

Religion and The Fog of Recovery

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I used to hate NA meetings. It wasn't the never ending horror or sob stories that turned me off. No, it was the religion. Not that NA, or AA for that matter, are theological institutions. But anyone who has gone to either knows that there's an undercurrent of religiosity that's interwoven throughout the fabric of most 12-step programs. While today it's more of a soft sell, back in the 80's those fibers were front and center.

For me, it all came to a head one day when I realized that if I was ever going to get anything out of those meetings, then I had to find a way to get myself past this misguided god issue. So, one evening, when the regular barrage of evangelical, interrogative questioning began - "Do you believe in a higher power?" - I simply replied, "Yes, I see the devil every day, and every way. How about you?"

Now this was great, because not only did it shut them up, it kinda freaked them out a little bit, too, so they were reluctant to question me any further. After that, NA was a joy for me to attend and understand, and it became a foundation for support and inspiration. But this sudden change made me think. Why do we still have this never-ending hangup on religion? Why, after all these millennia, do we still cling to such outdated and superstitious belief systems?

I'm not trying to say that there's nothing good in any religion. Yes, there are some pretty horrific passages in most of their texts, but they can also be instruments of goodness as well. Yet, what is good in them is not hard to find, and it can universally be reduced to just four, simple words: be kind and share. If you understand and practice that to the fullest extent possible, then that's all you need to know about religion. The rest is just hyperbole at best, and hateful or harmful at worst.

Though there are hundreds of theological perspectives today, when it comes down to it, there are just two types of religion: private and public. Private religion is, as it says, private: you following your own spiritual path. Thus, this kind of theological practice is often referred to as spirituality, and assuming no spirit voices in your head tell you to hurt or kill others, this is religion at its best. It's you seeking

attunement with yourself, your world and the unknown. That's the kind of religion I practice, and this is why I always say that religion is like masturbation: it should be enjoyed to the full extent of the law, but in the privacy of your own home.

Unfortunately, there's a darker side to religion: public religion. This is where churches, mosques and synagogues often come in, and it's where theology walks out the front door and into the public square. For anyone who understands the value of "the separation of church and state," this is a huge no-no, because this is where religion crosses over the line from spirituality into mental illness.

Sure, there are a lot of nutty spiritualists out there, too, but as long as they don't foist it on anyone else and keep it at home for their own enjoyment, that's okay. We're all a little screwy deep down inside, so what's wrong with a bit of personal fun behind closed doors? But when you march into town hall and demand that everyone bow down to your god, or your testament, or your religious rules, then you've not only gone a bit insane, you've become a bit of an asshole, too.

I do understand that neither science nor religion have all the answers. Though the former focuses on what is or can be known, and the latter is squarely centered in the unknown, neither is complete. Yet, it seems odd to me that so many who claim to believe in the god concept also prefer to study archaic, self-centered, man-made tomes, rather than unfolding the principles behind the very things their god supposedly created.

With all that said, the problem that religion poses for recovery is in the divide it creates between self-centered, man-made superstitions and reality. Though it's nice to have someone else give you all the answers and to believe there's some bearded, grand-father figure hidden in the clouds who is always watching out for you day and night, reality is often trying to tell you something quite different. And what reality is most often shouting at you is that when it comes to recovery, ultimately, you are the one who has to take the first step, and the second step, and the third step, and the... not some smiley ghost face.

We are never recovered. At best we are only in an active, stable recovery. Each day is another step, and each day is another opportunity for perseverance and success, or a chance mis-step into the fog of recovery. Our best successes happen when we are strong, self-reliant, and willing to take on the never ending daily challenges life offers us. Religion, expressed privately and spiritually can provide a healthy anchor for daily living. But when it goes public, when it gives orders, and

when it becomes insane, do the Nancy thing: “Just Say NO!”

Robert offers anonymous and confidential substance abuse recovery telephone coaching to help those who wish to stabilize and maintain their recovery from substance abuse. Recovery coaching with Robert is available worldwide to anyone fluent in English who can reach him at **786-262-5750** (USA). For more information, please visit **<http://trafn.com/coach.html>**