

[Name withheld]
SCTR 19H
iBible Reflection 2a
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What beliefs or values are most central for you? How were these passed on to you?

I believe that the world is good, and that beauty outweighs darkness. I do not believe this out of cliché, but rather out of necessity. Tragedies and suffering seem to physically press me down, and moments of weakness, when I allow myself to be convinced that the world is irrevocably huge and ugly and repulsive, are helplessly bleak. Feeling that small and that impotent is a terrible feeling. It is during these moments, when nothing about the world seems loving, that I turn away from anything human and hug my furry companions.

I believe that animals are the most Godlike beings on earth. They are not sadists; the violence they engage in is not for their own pleasure, but merely to survive. Their violence is not meaningless. I believe our domesticated pets have the purest souls. They are subtle, not boastful. They are quiet, not loud. They do not broadcast themselves. Their eyes are consistently kind, free from vanity and greed and corruption. Their beauty is only matched by the beauty of nature.

I believe our Earth is beautiful. We have amazing capabilities in a world so complex we do not fully understand what we are exactly a part of. We hate uncertainty, and so we turn to science and religion to solve the ambiguous, but I try to focus less on despairing over what I don't know. I'm always interested in acquiring facts and analyzing theories, but I do not let insecurity drive my interest. Our situation could breed in us a paralyzing fear, or we could conquer our insecurity and learn to accept what we do not know. We will never know all the answers or all the truths or all the details, but to let this ruin this wonderful gift for us would be a cosmic waste of something so lovely.

I believe life is a gift. Life is inarguably fragile, and so it is excruciatingly wasteful to not enjoy every second. Perspective is crucial. It can be hard to see past stress during trying times, but this skill is essential. Life is like a housewarming gift from your new neighbors: they didn't give you something you were entirely enthralled with, but their consideration is admirable. So questioning the gift makes you resemble the "whiny" Israelites in Exodus, who complained to Moses and God over the tiniest setbacks immediately after their freedom from slavery. Selectivity in negative emotion is important. I celebrate life. I equate the gift of life with my most cherished memories: Thanksgiving dinner with close relatives and Christmas music in the background, a really good hug when you really needed one, a particularly joyful greeting from a pet, one of nature's arresting displays. I believe that life, at its essence, is a pure, loving energy. I do not personify what gives us our emotions, our intellect, our ability to act and to love. I do not claim to know how we got to where we are, but I am so grateful to be here. I rejoice in the beauty I can find here, and for my own sake I believe that we run on that love.

I was raised in a very close family of four, with twenty-two pets (half indoors, half outdoors). My family taught me how to love, and I also largely attribute my positivity to my upbringing. They are my rock, and I truly treasure their company. My

pets are a delightful part of my life, and I believe that without them I would not be who I am today. I saw in my pets a truth that guided me when organized faith didn't seem like enough.

I was baptized into Catholicism when I was young, and have attended Catholic schools from elementary school to college. Every member of my immediate family is also Catholic. However, my family and I have never attended Sunday mass regularly. Still, I would contend that my parents and brother are the most moral and "Christian" people I know. Therefore, as a child, I took to Catholicism wholeheartedly and tried to ignore any questions I had during school masses. Personally, I have never felt connected to the stories of the Bible. I cannot convincingly personify a God for myself. Mass began to look like a ritual to me, and I wondered what made the *Catholic* ritual correct and other rituals wrong. I do believe that the Bible, at least how it is taught and emphasized by Faith Formation teachers and priests, is centered on good morals that I agree with. But I did not see why a God was necessary to be a good person.

As I became a teenager I decided to simply be a good person but not to keep forcing myself to believe something I didn't. What I realized from this experience was that religion, at least as it concerns me, does have a purpose. Religion gives structure to something that is pretty intangible, and it can be used as a reminder to us of what is important in life. I was a good teenager, but I did not feel as inspired by life as I do now. Between then and now I have learned to take what I want out of religion. My method reminds me of the Jewish method of building an Oral Torah of interpretations based on the Written Torah and past *midrash*. To me, religion is all that I described above: I believe the world is good, I believe animals hold a unique purity, I believe our Earth is beautiful, and I believe life is a gift. I believe in the love and the energy in all of us and in everything. I also believe in being a good, moral, compassionate person. But even though these beliefs are central to who I am, challenges and stress can wreck havoc on things we are not regularly checking and reaffirming.

My beliefs and values have been strengthened since I have come to SCU. I do not have my family or my pets here, but they are only an Amtrak train ride away. In the meantime, I have started going to the student Sunday Mass regularly. After years of Catholic schools, I have come to appreciate the kindness that can pervade a religious community. We may not have all the details figured out, but we are trying to spread hope and love. My 3 year old cousin has recently become very scared of death, and so my uncle and aunt have introduced her to a Protestant faith life that they previously did not take part in. The introduction has led to a dramatic reduction of her anxiety, and she is much happier now. I am in complete support of their decision. I believe that I am using Catholicism in the same way. I use Sunday masses as chances to take a moment and remind myself what I believe and why I am here. Because of this practice of regular and repetitious ritual, I feel more relaxed, at peace with life, and capable of handling anything that comes my way.

Catherine Murphy 11/2/13 10:37 AM

Comment [1]: This entry is a thoughtful and beautifully written reflection on personal beliefs. The only area of improvement is the integration of the communal responses of the Jewish community to the same questions. There is a statement about Exodus earlier, and one about midrash here, but I would like to see more engagement with the insights of the secondary readings ABOUT the primary readings in the reflections.