

WHEN DID I STOP BELIEVING THAT GOD IS A NAME FOR AN OLD WHITE MAN IN THE SKY? HOW DID THAT AFFECT ME?

Many years ago I was with family members for Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve at a Roman Catholic Church in Shelby, Ohio.

There was a beautiful large painting above the high altar on the front wall of the chancel, and I was surprised to see that the subject of the painting was an old white man in the sky. This was one of the few times I had seen such a depiction of God, and it didn't fit my personal image of God.

This caused me to reflect on my beliefs as to what God looks like.

Through pre-history, and history--gods/goddesses have been seen as nurturer, power, protector and guide with both loving and threatening tendencies.

Different civilizations, cultures, and religions have worshipped images or kept talisman images of the Divine.

Images are powerful, and in situations where I have needed strength, encouragement, and comfort, The Divine Creative Energy of The Universe has sometimes cradled in my awareness as a fatherly or motherly image in the sky or present with me. I believe that God can and does reveal God's Self in whatever way is most meaningful to us, and/or those around us.

During meditation I follow the breath within my inner body, and sense a warm pulsing Presence & image of Light.

In a few situations in my life I have known total darkness, and have needed to reach out to others to bring the Image, and Presence of God through their love and compassion.

For me, there are other images of God related to various experiences I have had.

As a child I was early introduced to a tiny Christmas baby who grew into a person of compassion and "came to show what God is like"--loving, forgiving, and healing.

Once I was having a very invasive medical test that could have resulted in paralysis or blindness. I was frightened, to say the least. During the procedure an image of Jesus came to me unbidden. It was of Jesus in a storm on The Sea of Galilee, and he was saying, "Peace. Be still." I immediately felt calm.

It's interesting to think of Jesus as a baby--being the image, and Presence of the Divine. Whenever I see an innocent baby, I feel that I am looking at something of the Divine, too.

And here is an image of God that is meaningful to me, and is probably so to some other writers,too.--"In the beginning was the Word (or the Mind and Expression of God), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Sometimes I feel that inspired writing reaches that image

Another childhood image I have, is of God as Ruach, the wind or breath. One day when I was walking home from grade school with a friend, a great windstorm came up, and frightened us. I stopped, and explained to my friend that my Daddy had said that God was in the wind. We both laughed, and ran with the wind all the way home.

Years later I sensed God's image as breath or wind after a Near Death Experience. I felt like a Spiritual Presence put the breath back into my mouth.

And there is a description of the Presence of God as being even "closer than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."--Something beyond images or words--A Consciousness in Oneness with us.

Once I was suddenly faced with a threatening situation--finding myself in the middle of a robbery in a market in New York City. The gunman was standing right next to me. I was conscious of a Power or Light that I can't explain, and in a timeless instant I floated out of the market, and found myself walking down the street in a state of trembling shock.

If "God is Love," and "God is Light," then wherever Love and Light reveal themselves--in a Presence, in a person, in Nature, through creative activity, or anywhere in the Universe, I believe that we are seeing a reflection of God's image.

During that Near Death Experience I saw a luminous, radiant light. It was magnetic and I just wanted to go toward it. It seemed to shine with all the love and warmth associated with home, best friends, and loved ones. It's over 30 years since I saw this image of Light and Love, but I am reminded of it every day!

God as Judge is a more difficult image for me because I passionately believe in seeing, focusing on, and affirming people's gifts and capacities in relationship rather than sitting in judgement. But, just as I know there are laws of Physics, I believe there are

Spiritual Laws related to how we treat ourselves, each other, our Creator, and The Earth.

Last year I became involved in a Municipal conflict in my community, and I got so boiled up about some people, that my physical body responded by giving me an oozing boil on my back. It required some emergency treatment that gave me pause to think about my own way of relating in that situation.

It says in The Holy Book that "we are made in the image of God." If this is so, I believe that when we look in the mirror or into the face of a loving person, we are seeing aspects of God's image. Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic Priest, Trappist Monk, and famous writer and mystic once said, "Most of us don't even know that we are all going around shining like the sun!"

I met a loving shining person, an angel, on Albert Bridge in London, England. I was travelling with some friends, and our little rental car had a flat tire right in the middle of the bridge. There wasn't a shoulder to pull the car onto, so we had to park the car on the bridge's sidewalk. For over half-an-hour pedestrians walked past us--many swearing at us, and telling us to get the "bleep" car off the sidewalk. We couldn't even find the spare tire. Out of nowhere a man in rainbow coloured shorts appeared, and quickly found and changed the tire for us. When we turned to thank him and pay him, he was gone. There was no sight of him and his rainbow colours as we looked toward either end of the long bridge.

Are there angels among us? I think so. And sometimes they arrive at unpredictable times in surprising ways, images, and costumes!

George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, encouraged his followers to "Look for that of God in everyone."

And during my Near Death Experience I heard a deep bass voice which seemed to split everything. It said, "God is not so much a Trinity as a Magnanimity. God is in everything."

Does this mean that God is part of the darkness, too? I don't know the answer to that. An artist will tell you that it takes light and shadow to reveal an image.

In life, there will be dark moments, and if we are expressing Love and Light in the face of the darkness, I believe God's image and Presence are expressing in and through us--to change ourselves, melt into others and our surroundings, and, perhaps, change the world.

Mary Morgan McKnight!