

# Questioning the Existence of God

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I'd like to share some of my thoughts and evolving ideas about God and the divine. For most of my life, I have firmly and unquestionably believed in God. As I have lived longer and through more, my thoughts and beliefs have gradually changed. Growing up Catholic, there were many things I was expected to just believe. Divine mysteries was the term I remember. God was focused in the church building, Holy Name Catholic School (where I had catechism classes), and Sunday services. We could not see any tangible proof, it was simply a matter of faith that God was there watching everything I did. Faith in the Catholic mysteries was a bit of a competition, how well could you believe in the unseen? I was an excellent student, a people pleaser, and a perfectionist, and I dutifully believed in the proper mysteries and naturally, in God. Posing difficult and logical questions was generally seen as a sign of lacking personal faith, thus being a deficient Catholic. Deficient Catholics were certainly headed to Hell. If not Hell, then your soul would land in dreaded Purgatory. Purgatory is a plane of existence where your soul is indefinitely stuck between heaven and hell. According to Catholic doctrine, if enough people pray for your soul, you will be eventually granted entrance to eternal rest in heaven. Otherwise your soul spends eternity in a place without either blessings or punishment. You are denied seeing your loved ones or Jesus or God. All of this was without any proof, for how could anyone really know what happened after death? After all, only Jesus has truly returned from the dead in all of Christianity. There's no one alive to ask for verification of this story. Again, believe it, take it on faith, that's how God has it planned for you. A non-belief in God horrifies your family and church community, you'll be hell bound. For decades, my Mother prayed for my soul daily because I had left the Catholic church and become, God forbid, a Protestant, a totally non-Christian Presbyterian!

Probably because of the early learning of God being in a few fixed locations, it took me well into later adolescence to understand, and feel I had permission, to see God and divinity in nature, people, our homes, art, music, and everyday life. I still consider things divine that are really unrelated to God. I was fortunate to not have Creationism be a large part of my religious education. I had Science teachers who said Evolution in and of itself, was divine. They shared their belief that the transition from primordial ooze to the current abundance and diversity of life on our planet certainly took a Godly hand. Fortunately, there was no conflict between Science and my religious beliefs. Today I see divinity as the delightful, the excellent, and the innate perfection of things in our world. I no longer mean the strictly God-based form of the word when I use it. There's absolutely the divine in the structure of a bat's wing, a tree growing and spending many generations with us, and the perfection of all kinds of adaptation in the natural world. Evolution is divine to me. Excellent and perfect.

The Christian concept of original sin, that we are born sinners who are deficient in God's grace until we are baptised is another mystery to me. I believe children are born with innate perfection in their little bodies and souls. How is an infant or toddler really going to violate the Commandments of God? It takes several years for them to even understand our moral judgement code of right and wrong. A loving God would not allow these little people to suffer and hurt. We are told that all bad things that happen to human beings come from another person's greed, malice, or sin. We are led to performing good works and being a good person to help reduce the suffering in our lives and the lives of others. Trying to be good enough for God to accept. I have long felt that this path causes personal pain and low self-esteem, rather than promoting actual spiritual development. I am worthy to be alive in this world. I don't need to apologize and atone for being born. I now believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. I find freedom from that harsh and judgmental God in our first Principle. Human beings are certainly flawed but we are perfect and excellent in our very existence..

As I became more aware of alternate ways of looking at the spiritual world, I was exposed to the beauty of the Goddess, Gaia, and the life force of females in our world. Of course, I grew up with Jesus and God being not only men, but white men. Patriarchy. As my convictions of feminism grew, so with it my interest in the female spirit, energy and divinity. That directly challenged my entire patriarchal Judeo-Christian indoctrination. Interestingly enough, my feminism grew and blossomed while attending a Catholic college founded by and run by Benedictine nuns. My undergraduate studies were at the College of St Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. Despite a worldwide shortage of men entering the vocation of Priesthood, not a single one of the wonderful, intelligent, educated and deeply spiritual Benedictine sisters I knew could ever lead a Congregation. They were confined to support roles in education, charitable work, missionary work, and pious celibate religiosity. The Benedictine nuns actually wear wedding rings, they are literally married to God when they take the vows of Catholic sisterhood. It is absolutely ridiculous to have extremely talented people restricted because of their biological sex. I began to notice and wonder about the powerful beliefs of ancient people toward women and toward matriarchy. The Goddess of Willendorf, an ancient small European statue from 25,000 years before present, captured me. I initially thought she was ugly and unflattering, being influenced by the 1980s skinny cultural ideal. With time and ongoing detailed study of the female body in Medicine, I recognized the fecund glory and appreciation of the powerful life force of the female held by those who fashioned and worshipped this statue. Around that same time, I began to learn bits of comparative religious beliefs. I was fascinated by the Hindu faith and its goddesses. The powerful Shiva is generally the most worshipped by Hindus. The fiery Kali inspired my righteous and rebellious spirit. In my early life, I was pretty dutiful. It took me a long time to express these strengths in my own life. As time has moved on, I find Goddesses more accessible and completely distinct from God. They are part of my fledgling pagan and earth centered beliefs. They are powerful and nourishing to my soul.

In the past few years of my life, I have wrestled mightily with the existence of God. Heaven seems inextricably linked with God for me. It is still comforting to think of departed loved ones resting in a divine place, playing with their pets in a verdant and peaceful plane of existence. I do really like that image. If there's no God, is there a heaven? On the other hand, I like to think

of despicable people roasting (or whatever their custom torture may be) in Hell. It is satisfying to think that people like Hitler, Pol Pot, Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt in Guatemala, Augustin Bizmungu in Rwanda, and perhaps even our 45th President, may not have it easy in the next stage of existence. All energy in the Universe is conserved, which makes reincarnation a logical concept to me. Sometimes I think of the despicable reincarnated as a snake or a mosquito, a lowly, generally despised, and often-killed creature. It is very difficult to see our first Principle in such people who have committed monstrous crimes against humanity. I have tried over my lifetime to believe in a loving God, rather than a vengeful one. As increasingly severe and tragic natural disasters happen, and as the scope of poverty, hunger, labor exploitation, and war become increasingly apparent in our interconnected world, it is hard for me to believe. Would a loving God allow tens of millions of people worldwide to die of Coronavirus? Would HE or SHE select which children are abused or orphaned? It doesn't make sense. I no longer have faith that a God keeps score for anyone or anything that happens. Yes, much or even all, suffering is of our own making as humans, but if there is a higher power, how does IT select who gets the crappy life or death?

The well-known Atheist scholar and author Richard Dawkins makes many logical points in his numerous books about non-belief in God. As he says in his book, "Outgrowing God", 'Strictly speaking, it is impossible to *prove* something does *not* exist. There's a billion things you can imagine and nobody can disprove. The philosopher Bertrand Russell made the point with a brilliant word picture. If I were to tell you that there is a china teapot in orbit around the sun, you could not disprove my claim. But failure to disprove something is not a good reason to believe in it.' I was taught to believe in the invisible, to simply have faith. Although I strongly believe in the divinity( my definition and usage) of the world around us, I increasingly disbelieve and distance myself from a monotheist idea of a "person" in heaven. At times of difficulty or fear, my knee jerk reaction is to panic and talk to a single God I doubt is there. Decades ago, I stopped bargaining with God for a certain outcome of something important to me. Now I pray to the universe, or hold people in the light of my thoughts and my energy. At times, my old God thoughts surface. In tough times, I tell my Christian friends I am praying for them. I think of them with love and affection and offer them to the Universe, try to send them positive energy, which is not what they're thinking, but the sentiment is the same. I still say, "Prayers are always accepted", because I think there is healing power in people believing in you and wishing you well. I firmly believe that we give each other positive energy throughout thoughts and our actions.

As I tumble toward whatever my personal eschatology (Ha-ha) is, I'll continue to develop and reason and reshape my beliefs. Today I've shared some of my "God" journey. I hope that you will have your own path and enjoy the search for truth and meaning in your own life.

