Part Four of a Five-Part Series: Questions Answered by Herb Silverman

The following Part-Four questions are about faith and hope for an afterlife:

What do you say if someone tells you they will pray for you?
My first thought would be to say, "OK, I'll think for both of us." But this hurtful reply would offend a well-meaning person. I think the best response is "Thank you." However, I might get into a discussion about the efficacy of prayer with questions like: Why would an all-knowing, all-loving god change his mind because you asked him to? Or why would a god who ignored the prayers of starving children and Holocaust victims take a special interest in a football game? But I would only engage a person who seemed receptive to such a conversation.

Is it possible for God to appear before someone if they pray hard enough?
If there were such a god, she would have appeared centuries ago.

What is the term for when a person prays to God and their request is fulfilled?
Coincidence.

Is it okay to pray anywhere?
Yes, you can talk to yourself anywhere.

What should I do if I can't pray in school?
You can always pray in school silently, without disrupting others.

What does it mean when you feel a sense of peace after praying?
It means you believe praying is meaningful to you. It doesn't mean there is someone who hears you.

What are some of the best prayers to say after a disagreement or argument with someone?
Rather than praying, you should work to settle the disagreement and try to make things work better between the two of you.

Is it better to have faith in humans or in God?
Humans, because we know humans exist.

Don't you see that atheism is self-refuting because it requires faith in nature?
You don't need "faith" in nature. We know nature exists because we see it all around us.

How can we engage in a debate with someone who believes in God solely based on faith, rather than reason or evidence?
If a person doesn't use reason or evidence, then there is not much to debate. The problem is that theists rely on faith because they have no evidence for or of God.

Do you think it unfair that some people have the gift of faith, while others don't?
I consider faith a delusion, not a gift.

Is it possible to prove or disprove the existence of God without evidence?
Sometimes the absence of evidence is evidence of absence, especially since God-believers have been around for millennia, with no evidence.

Why do you need physical evidence for the existence of God?
We would need some evidence, physical or otherwise.

Is faith alone enough to believe in God, or is evidence also necessary?
If evidence were necessary, there would be no god-believers.

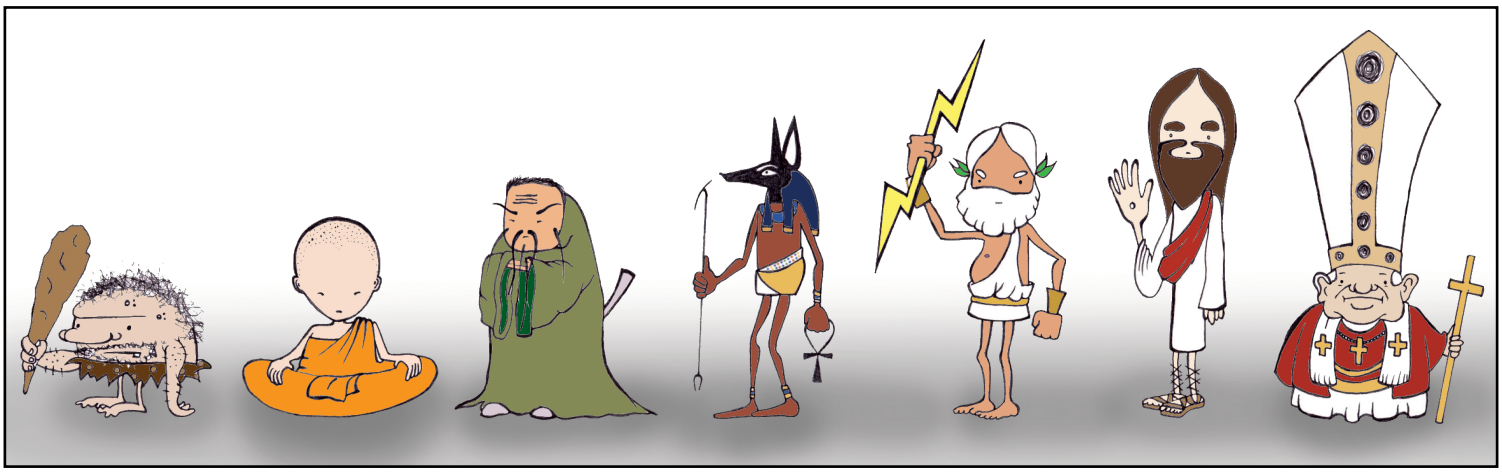
Why are we told we should just have faith?
Because there is no evidence for any gods.

Do you have faith in anything?
I have faith in reason.

Is there a correlation between being an atheist and having faith in science?
We don't have "faith" in science. We have faith in the evidence that science provides.

How can we strengthen our religious faith?
Why strengthen faith instead of searching for evidence?

How can I have the faith of a child, as recommended by the Christian Bible?
If you are a mature adult, why would you want to behave like a child?



What do atheists believe will happen to them when they die?
The same thing that happens to cockroaches. We are all just dead.

Are you scared of dying since, in your mind, that's it and you have to leave the party for good?
We all leave the party for good. Atheists focus on making this one and only life as good as we can.

What do you think theists will say when they die and find there's no god and no afterlife?
They won't ever find out because they will be dead.

Are you prepared to die for atheism?
Only theists die (or kill) for their alleged god.

What epitaph would you like people to read on your headstone?
There's no need to pray for me. I'm just dead.

Do atheists use the term "passed away?"
It's certainly better than "passed on," but I prefer saying "died."

Why do bad things happen to good people if Satan doesn't exist?
Shit happens.

Is it possible to get to heaven without doing good works?
No, because there is no such place as heaven.

Do pets go to heaven?
As surely as humans do, meaning not at all.

After fasting until we die, can we still go to heaven?
Fasting only hastens your death.

Do you believe in the existence of a heaven and a Hell?
Why would Satan cast me into Hell? Attributing malevolence to a devil removes responsibility from humans. If we are responsible for our acts, then we can do something about them.

What is wrong with believing in heaven and Hell?
Death gives you neither a reward nor a punishment.

How do atheists live without the concept of heaven and Hell?
The same way we all live, except without a belief in an imagined afterlife.

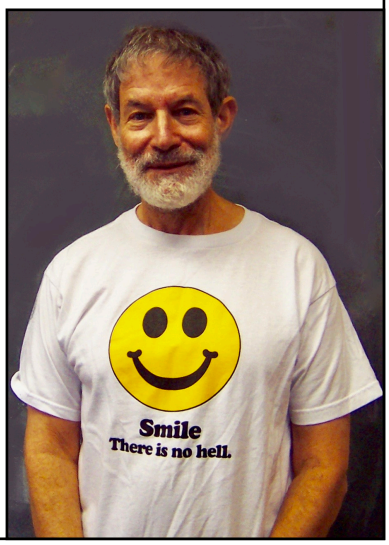
How much better is the worst person in heaven than the best person in Hell?
Our binary divisions are usually quite arbitrary. People in the United States may vote when they are 18 and buy alcohol when they are 21, but neither the day before. We recognize these are distinctions without a real difference. Not so with the cutoff between an eternity of bliss and an eternity of torture.

Don't you feel sad about going to Hell?
It is difficult to believe that a loving and all-powerful god would condemn Mahatma Gandhi to an eternity of torture while the Catholic Adolph Hitler has an eternity of bliss as he looks down at Jews suffering in Hell. Now there's a final solution for all Christians to think about, and discard as nonsense.

Herb Silverman is a regular contributor to the Freethought Society's (FS) quarterly publication *The Freethought Society News.*

The editors are grateful for all of his excellent submissions. Silverman's past articles can be found at the following FS website page:

https://www.ftsociety.org/herb-silverman-articles/



Silverman is the author of two very popular books, *Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*. Both books are available online and at your local bookstores.

Silverman is available for local, national, and international speaking engagements, and he welcomes communication from readers. Please contact him at the following email address:

silvermanh@cofc.edu

Did you know about the following recordings on the FS YouTube Channel?

On August 1, 2022, the Freethought Society (FS) hosted **Seth Andrews**, when he presented his work titled "I Sold My Soul on Twitter." Andrews discussed how tribalized and often cruel we can become, especially with Covid-19 and social media's algorithms affecting us. This event also features music by **Abraham Steve Mackey**. Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXBTlBTkAYo

On March 24, 2022, FS and the American Ethical Union hosted **Chetan Kumar Ahimsa**. Ahimsa is an actor in Karnataka, India and a political/social activist. Highlights from some of Ahimsa's films were shown. For the remainder of the event Ahimsa discussed his activism, what motivates him, and how his parents empower and help him. He also talks about **Erode Venkatappa** "**Periyar**" **Ramasamy** — the Indian social activist who started the self-respect movement. During his speech, Ahisma emphasized Periyar's importance in India's rational-thinking movement. Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SHmg4XEHRQ

On June 12, 2021, FS hosted **Bob Nygaard**, who delivered a speech titled "Combating Fortunetelling Fraud." The presentation highlighted his techniques and efforts in building criminal cases against so-called "psychics" who commit fortunetelling fraud. Nygaard is a respected private investigator and former police officer in New York City. Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gt9PihE09MM