

Daily Meditation 10/03/2021
God Questions, God Names for Believers and Atheists Alike

Good morning.

Today we're meditating on God questions, names of God that work for believers and atheists alike.

And I want to tell you a story. A little while ago... must have been before the COVID, because I was on the road, I was invited to preach at two services at a Unitarian Universalist church in Spokane, Washington. And they asked me to talk about my book, Naming the Unnameable: 89 Wonderful and Useful Names for God, Including the Unnameable God.

And having interacted with UU people before, I knew that there's always a percentage of participants in the congregation who would identify as atheists. And so in my sermon -- and they're pretty generous, letting preachers preach, usually giving you about 20-25 minutes -- I went through some of the various names for God I have in this book. Names from science as well as from theologians, names like Flow, and the Mind of the Universe, and the Self of the Universe, and the Enfolding and Unfolding of Everything That Is, and God is of course Beauty, and Truth, Artist of Artists, and Mother, and Father, and so forth.

I went through a number of the names and then I paused and said, "Now I want to address the atheists here. If there are any atheists here this morning, I challenge you not to be a dumb atheist, or a stupid atheist, but be a smart atheist. A dumb atheist is one who's rejecting God of the 17th or 18th or 19th Century."

So I said, "You have to get up to date! If you're going to reject God, it should be a God like I'm talking about -- a God of the 21st Century."

Well, after the first service there was an hour pause before the second. And I was signing books, and a man came up to me, and I'd say he's about 40 or 42. And he said, "I came to church this morning an atheist, and I'm not an atheist any longer."

And I said, "Well, my goodness," I said, "your devotion to atheism must have been quite shallow to be talked out of it in a short sermon."

"Well," he said, "you really hit me hard, right, a bull's-eye, when you said 'Don't be a dumb atheist or a stupid atheist,' and it's true what you were talking about -- I have been spending a lot of energy," he said, "rejecting the god of the 18th and 19th century, and you really challenged me. So I'm not an atheist anymore."

So I share this story with you, because it's not only amusing, but I think it's important that all of us have to update our understanding of divinity, whether we be believers or not believers.

Why fight old battles? We're a long way from the 18th century, my friends -- at least I hope we are! And so I encourage you to pay attention to naming the Unnameable and to finding those names for divinity that speak to you today, and that you speak.

Because we're all invited to give birth to new names for God. Remembering what Meister Eckhart says: "All the names we give to god come from an understanding of ourselves."

So that as we grow in our elasticity around God talk, our souls also, hopefully, are expanding.

Thank you, we'll see you tomorrow.