

## Eitan Stern-Robbins

It took me half a lifetime to begin to clarify my views on religion. Raised in a conservative Jewish household, we kept kosher and went to synagogue regularly. I was taught that God is this all powerful being that humans can never fully comprehend. I'm not certain if I ever believed this but I do know that whenever I prayed, I never felt like I was accomplishing anything. By the time I was about ten years old, I didn't even think about whether or not God existed. I would go to synagogue, say some Hebrew prayers, not understand them, and go home. It was more a ritual than an actual religious belief. I also attended Hebrew day school where I learned lessons from the torah, studied interpretations, and had daily morning services. However, it wasn't until I left my daily Hebrew school and attended a weekly Sunday school that I started to formulate my views on religion and God.

At Sunday school, I took a class called "Theology for Skeptics." In this class I learned about different theologies and the distinction between theology and religion. I interpreted theology as *how* one believes in something and religion as *what* one believes in. I was tempted to become an atheist and, for a while, I was one. My question was: if God doesn't exist, why are so many people devoted to him? I asked this question to friends and teachers but they thought it was an invalid argument. I understood where they were coming from; just because everyone thinks something, doesn't make it right. However, that was not how I was looking at it.

I posed this question in a more conceptual way. I proposed that whether or not God *actually* exists is irrelevant; what matters is whether people believe in him or not. An analogy is useful here. A pharmaceutical company is testing a new cold pill. They give one person the real pill and one person a placebo. Well, let's say that the person with the placebo gets better because

he expected to. It doesn't matter that his pill was a placebo. What matters is that his cold went away. This is what I meant when I asked why people are so devoted to God. I meant that if people think that there is an omnipotent presence guiding their way through life, isn't God *real* in the sense that his effects are real? I definitely don't believe in a literal God watching over us, but I do believe in his effects.

It would be wrong to say that I am atheist because atheists look at God more scientifically; they look at the evidence behind the existence of God. I look at the evidence that the belief in God causes. In reality, the belief in God has caused so many tangible things. It's caused people to become good citizens, to follow laws, and to be decent human beings. In contrast, wars have been fought in God's name and people have died over him. For better or for worse though, I believe that the observable effects of belief in God are enough to make God exist.

This internal change in my belief in God has caused me to look at many things differently in life. My beliefs have forced me to realize that I am a realist. I view things as they are, not as they should be. This can seem insensitive at times, but it is how I view life. I no longer question why people follow their religions. I have even tried to stop judging people and look purely at their actions. Looking forward to college, I expect my down to earth perspective will help me tackle challenges life throws my way. These "spill-over" skills still help me in school. I have stopped procrastinating (mostly), organize my time better each day and seek out help from teachers when I need to. From confused beginnings, to helpful conclusions my practical approach to the belief in God has led to other practical solutions in all parts of my life.