evil in an instant be destroyed and all thy enemies be cut down swiftly; and the evil ones uproot break and destroy and humble soon, in our days. Blessed art though Lord who breaks down enemies and humbles sinners.

This prayer is associated with sectarianism from the time of the second temple and the early Christianity.

I have a hard time thinking of something that is more us against them, Those lines get a perfect 10 on my chauvinistic scale. When I read that the Spanish Inquisition comes to mind, either as a the manifestation of the prayer, or as the people who are reciting this. While they talk of humbling thy enemies, they imply that they already chose who those are. To them God is instead of the master, playing the part of the attack Dog who is here

given the order to 'Get'em'. The God g-o-d inverted to Dog d-o-g in more than just letters but in roles too. So who are the ones needing to be humbled in this case?

To this day I pay attention to things I hear much better than read. I'm a huge fan of recorded books. Maybe that is why the hymns which are sung outloud I mentioned before had a much greater impact on how I saw things. These hymns are much later, if still ancient, haven been written in the high middle ages:

Adon Olam

*Eternal master, who reigned supreme
Before all of creation was drawn
When it was finished according to his will
Then "King" his name was proclaimed to be
When this our world shall be no more
In majesty he still shall reign
And he was, and he is,
And he will be in glory.
Alone is he, there is no second
Without division or ally
Without beginning, without end*

Attributed to Ibn Gabirol 1021-1058.

No mention of any supernatural actions or interventions. Relative to the Psalms it is lacking in physical imagery. Beyond comprehension
The second hymn sung aloud was written in 1404 by Daniel ben Judah. I searched for a translation of it and stumbled upon Newton M. Mann (1836-1926) who was a Unitarian minister, author, and poet, born in New York and ministered among other places in Chicago and Omaha, the New York Times wrote that he was "said to have been the first clergyman in America to publicly expound the doctrine of evolution from the pulpit."

Yigdal

*Praise to the living God!
All praised be His name,
Who was, and is, and is to be,
And still the same!
The one eternal God,
Ere aught that now appears;
The first, the last: beyond all thought
His timeless years!
His Spirit floweth free,
High surging where it will;
In prophet's word He spoke of old;
He speaketh still.
Established is His law,*

*And changeless it shall stand,
Deep writ upon the human heart,
On sea or land.
He hath eternal life
Implanted in the soul;
His love shall be our strength and stay,
While ages roll.
Praise to the living God!
All praised be His name,
Who was, and is, and is to be,
And still the same.*

When I was 13 this awareness led me to come out of the closet as a Deist. My sister snitched on me; I did not pray to God that He might intervene on my behalf by cutting her down soon in our day. Deists do not believe in that.

What do I believe then:

I believe that the world was created, I do not have a problem with giving this creator thought or awareness. I do believe God is infinitely beyond our comprehension and therefore is not looking down on us waiting on our every move, cheering for the good guys or keeping notes on the bad guys.

When the world was created the rules of nature were created, axioms of mathematics, the laws of physics and the reflexes of biology. When God made humans he made them in his image, to me that is morality. Morality is universal among people and that is what makes us human as apposed to beasts. Jefferson's version of the bible, the original New Testament, the Old Testament, all have this morality not because they are a revelation but because they are from humans and have worth in their own right. A person is born with morals and while he can be dishonest with himself, this is akin to working against nature.

Nature has no Good or Evil, carnivores are not murderers, and while some animals practice cannibalism no one thinks to punish them for it. A person living in perfect isolation, likewise has very little good or bad to go by. Morals, Good, Evil come to play relative to God in the singular and Humans, in the plural relative to how people interact with each other. This is the image of God and it is imprinted in us all. Just like gravity has no manifestation if there is just a single object, the earths gravitational force is felt by other objects be it the moon or this podium. Likewise morals have no manifestation without people and especially in their interaction with each other. Since God the creator is indifferent to us, morals do not apply the relationship between people and God. People were made to be moral and to detest immorality.

I found it simple to explain the difference between a Theist, who believes in an ethnocentric world and a Deist who believes God is at the center while people are marginal.

Why bother with God at all then? Why am I not an Atheist?

At first glance the difference between having no God or having a God that doesn't answer might seem like what I was told some monks were burnt at the stake over, debating how many angels can dance on a head of a pin. But without God people lose their senses. God is like the legend on the map. Without God, there is no image of God, which is morality.

Thank you.