

Does God exist? This ancient question just won't go away. Since human history began, as soon as someone thought he had the answer, someone else came along to challenge it. The question endures, and now rests in the ether, waiting to spring on college students, retreating after the age of thirty, surfacing for the odd cocktail party, and reemerging with full force in the "philosophical years."

Ask yourself this: Do I really need to know the answer to this question? I think if you are honest with yourself, you will realize that a yea-or-neh answer wouldn't really change your life much. Although a neigh might free up a lot of time now spent worshipping. In fact, I don't imagine God is really keen on worshipping. You can take it from me, Toby the talking horse—he's as humble as the next God, and a simple thank-you is all that's required.

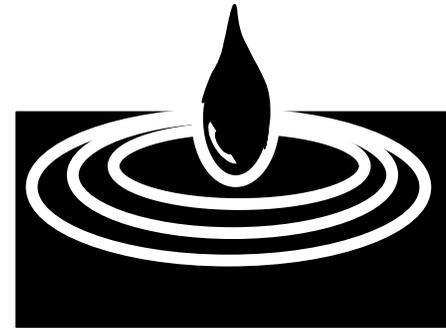
If you ask me what came first, the question or the belief, I'd say that the belief preceded the question. The question does not lead to belief; the question leads to disbelief. The belief, on the other hand, exists in almost every human culture, even though you sometimes get people praying to dolls made of dung.

It would be easy to reduce the question of God's existence to a problem of semantics. But we're beyond that now. Another thing: please do not mention the phrase "organized religion." I already know where you're going with it, and that argument is for college students who want to have something to talk about when they smoke pot. We're way beyond that discussion.

There are certain people who seem to know that the answer to the question is affirmative. And it makes them want to dress up in robes, and capes and cloaks and special hats, or to wear very thick makeup and comb their hair real high. Other people seem to believe the opposite. Some people are fine with this, but other people can be gloomy. For those people, there is a special word of one vowel and several nervous, unrelated consonants: angst.

One evening, stand out in a big open field, and cock your head back and stare up at the stars. You will know that there is a God. Then, one day when things are not going your way, stop and consider the same question. You will know that there is no God. Whatever answer you choose at any given moment is the correct one.

Excerpted from an essay by Steve Martin, originally published in The New Yorker.



SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF
SAN JOSE

Who or What is in Charge?

Preliminaries Get volunteers to light chalice and read the long reading. Announce church events. Pass the bowl of quotations.

Chalice Lighting - Apocrypha
Read aloud together:
I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart, which shall not be put out.

Check-in Please take minute or two to share briefly what's been on your mind lately.

Readings From the Bowl Going around the circle, read aloud the slip you have drawn from the bowl. Continue around the circle as many times as necessary to read all the quotations. If desired, you may also read the quotations on the front of this program.

Sitting in Silence

Sharing/ Deep Listening Share your responses to the preparation questions.

Reading The reading is on the reverse of this page.
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Discussion This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.

Singing
Hymnal #352
Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let the stillness carry me.
Find the silence, hold the silence, let the silence carry me.
In the spirit, by the spirit, with the spirit giving power,
I will find true harmony.

Seek the essence, hold the essence, let the essence carry me.
Let me flower, help me flower, watch me flower, carry me.
In the spirit, by the spirit, with the spirit giving power,
I will find true harmony.

Closing / Extinguishing the Chalice
- Richard S. Gilbert
Join hands or link arms as you read the closing words together:
For the faith of doubt we give thanks;
For the doubt of faith we make glad thanksgiving.
For the courage of adventure
That welcomes questions
As much as answers;
For the beloved community of seekers,
We sing our alleluias into the silent darkness.