

## What I Believe

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Friday, February 09, 2007

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A friend recently asked me to write about what I believe for a religious studies class she was taking at her local Catholic church. I believe she asked as she knows that I am a little ways from center in my beliefs.

I came across the following quote that seems to summarize my beliefs:

*We believe in the formless and eternal Tao, and we recognize all personified deities as being mere human constructs. We reject hatred, intolerance, and unnecessary violence, and embrace harmony, love and learning, as we are taught by Nature. We place our trust and our lives in the Tao, that we may live in peace and balance with the Universe, both in this mortal life and beyond. ~~~~ Creed of the Western Reform Taoist Congregation*

I flip flop between saying I am a Born Again Agnostic and a Want-to-be Buddhist/Taoist. I say Born-Again because I was raised Southern Baptist, but I have a hard time with their beliefs at this point in my life. I read somewhere once that an agnostic was just an atheist without courage or conviction. I'm not sure I am actually an agnostic as I find it impossible to believe that there is not some unifying or supreme force that created and organizes the universe. So much of it is still a mystery, but so much is eloquent in its design and application. I have as equally a hard time believing that this supreme force is personally interested in me or any individual.

One of my problems with Christianity is hell. Most religions (Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam) have hell. Only Christianity condemns a soul to hell for eternity. In the other religions hell is a place that souls go to be cleansed or do penance for their sins, and the time there is limited. Not all Jews believe in hell, but those that do believe the soul stays there no longer than 12 months. I have a hard time with a god that would condemn a soul to eternal damnation for the frailties that he has given that being. I tend to believe hell is an invention of religion in an attempt to control its believers.

Buddhism or Taoism as a philosophy to live one's life makes sense to me. I don't believe in reincarnation, but I do not "not" believe in it. It makes about as much sense to me as anything. It would certainly follow the physical law of conservation of matter and energy. I say Want-to-be Buddhist/Taoist because many of the basic concepts make sense to me, but even then I do not follow them all. I certainly still eat meat and I certainly still poison my body with alcohol.

One of the basic concepts of both philosophies is being in the moment, think Zen Buddhism. When you are chopping wood, you should be chopping wood. I, for one, spend a lot of time fretting over what was, and worrying about what will be. All we really have is right now, and we need to be present in the now. When you are writing a program, be the program. When you are talking to someone, listen to that someone. When you are golfing, be the ball, where have I heard that before. We all have a tendency to multi-task and not pay the best attention we could to a particular task

Not to bore you with a lot of detail, but the First of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism is that all life is suffering. Once you accepted that is true and expect it you can move on. The Second is that much suffering is caused by cravings and aversions. I think greed is a driving force behind so much evil in the world. To me greed is the suffering of craving. The suffering of feeling you never have enough. The suffering of aversions means to me intolerance. We have a terrible tendency to not accept people and things that are different from ourselves or our belief system. It is a lack of compassion.

Below is brief explanation of the Eightfold Path that I stole. I think it is a wonderful way to live one's life.

1. Right Views means to keep ourselves free from prejudice, superstition and delusion and to see aright the true nature of life.
2. Right Thoughts means to turn away from the hypocrisies of this world and to direct our minds toward Truth and Positive Attitudes and Action.
3. Right Speech means to refrain from pointless and harmful talk to speak kindly and courteously to all.
4. Right Conduct means to see that our deeds are peaceable, benevolent, compassionate and pure and to live the Teachings daily.
5. Right Livelihood means to earn our living in such a way as to entail no evil consequences. To seek that employment to which can give our complete enthusiasm and devotion.
6. Right Effort means to direct our efforts continually to the overcoming of ignorance and craving desires.
7. Right Mindfulness means to cherish good and pure thoughts, for all that we say and do arises from our thoughts.
8. Right Meditation means to concentrate

I will not profess that I have made an extensive study of the world's major religion, but I have made at least enough study to get a feel for them. These would include Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, and of course other branches of Christianity.

It appears me that all the religions at their core have many of the same beliefs. Some form of the Golden Rule is found in all of them. Moral / ethically living is also stressed in all. How God is defined varies, but in most God can be traced back to a Single Supreme Being or Force.

Where my problem arises is with religion. I personally feel that religion has done as much or more harm than good. I won't bore you with a listing of these wrongs as I am sure you can come up with your own list.

Somehow when mankind takes these core principles, attempts to organize them, to institutionalize them, something perverse happens. One of the primary ways being that my way is the right way, the only way. Just think of the wars that have been fought ostensibly over religion. It strikes me as a lack of faith in one's own religion or belief when you have force your belief on someone else to validate your own belief.

I believe that mankind wants to limit God by pigeonholing him/her/it into a certain form. I think that if there is a God this being is so multifaceted and complex that we cannot even begin to conceive its form. I

believe there are multiple paths through the forest, and there are multiple paths to God. Who am I to say your path is wrong and mine is right. If there is a God could this being not reveal itself to various peoples in various ways?

I wish I could always follow it, but I do try to live my life by the adage of “Live and let live.” I wish mankind could follow a different adage of “Believe (or not believe) and let believe (or not believe).”

In a nutshell what I believe is that no one knows the answer. But to live a good life one needs to study and attempt to learn the answer realizing all the time that the answer is ultimately unfathomable.

Clear as mud?

Addendum:

Complete Listing of the Four Noble Truths

1. The Nature of *Dukkha*: *Suffering exists in life.*
2. The Origin of *Dukkha* (*Samudaya*): *Suffering is caused by craving.*
3. The Cessation of *Dukkha* (*Nirodha*): *To eliminate suffering, eliminate craving*
4. The Way Leading to the Cessation of *Dukkha* (*Magga*): *To eliminate craving follow the Eightfold Path.* This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*: It is the Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration

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