

Affirmation

September 28, 2008

Good Morning! My name is David Cohen and this is my affirmation. When I was asked to give this affirmation, I realized I had two problems when it comes to religion. The first is that God does not speak to me. The second is I don't believe in praying to God.

God does not speak to me. I studied the bible at a yeshiva on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. I have been to the tomb of Abraham and Sarah in Hebron. I've climbed to the top of Masada where 960 Jewish zealots committed mass suicide rather than being taken as slaves by the Romans. I've wandered in the Sinai desert. I even visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. But no matter where I go, God does not speak to me. I haven't yet tried Noah's Ark water park in the Wisconsin Dells, but I don't expect God will talk to me there, even if I pay the admission fee.

Because God does not speak to me, I am forced to figure this religion thing out myself. The bible provides some help, but not much. During the time of King Herod in Jerusalem, a prospective convert to Judaism asked the great Rabbi Hillel to teach him the entire Torah, the Hebrew bible, while standing on just one leg. Standing on one leg, Hillel said: "That which is hateful to *you*, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary." I agree with this but I need more. If there is a God, I don't believe that God would just want me to be passive... not hurting anyone else but not taking affirmative steps to help anyone else. So I have been looking for more. Not a creed that tells me what to think but guidance as to what is it that God wants me to do.

I couldn't find it. But I did, or should I say my wife did, find the next best thing in being a UU. My wife, from a catholic background, discovered Countryside Church as a compromise so our children, when younger, could obtain some

religious education. A year later I checked out Countryside Church. The seven principles which Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote, along with our covenant made sense to me as to what God might want us to do: the inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all and the other principles. These principles and our covenant took Rabbi Hillel's passive instructions and turned them into something that I believe a just God would want us to do.

However, notwithstanding the seven principles and our covenant, I still didn't feel I was a spiritual or religious person. I still felt guilty for not praying to God. But why would God want me to spend my time praying to God? If God is really the omnipotent God we have been taught as children, whether in the image of an old man in a white gown with a long flowing beard or the image of a woman in a Hillary Clinton pants suit, God doesn't need my prayers telling God how great God is. And if I spend all my time praying to God, how will that help to make me a better person or help those less well off than myself? But our children's religious education program taught me I was wrong! If any of you have looked at the hallway leading to the R.E. classrooms, you see a large collage in the wall with the inscription "Service is our Prayer".

I was wrong because whenever I thought of "prayer" and being religious, I thought that meant having to sit in temple or church telling God how great God was. My error was not in rejecting this type of prayer. My error was in limiting the definition of "prayer". Now I know that living our covenant and our seven UU principles is a form of "prayer". So now I try to pray all the time. Who knows, maybe without realizing it, I have become a spiritual person after all.