

My Religious History

I was born in 1955 of two weakly Jewish parents. At the age of five I was forced to endure religious training, something I hated. I already resented having to go to public school, and now they wanted to take away the weekends too. So as a Jew I learned about the Old Testament and this funny language called Hebrew. Before that I had been exposed to the idea of God, but not enough to give it a lot of thought.

But now I was supposed to learn this stuff instead of spending time with my grandmother who was teaching me mathematics which I really loved. I remember these stories about animal sacrifices and God calling on people to sacrifice their children, but calling it off at the last minute. I saw people worshiping and praying. I was told that God got angry, destroyed the world with a great flood, then promised never to do that again. Being a logical person this guy God seemed to have some real problems with his emotions.

But then they got to the Exodus story and it came to the point where God killed the first born son of all the Egyptians. Being a first born son myself this was getting personal. That this God who was all wise and all knowing would kill someone like me because of my parents' behavior? No! I'm not buying this story. I rebelled. I decided this was all stupid and that I wasn't going to participate. I started skipping out and pocketing the 15 cents of charity money that I was given to throw into the till and going up on the hills to play with things that really interested me. Things like fire.

Fortunately my parents rarely showed up at Temple themselves so they had no idea that I wasn't going. Eventually word would get back to them and there would be punishment, but I endured it and when forced to attend I made sure they regretted every moment of it. So eventually they figured out that if they didn't report to my parents that I wasn't there, they didn't have to endure my presence when I was forced to come. Jews fortunately don't take their religion as seriously as Christians so if I missed out it wasn't as big of a deal.

I also lived a block away from St. Michael's, a large catholic church and school and several of the kids in the neighborhood we Catholic and had to attend both church and school there. The Catholic religion was a lot scarier than being Jewish because it was clear that had I been Catholic I wouldn't have been able to get away with the things I got away with as a Jew. So - even though I thought it was bullshit, I stuck with the Jewish identity because it wasn't nearly as bad as being Catholic or Christian which other kids were and I saw as something separate from being Catholic at the time.

One thing the Catholics had that the Jews didn't was that their church was open most all the time and anyone could wander in to this huge space that was mostly empty. And they had all these prayer candles there that you were supposed to drop in a dime and light one. So I'd go in and light them all sometimes and it became a source for matches which allowed me to start campfires and find old lead pipes to melt down and pour into molds for fishing sinkers. But while inside the catholic church I noticed the big Jesus hanging on the cross. As a Jew I identified this as "Idol Worship". They were worshiping a stone image. So I thought of Catholics as the primitive heathens who didn't realize that God wasn't a graven image, but the invisible cloud being. Later in school I would not say the pledge to the flag for the same reason. It was idol worship.

Although I wasn't as fortunate as people who are raised as Atheists I managed to resist being forced to become a theist. I never really bought into the God thing although if you had asked me when I was under 12 if I believed in God I would have hesitantly said yes, I never really got to the point where I actually owned the belief. It was in the world of adult superstition and adults were not to be trusted, which is another story in itself.