

Imagine No Religion: Is Freedom From Religion Possible?

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The God Conundrum, Part 2: What Drives Faith

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LOS ANGELES CA ([RPRN](#))

05/07/09 -- The idea of faith has

long inspired works of poetry, acts of love and acts of destruction. While personal wars are fought to defend the honor of a woman and the maintenance of a relationship, political wars are ignited with the goal of securing land and changing power structures. They are wrought with religious fervor that destroys far more than it evangelizes.

Still, however, the idea of faith in something larger than ourselves has shifted from era to era, providing an ever-changing landscape where now, it seems, pluralism and personal freedom reign.

According to the [American Religious Identification Survey](#), since 1990 the number of self-identified Christians in the U.S. has fallen from 86 to 76 percent. A recent [Pew Forum](#) poll reported that the percentage of people who claim to be "atheist" or "agnostic" has increased four-fold since 1990 (from 1 to 3.6 million).

[angels](#)

The American Religious Identification Survey also reports that “the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has nearly doubled since 1990, rising from 8 to 15 percent.”

So, what are people doing differently than they were 40 years ago? It turns out, while some philosophies like [Scientology](#) oft turn up in the news for their controversial tests and allegedly questionable money-making tactics, other forms of healing and gaining clarity are more innocuous and steadily on the rise. Hypnotherapy en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypnotherapy is one source available that claims to change the subconscious mind, ridding bad habits and negative thinking; bringing one closer to peace.

Studio City CHT [Jann Hoffman](#) explains, “It enables people to allow the subconscious-unconscious mind to take in positive, healthy suggestions and replace the negative, self defeating thoughts. One of my clients said that it really helped him ‘get out of the way of himself.’ Meaning that he really wanted to change but was only addressing the conscious part of his brain.” She goes on, “When you are hypnotized you are the one in control. Your subconscious mind is actually your best friend. It is like a computer -- allowing new input to be programmed.”

Also a psychic who has worked with detectives to help solve mysterious cases, Hoffman combines her practices of intuitive healing with researched hypnotherapy exercises.

She says, “One of the reasons I got into hypnotherapy is that as a psychic you can see what is going to happen in the future but I did not feel I could sufficiently teach or guide people to learn new ways of doing things and responding to things in a lasting way.”

Can thinking different thoughts really change your life? She says yes. “The subconscious mind is like a memory bank,” Hoffman explains, “everything you have seen, heard, experienced is in the storehouse of your mind -- I simply replace some of those imprints that no longer serve you in your present life with new, healthy ways of doing and new belief systems.”

What is it exactly, that people need to forget or change? [Christa Burton](#), an Atlanta-based jewelry designer and model had a particularly harrowing

experience that led to her own belief system shifting considerably.

“In 1991, 18 yrs ago, I was on a peace march on the Brooklyn Bridge. It was the first day of the [Gulf War](#). I was with a friend visiting from Texas who said ‘let’s make history, let’s get on the peace march on the Brooklyn Bridge.’ Soon after we were on the bridge, a car started running people over. I had to jump to get out of the way.” Burton fell nine stories, hitting concrete.

Many wonder what it feels like to undergo this type of trauma. Burton describes the actual fall. “I didn’t know what was going on, my arms were flailing, my feet were off ground. I tried to catch on to something so I wouldn’t die.” When she did land, she remembers seeing something that forces her continued faith in what she recognizes as, “the other side.”

“It was really bright suddenly,” she explains. “Then I was floating. I didn’t feel the ground.” Burton claims that she had an “out of body experience.”

“I’m hanging around in the air, I’m floating, arms are out to the side, looking around, seeing sidewalks, buildings, the river. I thought ‘whoa! What is going on? I must be dead. I can’t be dead yet, I haven’t hit the ground.’ I felt like my astral body that was floating around was my real body...like a ghost version of myself floating around, dangling, hanging. I believe you make a conscious decision to either die or live. Maybe you have something more to do. I decided I was not going to die.”

Burton remembers offering “part of a scream and part of a prayer” upon falling off the Brooklyn Bridge. “I screamed ‘please God, let me land softly’ with every molecule of my being.”

Burton suffered injuring that still haunt her today, including breaking her legs, hips and part of her rib cage. Her head, however, remained unscathed.

This near death experience has been a major vehicle for change for Christa.

She incites, “It really changed my life, everything became clearer and more important, and I know it can be taken away from you when you least expect it.”

While many of us will never undergo such an intense journey to self-reckoning, others argue that these types of occurrences are the secondary cause of the religious melting pot that is America today.

According to Harvard’s [Pluralism Project](#), “In the past forty years, immigration has dramatically changed the religious landscape of the United States.”

Since 1991, the Pluralism Project has been studying what they call America’s “multi-religious society.” A society that includes, “interfaith engagement” and “civil diversity in civic life.”

Whatever the reason, our multi-tiered system of faith has many landing hard on one side or the other. Heralding wars, protests and attempts at unification among varied sides, the right to believe is an idea both loaded and serene, depending on your scope of practice and how you are affected by other people’s moral landscape. Especially when it comes to the voting booth.

Atheists in particular have their own work cut out for them: keeping the believers beliefs out of lawmaking. Garnering help from a Wisconsin-based organization called [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#) billboards that spout “Imagine No Religion” can now be seen in popular intersections in Hollywood.

With more than 13,000 members, FFRF is “the largest association of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics) in the United States. FFRF has been working since 1978 to promote freethought.”

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has its own newspaper, which documents their victories at keeping “state and church separate,” their website explains.

With all this talk of non-believing, and really, the Atheists have some tough guys on their side, including [Bill Maher](#) and the late George Carlin, faith is something that has led, inspired and even catapulted many into success and transformation.

In this discussion, it's also important, however, to distinguish between what some call "spirituality" and our mass-produced ideas around more organized ways of thinking and praying.

While religion has been at the forefront of divisiveness, faith has been known to usurp reality, floating people in desperate circumstances into territory mythologized best by the phoenix, rising out from the flames and surviving the worst of times.

Women have long been persecuted in organized religions, relegated to Madonna, Whore or invisible. However, in our modern times of anarchist painters and gothic rock stars, artists are infusing feminism and literature to obstruct the continued double standard that has long been associated with being a 'believer.' Books like, "[The Red Tent](#)" explore the women of the Old Testament through fictional accounts. Giving a voice to the unheard from. Other feminist theories, as contained in [Mary Magdalene and the Divine Feminine: Jesus' Lost Teachings on Woman](#) explore that "the feminist movement never got off on the right foot because of what early church fathers did to Jesus' true teachings on woman," which would have elevated Mary Magdalene's role "in church, state and society." The book also asserts that "Jesus learned of the Divine Feminine while studying in the East before his Jerusalem mission."

The late mythologist [Joseph Campbell](#) wrote about comparative religion in a less biased way, removing himself from the equation. He rallied studies on everything from [Hinduism](#) to [Judaism](#), [Christianity](#) and [Paganism](#), choosing instead to find the links between them; the commonalities that spoke beyond ethnic divisions or familial ties, presenting only what he found to be true. And while Campbell didn't believe in what he called a "personal God" he did find strength in the texts he read and the myths he dispelled. His ultimate last

words driving those to find their calling, simply stated, "Follow your bliss."

In a time where a frustrating economy could catapult cynicism to reign, the importance of faith -- whether in angels, hypnotherapy, or Buddha -- seems to rely not on what you believe, but that you simply do believe, in something.

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