THE GOD I DON'T BELIEVE IN
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A Catholic missionary, well-versed in the art of proselytization, approaches a Jewish man with the hope of converting him. The Catholic explains his Church's theology to the Jew: We call it the Trinity: There is the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit… The Jewish man responds and says, "Look fella, I don't even believe in One. What makes you think I am going to believe in three?"

When Rabbi Brown and I sat together at Camp Kalsman this summer to plan Second Day Rosh Hashanah services, and specifically what to do for this sermon I wanted to bring in a guest speaker. I mean I know there is an element of growth through suffering in Judaism, but you just heard me yesterday, even I don't like the sound of my own voice that much to make you endure two sermons in a row.

Then we settled on the topic of God & Science and I was faced with another conundrum, rather than having too much to say I worried I wouldn't have anything to say.

It's at this point in some congregations where Morry takes out his watch, leans over to his buddy Fred and says let's put money on how long it takes him to say nothing.

The question of God and Science in Judaism seems at first pass oxymoronic. One deals with the mind and reason and the other heart and soul. Try to apply one to the other and you get pop culture theology like, "The Power of Positive Thinking" and "Everything Happens for a Reason". Yes there is truth in both statements, positive thinking is powerful, but science would tell you it doesn't move God over to your side, it moves you to your own side.

Everything does happen for a reason, or maybe better put there is a reason for everything that happens. Is it part of some divine master plan? That would be hard to prove in almost any instance add those things that happen are in your own self-interest and we have entered, I think the realm of magical thinking.

Now before you run up the street to BI or Schara Tzedeck and ask about emergency membership because you think your rabbi doesn't believe in God. I do very strongly believe in God. I just don't believe in "the Old man with a Beard Sitting on the Cloud manipulating the world like puppets on a string kinda God." Where the laws of nature are set aside so that I can find a parking space when I pray for one, or more seriously that God will cure a loved one from a disease or illness.

I wish it worked like that, but I don't think that it does. No amount of prayer will make the sun stand still, the oceans part or the Blue Jays win the World Series.

But God and science are not mutually exclusive either, they are I think harmonious.

Albert Einstein famously wrote, “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”

The statement, which comes from the great expert in physics not theology is illustrative of my own view.

Einstein’s statement is that the value of reason in understanding the world is a form of “profound faith.” The religion he believes in is curiosity and the relentless pursuit of knowledge through understanding.

Jerry A. Coyne a professor of Ecology and Evolution at The University of Chicago explains this can be confusing because the religious meaning of faith is “firm belief without substantial evidence,” while the scientist’s “faith” in the laws of physics is simply shorthand for “strong confidence, based on replicated evidence and experience, about how things are.”

It’s the scientific use of the term faith, “strong confidence in replicated evidence and experience” that is the God I believe in.

Further, Coyne explains we don’t have faith in reason: we use reason because it helps us find out things. It is in fact the only way we’ve made progress in understanding the universe.

That is for me the great value of Torah, and here I mean the whole cannon of Jewish writings and thought. Our constant struggling and wrestling with the question till be arrive at the answer, only to then have more questions once we get there. That is a religious life.

God does not explain the universe, but in understanding the universe and everything in it, we can begin to understand God, if by God we mean more than an old man with a beard sitting on a cloud, but rather as Morechai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism taught, God is, ‘the Power that makes for Salvation.’ God is the force within humans which drives us to seek goodness and understanding – implores us to make the world a better place.

God and religion are the force that drives us – properly applied toward goodness and understanding. Science and reason are the tools we bring to bear to makes the world a better place.

They are not in conflict, they are in harmony.