

AAIDD-HUMANISTS NEWSLETTER

formerly Awl Weave Ghat

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This newsletter expresses the opinion of this subgroup and not necessarily of AAIDD

All data presented are opinions and alternative opinions may be printed in later issues.

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In this issue we wrap up the discussion on humanism and eugenics. As always, I don't profess to be an expert in these matters but am passing on what I have read in what I feel are reliable sources. If you have different opinions or experience, please pass them on. After the discussion there is an interesting essay from the internet on Hinduism that almost makes them sound Humanist.

We don't have any pictures this month although I may include a picture of a daylily I grew from seed. For someone with a lot of patience, this can be quite a rewarding activity. I picked the seed for this plant from another daylily in my yard but have gotten seeds from mail-order seed companies and there are a number of people on eBay that sell them.

You have to freeze the seeds for a few weeks (months are probably better) and then it takes 2 to 3 years for them to bloom. Plant a dozen if you can. Half will die and half of the remainder will just be unusable. You will get several nice unique plants and, if you want, you can register them and name them. Wouldn't that be a lasting tribute for someone with intellectual disabilities and a great gift for them to give relatives with yards?

In the last issue we discussed a belief among some non-humanists that it is logical for humanists to demean intellectually disabled people. Support for this belief comes from the arguments that humanists can't have a moral system and that it would be logical for a humanist to support eugenics. I think we adequately discussed the morality issue in the last issue: it is quite easy to develop a morality similar to what we have now from purely logical approaches. We didn't discuss behavioral genetics, a rather controversial subject as far as degree of influence goes, but the reader may want to research this on their own. It's a quite interesting field that basically says that many behaviors and values in a species are shaped over time and passed on through genetics. The implication would be that the morality we have is based as much as anything on the belief system we are born with.

Second of these arguments is both incorrect and cherry picking. While some avowed atheists have been eugenic supporters, these supporters can also be religious. Let's look at the most widely mentioned examples used when discussing eugenics: Charles Darwin, Joseph Stalin and other communist dictators, and Adolf Hitler.

Darwin was the son of a minister and trained to follow in his footsteps. For much of his adult life he was back and forth about having religious beliefs or not. Most of this ambivalence was secondary to the deaths of his daughter rather than a more in-depth analysis of god's existence. He considered himself an agnostic, rejecting the idea of a personal god. He may have speculated about eugenics based on his writings although didn't originate

the idea. It seems clear, though, that his support was at most weak. The passage often from his writings sometimes used to promote this view is followed by a passage describing how undesirable eugenics would be. For more information see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Darwin's_views_on_religion

Stalin was an atheist and killed possible millions although for political rather than eugenic purposes. Pol Pot and Mao Zedong did the same thing. So did Lenin. They were atheists but that wasn't why they committed mass murder.

Hitler's religious beliefs are uncertain but there is a good argument that he had some. He was born a catholic and influenced by Martin Luther who is traditionally seen as an anti-Semite in his later life. Hitler abolished atheist organizations and had his officers swear to god. He had some fascination with collecting religious relics although not to the degree seen in many movies like the first Indiana Jones movie. Millions were killed to purify the Aryan race with the Nazi prejudice based on several factors including religious ones.

One is certain, two aren't. The one that is certain one is a communist which influenced his belief system . Other communists did the same thing so is this a factor of political more than religious belief? A good link provided by the National Center for Science Education is <http://www.expelledexposed.com/index.php/the-truth/hitler-eugenics> which discusses this in depth. I should point out that the people who try to make this argument leave out most religious-related genocides like Saddam Hussein and the Kurds in 1988 where 5,000 were killed and twice that many injured.

Particularly in the Middle East and Africa it is still common for people to try to eliminate whole tribes or nations which can be characterized by different religious beliefs. Sometimes a large difference (Christian/Muslim) or sometimes more minor (Sunni/ Shiite). The Old Testament has a number of genocides noted and reportedly encourage by god. This is a little more general a killing than eugenics but still has destroying a portion of a population because they are dissimilar as a religion-based goal.

After looking at all this, all I can say is that there have been some incredibly evil humanists and incredibly evil religious people. In spite of some vigorous name-calling neither side seems to be totally responsible for the practice of eugenics and with possibly the exception of Hitler, no one was really doing eugenics but were rather practicing genocide.

There are smaller examples of which I have known people that were victims. I know several people who were sterilized because they were intellectually disabled or mentally ill and this was to keep them from reproducing. This was apparently common in the mid to early 1900s. Although certainly better that killing them, sterilization drastically changed their lives. I do not know the parties or people behind promoting this. I have also heard differing opinions on the role of the family in this. If someone knows a good source of

information about this (or are a good source) please let me know and maybe we can write up something about it.

So what would I say to someone with developmental disabilities who thought you needed a belief in a god to know what is right or wrong?

A friend at work who is Hindu thought I would find the following interesting. She was right. I tracked down the author and have his permission to reprint it along with appropriate credits and a mention of his website (which is in English, if you chose to go to it)

Am I a Hindu?

By Dr. Uday Lai Pai

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Four years ago, I was flying from JFK NY Airport to SFO to attend a meeting at Monterey, CA.

An American girl was sitting on the right side, near window seat. It indeed was a long journey - it would take nearly seven hours!

I was surprised to see the young girl reading a Bible - unusual of young Americans! (Later I came to know that September 11 has changed mind-set of lot of US citizens. They suddenly turned religious, it seemed.)

After some time she smiled and we had few acquaintances talk. I told her that I am from India.

Then suddenly the girl asked: "What's your faith?"

"What?" I didn't understand the question.

"I mean, what's your religion? Are you a Christian? Or a Muslim?"

"No!" I replied, "I am neither Christian nor Muslim".

Apparently she appeared shocked to listen to that.

"Then who are you...?"

"I am a Hindu", I said.

She looked at me as if she is seeing a caged animal.

She could not understand what I was talking about.

A common man in Europe or US know about Christianity and Islam, as they are the leading religions of the world today.

But a Hindu, what?

I explained to her - I am born to a Hindu father and Hindu mother. Therefore, I am a Hindu by birth.

"Who is your prophet?" she asked.

"We don't have a prophet," I replied.

"What's your Holy Book?"

“We don’t have a single Holy Book, but we have hundreds and thousands of philosophical and sacred scriptures,” I replied.

“Oh, come on...at least tell me who is your God?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Like we have Yahweh and Muslims have Allah - don’t you have a God?”

I thought for a moment. Muslims and Christians believe one God (Male God) who created the world and takes an interest in the humans who inhabit it. Her mind is conditioned with that kind of belief.

According to her (or anybody who doesn’t know about Hinduism), a religion need to have one Prophet, one Holy book and one God. The mind is so conditioned and rigidly narrowed down to such a notion that anything else is not acceptable. I understood her perception and concept about faith. You can’t compare Hinduism with any of the present leading religions where you have to believe in one concept of god.

I tried to explain to her: “You can believe in one god and he can be a Hindu. You may believe in multiple deities and still you can be a Hindu. What’s more - you may not believe in god at all, still you can be a Hindu. An atheist can also be a Hindu.”

This sounded very crazy to her.

She couldn’t imagine a religion so unorganized, still surviving for thousands of years, even after onslaught from foreign forces.

“I don’t understand...but it seems very interesting. Are you religious?”

What can I tell to this American girl?

I said: “I do not go to temple regularly. I do not make any regular rituals. I have learned some of the rituals in my younger days. I still enjoy doing it sometimes.”

“Enjoy? Are you not afraid of God?”

“God is a friend. No- I am not afraid of God. Nobody has made any compulsions on me to perform these rituals regularly.”

She thought for a while and then asked: “Have you ever thought of converting to any other religion?”

“Why should I? Even if I challenge some of the rituals and faith in Hinduism, nobody can convert me from Hinduism. Because, being a Hindu allows me to think independently and objectively, without conditioning... I remain as a Hindu never by force, but choice.” I told her that Hinduism is not a religion, but a set of beliefs and practices. It is not a religion like Christianity or Islam because it is not founded by any one person or does not have an organized controlling body like the Church or the Order, I added. There is no institution or authority.

“So, you don’t believe in God?” she wanted everything in black and white.

“I didn’t say that. I do not discard the divine reality. Our scripture, or *Sruthis* or *Smrithis* - *Vedas* and *Upanishads* or the *Gita* - say God might be there or he might not be there. But we pray to that supreme abstract authority (*Para Brahma*) that is the creator of this universe.”

“Why can’t you believe in one personal God?”

“We have a concept - abstract - not a personal god. The concept or notion of a personal God, hiding behind the clouds of secrecy, telling us irrational stories through few men whom he sends as messengers, demanding us to worship him or punish us, does not make sense. I don’t think that God is as silly as an autocratic emperor who wants others to respect him or fear him.” I told her that such notions are just fancies of less educated human imagination and fallacies, adding that generally ethnic religious practitioners in Hinduism believe in personal gods. The entry level Hinduism has over-whelming superstitions too. The philosophical side of Hinduism negates all superstitions.

“Good that you agree God might exist. You told that you pray. What is your prayer then?”

“*Loka Samastha Sukino Bhavantu. Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti,*”

“Funny,” she laughed, “What does it mean?”

“May all the beings in all the worlds be happy. *Om Peace, Peace, Peace.*”

“Hmm...very interesting. I want to learn more about this religion. It is so democratic, broad-minded and free...” she exclaimed.

“The fact is Hinduism is a religion of the individual, for the individual and by the individual with its roots in the *Vedas* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. It is all about an individual approaching a personal God in an individual way according to his temperament and inner evolution - it is as simple as that.”

“How does anybody convert to Hinduism?”

“Nobody can convert you to Hinduism, because it is not a religion, but a set of beliefs and practices. Everything is acceptable in Hinduism because there is no single authority or organization either to accept it or to reject it or to oppose it on behalf of Hinduism.”

I told her - if you look for meaning in life, don’t look for it in religions; don’t go from one cult to another or from one guru to the next.

For a real seeker, I told her, Bible itself gives guidelines when it says “*Kingdom of God is within you.*” I reminded her of Christ’s teaching about the love that we have for each other. That is where you can find the meaning of life.

Loving each and every creation of the God is absolute and real. ‘*Isavasyam idam sarvam*’ Isam (the God) is present (inhabits) here everywhere - nothing exists separate from the God, because God is present everywhere. Respect every living being and non-living things as God. That’s what Hinduism teaches you.

Hinduism is referred to as *Sanathana Dharma*, the eternal faith. It is based on the practice of *Dharma*, the code of life. The most important aspect of Hinduism is being truthful to oneself. Hinduism has no monopoly on ideas. It is open to all. Hindus believe in one God (not a personal one) expressed in different forms. For them, God is timeless and formless entity.

Ancestors of today's Hindus believe in eternal truths and cosmic laws and these truths are opened to anyone who seeks them. But there is a section of Hindus who are either superstitious or turned fanatic to make this an organized religion like others. The British coin the word "Hindu" and considered it as a religion.

I said: "Religions have become an MLM (multi-level-marketing) industry that has been trying to expand the market share by conversion. The biggest business in today's world is Spirituality. Hinduism is no exception..."

I am a Hindu primarily because it professes Non-violence - "*Ahimsa Paramo Dharma*" - Non violence is the highest duty. I am a Hindu because it doesn't conditions my mind with any faith system.

-Uday Lal Pai

www.udaypai.in

see you next quarter