

Is There Really a God?

I believe that all reality is divine. All of being contains sparks of mysterious cosmic life which we can see if we open our mind's eye to them. These sparks enable us to view all of existence as a single whole and give us a glimpse of life as being filled with absolute meaning. It is this vision—open to all who seek it—that I believe is the true vision of God.

The answer to this question depends completely on how you define two terms. What do you mean by “God” and what do you mean by “really”? Both of these must be open for examination.

I am a religious Jew. This means that I pray each day and that I open my heart to words of prayer that speak of and to Y-H-W-H (Adonai), the universal God of all being. This one God is described by our tradition as creator of the universe, as revealer of life's meaning, and as the one who will finally redeem the world. I affirm my relationship to *all* of these, but I understand *none* of them literally.

I do not know of any rigid lines that separate God, the world, and the human soul from one another. I believe that we discover Y-H-W-H when we turn most deeply inward, both toward ourselves and toward a more profound and “inward” perception of reality. Y-H-W-H should not really be translated as “God,” which is a term that derives from old German paganism rather than from Judaism. The Hebrew term is really an impossible conflation of the verb “to be.” Rather than “God,” it should really be translated as “is-was-will be.” Y-H-W-H means “God,” but in a sense that is not separable from existence itself. The same letters, when rearranged as H-W-Y-H, means “existence” or “being.” Y-H-W-H means: “That which is.”

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The figure of God imaged by most religion is a human projection. The person on the throne, to paraphrase one surprisingly radical Hasidic statement, is there because we put him there. No God-figure would exist had we not created or projected it. In this sense, my view can be called nonbelief. But we who create “God” are also created by Y-H-W-H. We are creatures of a natural world that itself is filled with divine mystery. I like to say that God creates us in the divine image and it is our task to return the favor. God seeks to make us divine. Conversely, we have a need to remake Y-H-W-H in the human image.

Here we must involve ourselves in a profound subtlety of religious language, in order to be quite clear. *All* the images through which we depict the divine, *both personal and nonpersonal*, are human creations. The reality toward which we are reaching through those images is entirely real. In religion, and especially in prayer, we are groping toward the essence of reality itself. But its nature is so subtle, the manner of its existence so profound, that *only* by means of projected images can we address it. We have to create such images, and at the same time we must ever be wary lest we turn them into idols.

I call the unitive essence of nature divine, not because of objective knowledge about it, but because all my attempts to encounter the world in its aspect of oneness evoke in me a feeling of an awesome presence—one that can only be described in the language of the sacred. As I stand “outside” my religious vocabulary, I know full well that “God” is a human projection. But as I seek a level of consciousness beyond that of my prosaic, “weekday” language, I know in the depths of my being that saying Adonai in prayer—itsself an act of submission, substituting Adonai for Y-H-W-H, the mysterious and unutterable Hebrew name—is as close as I can come to naming and addressing the inexpressible mystery of life. This act of calling upon God, despite all I know about projection, is the essence of my religious faith. The human need to pray exists on an infinitely deeper level

than the question: "Do you believe in God?" It is the desire to open myself to this level of reality that brings me back to faith.'

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