

HOLY ENVY—NOTES

INTRODUCTION

I am excited after reading the introduction. I hope she will expand on what she hints at here, something I've either not noticed at all or taken for granted. In almost all of our studies, I have (perhaps because I'm doing this from distance) been focused inward to see how the book affects me and my faith-and-spiritual journey. She is reminding/emphasizing that there is much merit in making a communal journey and taking the trip in the wagon with a bunch of other humans.

I also started reading this while "baptising" myself---taking a warm bath. As I think you know, the "mikvah" - the Jewish Bath—has significant meaning in our religion as well. One of the holiest rites in Hinduism is to immerse yourself in the Ganges at a festival that happens every 12 years. For the first time—and this comes out of an instinctive reaction to where I was when I read the intro—I'm going to consciously look to do something I do a lot of in my photo club.

In that club, every 6-8 weeks, we take time to work on a specific project. I almost invariably weave a subtheme into my pictures. I think I want to think about *water* and how it can be a metaphor for the things I learn in this book. We shall see. But start with these thoughts. Water is something we can never get a hold of, yet it's essential for our survival. It has nourishing and destructive forms. It ebbs and flows and though we channel it we don't (often) contain it. And right now, it is a resource we take for granted. Any similarities to faith/religion?

CHAPTER 1 - RELIGION 101

- 15-16, an interesting commentary on how "church and state" did interact---in this case state doing so in a negative way to stunt the growth of other-than-Christian religions

- 16, middle, "homogeneity". A motorcycle-riding older friend of mine, Bob Summers, who our wine community affectionately refers to as "Backroads Bob" had the most acute observation on this I've ever heard. He said something to this effect: "here in Canada, the cultures meld harmoniously. In the U.S., they grind against each other"

- 17 bottom, "we do not see what we do not expect to see". Very true. Cleverly tucked away in this part of the memoir.

- 18 top, she is citing one of the main issues with religious diversity and, by extension, interfaith dialogue. It's something dad despairs of often. Terrible marketers. It is to wonder whether there is a deeper thought or two to tease out here. *why* do religions have such trouble showing and telling the best of themselves in a manner that other-than-them can understand, perceive, relate to and admire? I can understand fear of persecution in some instances, but even in "safe" environments, you don't see a lot of effective marketing or advertising.

- 19 top, what kind of Christian I am. It occurs to me that this *might* be a good question indeed. And I *like* episcopal----goes with my demoninations!

- 19 bottom—fallen in love and then set out to prove their loyalty. Did I comment on this sort of thing when wrestling down fundamentalism at its core? 😊

- 20 top, the reference she makes here is more serious---that this one religion has all the answers to all the questions. That simply cannot be. I will be curious to see if she expands on this reference.

- 20, middle. OK, so this is, to me, one of the true dangers of any religion. In setting up rules and parameters and what I will call acceptable beliefs a religion is, by definition, crystallizing the views and emotional positioning of its worshippers---in a way, taking choice away from them (not entirely, of course. You can choose to follow the edicts of the religion or to leave it). A religion that emphatically allows questioning of itself is....heretical? I wish I could remember more of the Karen Armstrong work on heresy. Here, then, we have the great challenge to the great religions today. How do you elasticize the structure and rules base without inciting chaos? How do you transmute heretical thinking into a better form of the religion at hand? Hard, but do it these religions must, I think.

- 20, bottom, sharp reminder of the student or person in the McLaren book who he refers to in opening some of his doors. Another of my pet sayings---the only closed doors are those you put the locks on yourself.

- 21, better answers---that's good!

- 22, some of the best teachers and professors are those who embrace the constant need to learn

- 22 middle, my friend and mentor, Rav Sean Gorman, has put this point to specific application. He spends part of his time as a chaplain for the Marine corps. He has told me on more than one occasion that it has broadened his understanding of Judaism and his own faith, by being forced to deal with his...parishioners...in their own faith context.

- 22, bottom, wonderful exposition!

- 24, top, mentioned this in my McLaren closing---you can never be learned---you can only strive to continue to learn. The Hineni (“Hee-neh-nee”) prayer during the High Holidays is one of the highlights for me and one that often moves me. Composed in the Middle Ages, it sets the cantor alone to intercede with God on behalf of his/her congregation. The prayer begins thus: “Behold in deep humility”. I am getting a strong flavour of that concept from her in this first chapter.

- 25 top, very interesting choice of wording, analogizing to indigenous traditions perhaps

- 25 middle, Abraham Heschel was the much-beloved teacher of our Rav Baruch. Rav Baruch speaks of him very often during his sermons.

- 26, say not “lost heart” but perhaps “lost interest” or “weren’t willing to put in the work”. I would think that those are more likely outcomes for the students who don’t finish. That in itself is something that the higher education system as a whole needs to try to fix---the lassitude of its students.

WATERLOG: for me, this first chapter feels like water that is dammed up....it will find a way around the obstacle, but is somewhat directionless while it looks for that way around.

CHAPTER 2 - VISHNU’S ALMONDS

- 28, middle, no single sacred text. But revered texts? I might challenge her here. I'm not sure if it would be easy to find a Hindu who didn't have some familiarity with the Ramayana or the Mahabharata

- 30, middle, the conversation begins to get at something she seems to be driving towards. Many religions, but a unifying human "code of faith"?

- 31-36. I will forever be grateful for being invited and for making the choice to travel to India in late 2003 (a week before the Tsunami washed the beach we had the wedding reception on a kilometre inland) to celebrate Dileep's---one of my best friends---wedding. And when I mean celebrate, I mean I was in Chennai for 11 days and the wedding was a full-on 4 day affair. *the* most fascinating part was the religious portion (my friend's family is Tamil in derivation---interestingly, he married a (wonderful) Malay girl) and I was fortunate to have one of his cousins at my elbow to explain everything. In that ceremony, there were many unique things---the female blessings, the gifts of nature. But there were also aspects that harked to Zoroasterism....and to the 4-corner archangels---Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael. It was an observation that has, in part, shaped my own curiosity about faith and religion.

WATERLOG---there's one thing water isn't. It isn't judgmental. It doesn't pick sides or favourites. It is there to bless or curse all alike. Water defines the term "immutable" Let's not forget something else. *WE* are 95% or more water. Should we get more in tune with our liquid selves?

- 39-41. In a way, explanations would have lessened the experience

- 44, top---or, a more troubling question. Can your religion stand up to and pass through this kind of scrutiny and strangeifying?

CHAPTER 3 - WAVE, NOT OCEAN (wow---do I have X-philic powers or what! Water!)

- Page 46, I'm groping too, but I'm probably closest to "God is my road, my food, my shelter and my goal"---though I really like "God is a possibility one can choose to seize or abandon". Mine might be "God is all that we wish and hope for and all that we don't understand"
- 47 top, suffering---I like that definition of hers
- 47, bottom, hard to say, especially if we use my religion definition, because "organizing human behaviour" inherently comes with a stratification. I'll get at this question in more detail in a bit.
- 48 bottom, Alopen. OK, so this is definitely worth taking a look at. The language that holy scripture is written in is a very underrated and very intrinsic element of a religion's heartbeat. In my Jewish study group, we talk about this all the time. There are words in the Hebrew which either get mistranslated or don't have a translation But I'm talking about more than broken telephone here. When I (rarely) read a torah portion, I will learn the Hebrew. Then I will cross to the English translation. But then I'll go back to the Hebrew---to puzzle out possible different meaning. And the *sound* of the language is its own language and imbues its own meaning, where you accent a word as you chant it, the "trop" as we call it---the musical "line" you are supposed to follow based on certain indications above or below each letter. I can imagine that if the New Testament was written in Chinese, the ideographs and sounds and syntax of the language would make for a rather different religious experience. Is it not worth thinking about?

- 49, middle, Jesus who I come home to at night. That's fine for *her* definition of Christian. I would be leery of applying that definition to everyone. What is *your* definition of being Christian? *is* Christ a *necessary* part of that for you today? Just so I don't shirk my duty, I will take a stab at answering on my end.

That answer is not easy, because for us it is next to impossible to untie the gordian knot of religious text and teachings and cultural identity. They have grown intertwined together for well over a thousand years. But I will try. For me to live a Jewish life means? I think at the core, it means to value (or even hallow) stuff. To value family. To value kindness. To value love. To value doing at least a few Mitzvot. To value learning---and questioning! To value my time spent in synagogue. And yes---to value God. There is a sense of appreciation that filters through all of what I would consider to be my own Jewish experience. Maybe that comes from how much we have suffered and from how long our traditions have been in place. At war with this is my basic pragmatic nature. So, do I value traditions themselves? Only where they have some utility in my today life. Look---I go to synagogue on Yom Kippur and recite the "Al Hets" (the list of sins) not because it's dogmatically commanded of me, not because it's rote, but because I truly, that day, want to immerse myself in a spiritual cleansing and this is a very important part of it. Because, perhaps to my shame, I almost never think of these things outside of that day. I should have at least one day to recalibrate, no? But if you look at my list above, you'll find some very significant similarities to my list of "what makes me human". From the Chronicles, then:

" our monthly book club was without a book to study, so our intrepid organizer set about collecting a few articles on "what makes us human". Setting aside the diversity of opinions and thoughts, my first instinct was to discard this overarching concept and ask "what makes *me* human"? (it's interesting that Bill from our group followed the same path). I decided that for me, it boiled down to six things. An ability to reason, an ability to believe, love, hope, curiosity and to create. Somewhat fundamentally disturbing is the question of "if I cease to have one of these things, am I no longer human?" I can't answer that. And I chose not to add "the ability to choose" because I find that the fusion between belief and reason. But the question raises lots more. Take an example. We talked about names. I started calling myself "Mike" in high school. Can't even remember why I did it. Yet about 50% of my friends still call me "Michael" and the other half "Mike". And I'm comfortable with both. Perhaps more surprising, the name I *do* feel something about is one I never use---my Hebrew name, "Meir", because it is my only connection with a grandfather I never knew. We also discussed the sort of invalidity of couching this question in terms of "how are we different from the other animals". I don't find that to be valid at all. There is no shame in sharing the trait of love with the animal kingdom. Ultimately, though, this is a charged question because it revolves around individuality and subjectivity and value-ascribing, which defy an attempt at some sort of global or communal definition. We also chatted about "evolution", and whether, in our present incarnation which is doing a lot to destroy the nature we live in, this is just "the natural course", whether a curb on curiosity would be all to the good. And "what would make me more human", another question I don't have an easy answer for.*

However, looking back up at those 6 things, there is maybe a deeper singular answer. An ability to BE me is what makes me human. There is pressure from many pressure points to conform to

*and almost give of yourself for the good and betterment of the community. Well and good. But that has to come with balance. To serve the community fully, and to not exert any individuality or independence of your own? That speaks to me of a loss of humanity. To be human, I have to be in touch with my own unique identity and see that identity grow and change and develop...and *live*.”*

“ I’ve made some progress in the “what makes *me* human” question. I reason. I believe. I feel. I learn/understand. I communicate. I share/teach/give. I dream. I fear. I remember. I seek/ explore. And yes....I take. I might make an album about that. 7” (for timing, I wrote this when we were studying Fields of Blood)*

50, top, in a way, she’s talking about my concept of “perception deception” on a community scale.

- 53, top, zones of safety\ off-topic, but it triggers my memory for a long-ago Chronicles entry:

“A little while back I read something about the “elevator dance”---that, when people get into an elevator, they automatically shift around and move around to reposition themselves in an equal or personal-space-maximizing arrangement. This did spark my awareness about personal space and how we use it. I’m not professing to get into an expert’s discussion about this, but doesn’t it seem to you that if you spent time watching the dance a person does with their personal space, it could open up an entire insight into their behaviour, personality, even soul? I’d equate it to graphoanalysis, where handwriting tells the tale. Personal space isn’t just about the actual room or space itself. It can be about angles. It can be about vertical and horizontal levels. It would/ is/should be just as much about how it changes and fluctuates with your emotions, your interaction with friends vs. family vs. strangers, your age, your health, maybe even the weather. At the root of things, it would be fascinating to see how changes people make in their personal space reflect the human being’s adaptation to the circumstances around her? And going even further, you’re left to wonder how personal space has changed over the last few hundred years and what we’ve become used to as an acceptable amount of personal space. I’ve been exposed to the concept, certainly, as an integral part of swing dance lessons, but that was always in the focussed context of the dance itself and not as a general extension into a study of life. Just one example---I have a comfy chair and tend to lean back into it when people come in to consult or talk or whatever. Am I giving off some sort of message that maybe I don’t even want to? It’s food for thought certainly.”

- 53, the analogy is your expected behaviour in a court room. It’s pretty similar—for leaving and for when the judge enters and for when you approach the judge
- 54, 4, he’s not wrong
- Yup. My demi-famous aphorism. Life is what you make it, and what you make of it. And life makes you. Every second, every minute, every day. All you can do is make the most of life.

- 55, top, I've never thought of it that way—though I have spent precious little time with Buddhism to date, perhaps unfortunately. But “belief is optional”. Let's get at this too. She is saying that Buddhism doesn't look to spread itself, to proselytize. I think something happens to a religion when it shifts focus this way, from “what is it about” to “who is it about”. When religion and its precepts becomes a sales pamphlet, an editing process starts and the whole of the meaning of the religion becomes the sum of the parts that are not only saleable, but the sum of the parts that the “marketing director” decides (s)he wants to impose on the minds of the potential customers. Some not nice things happen in that process. The bad/unpleasant parts of scripture (which I differentiate from the fear-inducing parts...not necessarily the same) are either not mentioned at all or minimized or changed so that you don't end up seeing the “whole picture” that I would argue a healthy religion should be able to convey. Without that, I'd argue further that a religion either loses the context of its overall purpose or redefines a false sense of purpose that doesn't stand up on its own because it's only based on chosen texts and ideas. She gets at this herself on page 59, I see.
- 55, top, less confidence in my ability to decide for myself. Coincidence? It's an amazing one, I guess, since this comment dovetails directly into my very latest entry in the Chronicles:

*“there's something else that has become a super-scarce resource. For all of our existence on this planet, the human has been “the possible species”. We have thought and dreamed about the possible. We have striven for the possible. We have even, on occasion, achieved the possible. I can't name a scientist in the last 40 years who has made an “earthshaking” level discovery. And (yes, sorry, I'm *still* thinking about it) in this lens, a fundamentalist movement becomes the crystallized battleground of the human condition. The basic needs of safety, security and less fear, for many people, are satisfied and dealt with through *certainty*. But certainty excludes possibility. Certainty locks doors and pins people to a wall and confines them in a box. I do believe the basic human spirit rails against this. The problem is, there are so few places and milieus anymore which hallow the possible.”*

- 57, top, so I've always thought of him 😊 But it gets back to what he really wanted, no? a *participative* religion. And teacher as facilitator of discussion rather than dispenser of knowledge, he was a long way ahead of his time in that case
- 59, a “jealous” religion? This returns to a subtheme I'm getting, a (for her unwanted) distancing from community
- WATERLOG—water can take on the colour of its surroundings, can be made more turbulent by being confined in a canyon, e.g., but it does not by doing so change its essential nature. Maybe in Christianity—and Judaism and any other religion—we need to drill down to “why is it about” and work backwards, in a way, from humanity to scripture and rituals and beliefs.

CHAPTER 4 – HOLY ENVY

67 — I am a better person for having participated in interfaith activities, this study group emphatically included. Am I a better Jew? I *think* so. But I've lived a life conditioned for this—to accept and welcome instead of reject and refuse. To respect and question instead of judge and answer.

67 bottom—that's really harsh. It *is* judgmental. If the perception of securing that favour is what's important to that person, who are any of us to tell them what religion to choose or not. As long as the person doesn't coerce others to do the same for his/her reasons, leave them be. At least they're interested at some level

68. That's a nice quote. And lo and behold. The divine ice bucket challenge! See? ALS didn't invent it—everything new is old again.

69-70. Joel asks the right question

70—loot. Mmmm, maybe she's being hard on herself this time. These items can act as avatars and conduits for a relationship with that faith. I have a little habit. I always put my kippah on when I step into the synagogue grounds—not even in, but on. I always put my prayer shawl on inside the synagogue and before I enter the sanctuary. These are objects, items that prepare my mind and body for my religious and spiritual existence that day. I have not looked at it like this before, but that is what it is.

71 top, artifacts, maybe not, but see my comments just above.

72, I find merit in the tennis analogy

72, middle—no, you may not see your yard the same way. You may see a richer yard. Am I *always* comfortable that my religion is not *all* of my spirituality or my faith? Not *always*, no. But that can teach me---to look to draw more from my religion and to give more back to it. And most of the time? Most of the time, I *am* comfortable with that. I will keep coming back to my personal definition of the bible---a written way of thinking.

73, middle. Yup. Exclusionary wording. Wording that doesn't allow for a different viewpoint, a different way of being Christian, I guess. This part *is* the antithesis of a participative religion, but more than that, it goes to the core of the struggle any religion has----roots and flowers. How far do you let your worshippers off the leash?

73, bottom, tautological marketing at its best?

74, and Moses and Muhammad were themselves human, with faults and urges and, in a few cases, anger and violent tendencies.

76, bottom, and affirms each of these religions as coming from the common base of....humanity

WATERLOG—A bit pithy? You tell me. Water tastes, mostly, the same. But it can be utterly delicious and lifesaving if you have been walking for 15 km in 45 degree dry heat. Or it can be taken for granted if you can just turn on the tap. Your circumstances define your relationship with it. Care to apply the same analysis to relationship with religion?

78, hmmm!

79, middle, a hard warning, but with some truth to it, I think

CHAPTER 5—THE NEAREST NEIGHBORS

- 81, top, I don't know if he would have been *that* alarmed. It is in the nature of humans to adapt even something like the NT to their circumstances and no religion can or should exist in a vacuum. Also, a new religion—like any socio-organizational thing—gains a lot of traction by differentiating itself from the “mainstream”. And it's always, always easier to do that in the negative, rather than courting danger of finding too much similarity and things you admire in the other. The last thing a fledgling religion would have wanted would be to *create* holy envy in its followers.
- 82, middle, again I wonder if what she's talking about is such a bad thing. Instead of seeing Abbie the Different, she saw Abbie the friend. I grew up with the United Nations for friends. I am so thankful, not only to my own parents, but to the parents of all those boys—the black kid, the Armenian dude, the Latvian guy, the Anglican fellow, the Chinese boy, the Muslim kid. I grew up without prejudice as a part of my life. I don't miss it—the prejudice, I mean.
- 83, we've already touched on it, but she brings out one of the big differences. With us, it is so very hard—and almost inutile—to separate our religion from our culture from our nation.
- 84, bottom, I'd like to meet Shlomo—he sounds like a most unusual Chasid.
- 86, just let's be clear that there are plenty of what I would term bigots and fundamentalists in the Hassidic and extra-Orthodox side of my religion. They can be insular, unwelcoming and sometimes supercilious people. Or on a flip side, they can be aggressively conversionist. All these things *might* be hallmarks of what we can term social awkwardness. Why? Because they have moved themselves outside the world and inside their own world.
- 90 top, so perhaps I should go about this exercise myself. What do *I* envy in the Christian religion? Well, I could start with the abundance of beauty I see in many churches and cathedrals. I'm a sucker for glass and the stained glass windows in the great cathedrals of France awe me with the fact that something had enough power to inspire this way. Christmas carols—the music is so very beautiful. What else? How about the length of service? Ours, in full, is 3 hours for Sabbath. The typical Anglican or United service I've been to is no more than half that. And yeah—“peace be with you”. I really enjoy that every time I'm in church---to wish your neighbour peace, all with smiles on everyone's face. I won't say my religion takes itself too seriously---there are many opportunities for festivity---but during the typical service, there's a kind of austere

introspection that creeps in or, at best, a respectful listening. That in itself is not bad, but a bit more pure joy in the service wouldn't hurt. I'm sure I'll think of some others

- 91-92, bottom, yes, isn't this what interfaith is about?
- 94,-95 Yes, she's getting at this concept—Judaism isn't a religion. It's a vocation. Our rabbi sort of said the same thing at yesterday's Rosh Hashanah sermon
- 95, middle, yes, the Shema is the most important prayer we have, the one that countless Jews would recite before execution in the concentration camps. It is, as you can see, an extension of the first of the ten commandments.
- 96 top. My good friend Dave was a little stiff after a longish car ride. I said humourously "I'm God—I can't do *everything*" He couldn't stop laughing. But is there a kernel of truth to that? or to this: "I'm God—I can't do *anything*." God just *is*? the rest is up to us. There may be something here.
- WATERLOG—water in a lake, ocean, river? Looks the same, more or less feels the same. We've heard of the dignity of difference. There is great dignity in similarity too, a common message that we all need to access.
- *****

DISOWNING GOD

- 102, bottom, I really like that first question.
- 104 top, hymns, Borg, I think, commented on the same thing, or maybe McLaren
- 105, top, counternarrative—that makes sense, after a fashion. If you're going to "sell" your book, best to have more than one target market/demographic in mind
- 105 bottom – 107. Distort. Yes, will get back to that in a minute. But here's a quirky thought. Some of the allure of the new testament (and there are instances of this in the old testament too) is because its central features and "characters" are aligned fundamentally with the use of language itself. Language has active and passive tenses. They seep into our unconscious understanding and use. Christianity has an active and passive voice. The active voice is Jesus. The passive voice is God.

Now, back on track...what is one particular thing that I pick out of your religion's central figure? I don't know my NT well enough, so someone can correct me, by all means.

But...does Jesus ever raise a sword? Or an axe? Does he ever hit anyone? At most, he “fights” with words. Does he ever “order a hit”? *NON-VIOLENCE* seemeth to me to be the centre of his character. King is as far as anyone goes, no? How does this fit with the violence done in the name of Christianity? Maybe I have to delve back into---sorry Deb!---my Armstrong books to see if she explored this....nah, maybe not. If I plunge into that, I may never come up for air again!

- WATERLOG: Water does something to the solids it comes in contact with. It turns the hard to soft. It often soothes. A callused hand will get wrinkled. A crusty piece of bread becomes easily chewed. And a hard rock eventually gets eroded. Where and how do we look for the soft parts of our religion? How do we look to religion to soften our outlook on life and the lives of others? I’ll expand this---how do we find our way to use religion as a gateway instead of a cage?
- 107 bottom, message---BIN-GO! Instead of listening to the message, have too many people become...not even the messenger, but the message?
- 109, if you want the translation, melchizedek would be “king of righteousness”. We puzzle over this guy too. If you want to say he is the equivalent of a passive apostle of Abraham, the first to recognize his (sort of) divinity, I won’t argue too hard with you. At a minimum, you have to recognize patterned material that the NT might have adapted.
- 110, just as a sideline, when my group here studied the book of Esther last year, our leader told us that King Ahasuerus was probably Xerxes by a different name.
- 110 middle, the stranger. So---I have an unusual slant on this. I think God’s emphasis on this point is to remind his people of a different message—that they had become strangers to him/her/had become estranged from *God* when they were in Egypt---a thing that was to recur with Jews over the next little while. And God accepted them back into the fold anyway. If that is the model behaviour, then so should we, in thanks, accept the stranger into our midst and give him/her all honour and comfort. Just my 2.5 cents.
- 114, yes indeed—propitious timing
- 117, middle, certainly plausible enough
- 118-119, for me this bit is actually the best part of the book so far. Very cogently said

- 119, very bottom, double-BIN-GO. Alternate definition of religion—a codification, structure and justification for the human need to be *right*

THE SHADOW-BEARERS

- 123, top, should psych 101 be a prerequisite for religion 101? She's not wrong
- 123, bottom, that phenomenon is not isolated to religion. Politics is another fertile arena for it.
- 124, bottom, or sometimes worse, how do you deal with a repressed hostility that has been buried but is still festering, without being espoused so at least it is on the table?
- 125, middle, I was on my way to a meeting with a client and his supplier and had the radio turned on to the news channel. It was 9 am or so. I almost stopped driving. We got to the meeting place and everyone was watching TV—live—when the 2nd plane hit. Later that day, I finalized the purchase of my first purchased car. The salesman and I, it was like we were in some crazy dream. This event was our generation's "Kennedy". It is hard, hard, to shake off a miasma of accusation against an entire culture/religion when something like this happens and is burned into your mind. I went to NYC that Christmas and visited Ground Zero. There was still smoke and steam coming up. I had never been up the World Trade Center but I could understand that something was physically not right with this picture. My friend there, she said it was like someone had come into her home, robbed her and trashed the place. That concoction of anger, hatred and fear is potent.
- 126, speaking to Deb the other night, I told her I was happily envious of your group's chance to attend a mosque. I really want to go as well, when I have someone who can and will explain everything to me. I hope someone from the group will write up a summary of what it was like---Deb told me it was amazing and that you did have a chance to experience the final call to prayer for the day.
- 127, wow. Why did I/we not hear more language like this? A powerful statement!
- 128, bottom—you came to see for yourself. It's funny, but there's not a lot of expressed "gratefulness to others" in a religious setting, at least that I've seen in the main. For all its communal nature, the structure of a service is still relatively introverted. I always cherish those moments when the sunlight of gratefulness does break through---and I've

been fortunate to experience it myself---at St. David's, at my friends Andrea and Dave's church in Cleveland, at my semi-adopted synagogue in Kitchener, at my friend Andy's church in Kingston. For me, it is such a more vibrant and enticing message than "you've come to be one of us, to convert. Welcome, glad you finally came around". I come back to the soft parts of religion. Look how that is what has remained in her memory bank.

- 130, middle—nice image!
- 131, feel good about ourselves—back to my point of the human need to be right
- 132, middle—Christians do not exclusively own Jesus. Hmm, yes.
- 134 bottom – 135 top, most of us know how Jagmeet Singh, in the recent electoral campaign, did much the same with the Montreal man and turned it into one of his most powerful calling cards. He impressed many who don't agree with his ideology. I've met Jagmeet. He's smart, detail-oriented, asks a lot of good questions and still serves the public---a rare enough trait in a politician these days.
- WATERLOG—water can look—and even feel—different—on the surface vs underneath, on a sunny vs. cloudy day, in a waterfall vs. on a lake. One does best if one looks at the totality of the water you interact with
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FAILING CHRISTIANITY

- 140-142, she shouldn't feel despondent—I'd probably fail the Judaism quiz. We could all do better at living our religion if we knew more about it. A recent Chronicles entry:

** wisdom and being wise---I think I understand and view these words differently than most people. I think wisdom is the exertion, focus and application of one word. "Care".
I think that if you care about someone---enough---then you will think about them, their circumstances and what they may be thinking about and you will think about how you can help them through difficulties they may have----without, of course, trying to tell them how to live their life. My friend Jay and I have had some talks in this direction about his professional and personal life....and a bit of mine, for that matter....and there seems to be wisdom traded back and forth. If you care about someTHING—enough---then you will*

*apply yourself more seriously to studying it, thinking about what you can do to improve it and thinking about how it works—or doesn't. Again, because the idea of *thinking* is in here, a scarce resource in and of itself (I don't think I've mentioned the byline at the bottom of my business cards---“thinking so you can succeed”), wisdom is perhaps in short supply. The real masters and mistresses are those who can exert, focus and apply this level of care to more than a handful of people or things or both.*

- 145-146, she's elucidating the 3-way tension between set beliefs, individualism and progress and change
- 147 bottom, “when you meet one Christian you've met exactly one”---oooo---I need to save *that* quote!
- 148-150, sort of bleak look at evangelism, but one I haven't seen quite articulated this way
- 151, selling is a way of life for any, um, organization to thrive and grow. And selling means persuading. You don't persuade the majority of people by “passive advertising”, i.e. living Christian values---though there is much to be said for that
- 152, middle, string of pearls: **I sincerely hope I've helped the group with that, just as I must thank you all deeply for helping me understand my own religion better through these many years of study with you**
- 154, top and middle, I come back again to how Judaism has been able to seemingly grow and flourish even without a large base. And maybe that's just the thing. Does the immensity of the Christian population stultify the religion itself? Make it less malleable, less able to change to fit an individual's role within it? Perhaps because Judaism has almost always for its history been practiced in small groups, maybe this allowed the individual voice to be heard more clearly, and for a kind of flexibility to enter the substrata of my religion. Food for thought, certainly.

BORN AGAIN

163 bottom: by saying 'rabbi' it also seems clear to me that Nicodemus is trying to find common ground with this person of awe

165-167. A plausible and workable view on that chapter

169 top. Kind and courteous. I'm sure I've talked about the rule I'm very proud of for myself—a rarity for me to have any rules. That every day for at least the last 16 years, any day I've interacted with another human being? I've said something nice to someone. Every. Single. Day

170-171. The trinity setting up the idea of community, sharing and diversity of experience. This may be the most interesting point to me that she's made in this book

271 and by extension, worshipping literal words. See Exhibit A, my opening

DIVINE DIVERSITY

- 177, top. She sets out one of his teachings in a way I didn't see when I read it. Is monotheism its own worst enemy? One God steers us towards one belief system....and one people...?
- 177, middle, Babel---this is a bit of a sidestep, but I just took it up in our Jewish bible study group —we looked at Lot's daughters this evening. I said "cities and God....they don't mix very well". Babel. Sodom and Gomorroah. Nineveh. Shechem's home...a city. Jericho. Bad things happen to cities. Lots of bad things. Is this the bible teaching humility?
- 179. OK, although there are plenty of counterexamples to this in the "stamp them out" period when the Israelites reach Canaan.
- 181, top, what do you mean when you say God? The slowing down to think about it is a fair point
- 181 top and middle. OK, since we're here, another Chronicles entry from long ago:

"Words are funny things. Sometimes you can't say what you want with them and sometimes you end up saying too much. There's also a permanence, a nonretractable aspect to words. Thoughts, you can withhold, you can change or alter. Words, once written or spoken, they become part of the fabric of your life and the lives those words reach. I can say "I didn't mean it" as much as I want, but words will be burned into your memory or mine---not to be erased. Sublimated and overlaid, maybe, but not erased.

I don't remember my first word, mind you, nor that I had any sense of discovery or wonder or accomplishment at the feat. Now, in fairly rare circumstances, I'll come across a new word and will be interested enough to go to a dictionary and find out about it. But the novelty is fleeting. When I'm learning words in German or Spanish in preparation for a trip, I'm wholly focussed on the goal--- "enhanced survival"---and don't pay attention to the process.

I'm not prepared to say that words draw out the beauty of the world, or that they don't add to it. But maybe words remove an element of mystery. So often they are used to clarify, categorize, coerce, control and demystify. I also think that because we are flooded, inundated with words,

we become almost blasé about them. The magic I see in music, art, dance is that the same work, the same piece can mean different things to the creator and the audience at different times. I don't see that happen with words as much. So I retain an ambivalence about words. Funny thing for a lawyer to say, isn't it?"

- 181, bottom. Seems I've answered that one earlier in my notes, no? Now it's everyone else's turn, I guess. What **does** make you human? What does the word human mean to you?
- 182, middle, I think I've mentioned that the most important word, not only in our language but in any language, is "hello"
- 183, top, "it's a beautiful place to rest but not the best place to stay" ---ooohhh, I **really** like that!
- 183 middle, not only geographically chaotic, but temporal too. Chronicles again:

*"I just finished watching "Before Sunset" on DVD. I hope you've seen the original, Before Sunrise and/or this one. The sequel picks up <exactly> where the other left off. And let me assure you, I have never seen it again after watching it 9 years ago. I loved the sequel. It resonates with me. It is, in some ways, part of the story of my life. And it starts off with yet another few "bon mots". Hawke's character asks the same thing I have over the last couple days. Is life but individual moments, or is it a skein of continuous moments all merging into one single moment? I extend that further to ask whether **we live in the moment, live for the moment, or have a life full of moments?** I'm not sure I can sort this one out, but there is attraction to both ideas. Living life as discrete moments, you are bound to be more aware of the things that impact you, the things that might slip under your radar. You're less likely to slough off an experience, or, better to say, a chance at one. And yet, the skein view is what makes us human---the ability to weave and meld the individual moment into the thread of our life. I think the greatest miracle is that a moment-experience that can last an eyeblink has every capability to change our entire life and everything that has happened in it up to that point. So I don't know, maybe it's both. Maybe we just bounce around like a pinball in a machine, and the important moments light up every so often when the flipper sends us that way. As an example...*

After India, I have decided that I'm not a black-and-white simple-shapes person. For my world to have meaning (and, based on some language in the last few journal entries, could this be one of your world-with-meaning conditions too?) it has to have colour. And texture. I really got exposed to this side of things in India, where each woman has at least 50 different saris/sarees (never got the straight of the spelling) and the shirts/kurtas the menfolk wear are no less distinctive. There, you realize that colour and patterning is an integral part of the person's character or personality. Do they take pride in their appearance and, by extension, themselves? Do they prefer to blend in with their surroundings? Do they like variety in their lives? Do they put great stock in tradition? Is comfort and the ability to hitch the thing up on the back of a motorcycle important?. Is age a non-factor or everything about who they are? These and dozens more questions and answers shot across the bow of my awareness as I took in all these beautiful clothes. I'll admit, I like to think I have some fashion sense for what works for me, but I've never

paid so much attention to others' clothes before. Or realized that this phenomenon of colour is so important to me."

- WATERLOG – we partake of water. We ingest it. And we expel it. Are we just a vessel for water to pass through on its journey? Or do we keep some of what it has to impart? Deep thoughts very late at night!

THE GOD YOU DIDN'T MAKE UP

- 188 top. Yeah, that's not bad
- 188 middle, so this is real quicksand now, because I have to find a balance between the God I can't ever know enough about and the God that I know enough about to guide my steps and frame my reference. Not easy.
- 189, top. My view of God is my own creation. Yes. It has to be, doesn't it? How can it have meaning and imbue purpose without that? And so we come to the ultimate expression of the symbiotic nature of faith. I paged back up to my notes at the beginning of Chapter 3: "God is all that we wish and hope for and all that we don't understand" Sure...but I really was hiding with that statement. "We" should properly be replaced with "I". I'm not at the elevated level of spirituality where I can lose my identity and my self in the quest for the almighty. Rather than rail at this, I accept it and look to see what I can do with that insight. Because if I have had the temerity to come up with a "divinity recipe", then that view is going to stick around with me. That yeah---I have a part to play in my greater understanding of God and my greater understanding of faith and religion.
- 190, top to middle. Just so. See above.
- 192, would have loved to have been a babbling fly on the wall in *that* discussion!
- 193, middle—no spiritual Esperanto. And there probably shouldn't be. Our religious and faith differences is what fuels the fire of learning, conversation and growth.
- 194-195, love the irritating? Hmm, a nice little challenge!

- 196, what's he preaching? We might today call it the religion of humanity—of being human.
- 198, “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt” Again—FORCEFULLY—see my notes to page 110. There is, in my opinion, at least a double meaning, if not a fully different meaning, to the holy words here.
- 199, bottom. Indeed. The kindness of a stranger is something *never* to be forgotten. Here's my personal story, from back in 1998. I still think of John every once in a while and can call his face to mind:

“Yeah. The pulling-out-of-ditches entry. Liked that one a lot. My parents still do not, and will never need to know, that I trashed my rental car going across a pass in New Zealand at the start of the Aussie '98 trip. Remember, you're driving on the wrong side of the road and it's very difficult twisty-turny stuff. And, of course, there's so much distracting Tolkienvista to see. But none of that excuses me. I was on a <flat> portion when it happened. How humiliating. Anyway, my guess is that a rock must've caught under the wheel, cause it spun quite suddenly in my hand. Next thing I know. I was flying into the ditch at 90 clicks. Or more appropriately, the fencing. I took out 200 metres or so of it. Car was a mess. Fortunately, the fencing was on the left side. And I, of course, was driving on the right. So unhurt. In shock, mind, but unhurt. It couldn't have been 3 minutes later that a Kiwi stops by the side of the road and he says “Looks like you've had a little mishap”. I could only nod. He obligingly offers me a spot in his car and drives me the rest of the way across the pass. He <offers me his hotel room to stay in>. A total stranger. Between him and I, we managed to corral a tow truck, the driver and I went in, towed out my car, I got to my appointed stop and next day, the rental company drove a new car across and I continued on my merry way. Note 1: I had gone cheap on the deductible, so was forced to lose \$1,000. This was a very good thing as I'd been budgeting and counting pennies to that point. After the debacle, I said to heck with that and I had a much better time for the next 7 or so weeks. Note 2: I had brought some of my compositional tapes with me on the trip. When I got back to Christchurch, I put one in the mail with a thank-you note for John (the Kiwi). It was the least I could do. I never heard back from him after we exchanged a brief phone call while I was back there that week or so later, but I've never forgotten John's kindness. There are beacon-people like that. Note 3: When we drove across the pass again in the tour bus 9 days later, they had fixed the fence. Drat. I was looking forward to showing all my new friends evidence of my folly. I guess the penning in of the sheep is kind of important there. Note 4: What I learned...that you can never meet enough or know enough good people.”

- WATERLOG—your experience with water will only be complete if you experience it with all your senses. It is not enough to drink or splash or watch. You must also smell and listen. It is one of the things in the world that looks to engage all your senses simultaneously. We often miss a part of the message because we don't engage at every level at which we are invited to do so.
