

I was born to Conservative Jewish parents. I have traced my ancestry back 45 generations to Rabbi Meshaka Ben Zimi, who lived in the Roman Empire just five centuries after Christ. I descend from generations of devout Jews, many of them prominent rabbis and scholars, but that tradition ends with me. Why? God and reason.

My parents endured six years of Nazi Germany, barely escaping to America on the last ship to depart Europe for New York in October 1939, leaving behind beloved family members lost to the Holocaust that followed. As a young child I questioned how an anthropomorphic, omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God, the bedrock of the Jewish religion, could have permitted this. I soon came to doubt the existence of such a God.

When I was 8, my parents enrolled me in a Sunday school at a Conservative Jewish Synagogue. There, you were taught to accept blindly what you were told, what your forefathers had long ago thought through for you. I was shamed and threatened when I asked questions or expressed doubts. I encountered degrading hateful comments about gentiles and blacks. By the time I was 11, I had had enough. I wanted no part of them or their illogical God and abandoned Judaism for good. After spending twenty years as an atheist with no connection to an organized religion, I joined three friends one day in attending a service at the Unitarian Universalist Church of East Lansing, Michigan. I liked what I saw and returned, joining their active young adult group. In fact, I have kept coming back to UU congregations now for 47 years.

Unitarian Universalists practice democracy. We are a community of equals, with each person freely contributing their opinion and having an impact on the direction of the whole. We are free to think for ourselves, the antithesis of what went on in the Judaism of my youth, and indeed of what happens in most religions. As my life has taken sharp turns, career and job changes, moves across the country, marriage and divorce, and then retirement, I have sought out and found UU congregations in multiple new locations, Salt Lake City, Berkeley, Palo Alto, and here in Orange County and have become actively involved at each of them.

How has my faith evolved over time? My atheism has not wavered. Human history together with a lifetime of scientific endeavor have only solidified my beliefs. However, my negative reaction to the faith of my youth has subsided. I've learned about more liberal and tolerant versions of Judaism. I'd like to believe my experience was not typical and that there are good people of every faith. However, as they still worship a traditional God, revere ancient biblical writings, and believe they have the exclusive truth, I'm not tempted to return to Judaism. I can however feel freer to celebrate some of the traditions of my youth that I remember fondly, such as the Passover Seder. As a UU, I continue to learn and evolve. Through classes and group discussions, I can work on becoming more accepting and tolerant. And as we face future uncertainties, I can try my best to change the world for the better.

Religion for me is not about belief in a higher power. It is a search for how to live one's life fully and compassionately and come together with others in community. Today, I celebrate continuing my spiritual journey here at Tapestry.