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Why I Believe and What I Believe In, 1923.

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"WHY I BELIEVE, AND WHAT I BELIEVE IN."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

NOVEMBER 25, 1923, CLEVELAND.

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One should take stock of his spiritual resources as of his material resources ever so often, or else they will dwindle through neglect, disappear through poor husbandry. Especially should one try to re-examine ever so often the premises upon which the great convictions of his life are based; to weigh, and revise, if necessary, these very convictions from time to time.

Good acts, when they run to habit, create something that is fine; they create character. But intellectual ideas, when they run to habit, create something else which is not so desirable. Our mind stagnates, and intellectual progress is impossible when our ideas become habitual.

Most religious men inherit their religion, and they accept their religious ideas without much ado, and pay them the homage of lip and of knee. But even these men, from time to time, especially in hours of crisis, when life assaults the citadel of their tranquility, even these men oftentimes turn upon these religious ideas, which have lodged with them comfortably for many years, and begin to demand their credentials and their passports.

I have often asked myself why I believe. What is it I believe in? One of the primary convictions of my life is my belief in belief. I believe that man has a right to believe; that man has a need for belief, and that



man is justified in his belief. I have no reference now to any particular belief. Of that I shall speak more anon. I have reference to the right of man to believe when he has gone beyond the boundary lines of the known and the knowable. I mean the privilege of the human soul to exercise faith in those domains which are beyond and perhaps above the ascertainable, the knowable, the calculable.

Why do men believe? It is, of course, folly to assume that tens of thousands of generations of men have been hoodwinked and preyed upon by priests and by religious mercenaries, who have taught them to believe in things that are not so. That is a very naive way of regarding life and man. Men believe for the same reason that they breathe; because they must. The life of man demands faith even as it demands physical sustenance. Of course not everything we believe in is so. There are many false beliefs. But then not all the air we breathe is pure; we often breathe poisonous air. The fault is not in the belief but in the object of such a belief.

Belief, my friends, is the outreaching of the human soul to grasp this confused complex which we call the universe. Belief is the attempt of the human soul to bring order out of chaos, to piece together, as it were, the bits of facts and phenomena which are presented to the human mind; to organize life so that man can live within the universe, can thrive and grow and develop.

Here is a universe as it presents itself to



man, a universe whose magnitude man's mind cannot grasp, a universe which endures through eternities, unknowable to man. Here is a speck of this universe, the earth, hurtling through space at a maddening gallop, drawing its life from a sea of fire--the sun; fashioned out of particles, each one of which is a solar system in itself; inhabited by myriads of forms of life, organic and inorganic; life species which are born and die, grow and decay, absorb and are absorbed. Here is a world full of beauty and ugliness, of warmth and satiety, of cruelty and pity--a vast, vexing complexity. And man's mind stands before it all and asks: Whence and whither and why? What hand fashioned it, and what mind conceived it? And what are we doing here? What is our relation to it all?

Surely the mind of man cannot be satisfied with a few facts which science, descriptive knowledge, gives him. Man must construct certain hypotheses. Man must postulate certain beliefs to make this thing intelligible; to organize it, to make it livable for him.

It is a mistake to believe, friends, that there is such a thing as one world or realm of things that may be known objectively, scientifically accurately, and another realm of vague, hazy, subjective notions which we call the realm of faith or the realm of religion. Everything in life is predicated upon belief. Science, which we regard so objective, so mathematically certain, bases itself upon certain postulates and certain conventions which cannot,



in the very nature of things, be established scientifically. Science speaks in terms of time and space, and yet time and space have never been defined. Science speaks of a law of cause and effect, that an act must have its reaction, and yet all that science can establish is the law of unbroken continuity. Science can never establish a law of cause and effect.

Science weighs and measures physical things. It will take a piece of matter and weigh it and measure it, and analyze it and describe it, and you will think that there you have objective reality; there is truth which cannot be disputed. And yet science in weighing it and measuring it uses the human mind, which is itself unweighed and unmeasured and unfathomable. And it uses the categories of the human mind, which are themselves abstract; and it uses our five senses, which are themselves faulty and inadequate and only relative.

Science is now discovering that what we regarded as matter, that what we regarded as the sure properties of matter, in reality must be reduced through particle and atom and electron to just a stream of electric change, just a sea of energy, which is another word for that spiritual something which we call life. Life in motion and life in manifestation--that is all that matter is.

Science has now come to realize what religion intuitively long ago discovered: that you cannot reduce life, organic life--your life and my life--to chemical and mechani-



cal terms. You cannot weigh and measure and hope to arrive at the mystery and the explanation of life; and so science, too, has a large measure of convention and hypotheses and faith - a very respectable ingredient of that which we call belief.

We believe, then, because we have to, because without it we could not live and live intelligently. Now what do we believe it? What do I believe in? First of all, I believe in God. No machine creates itself, and no universe just happened. A world so involved, so intricate, and yet so delicately adjusted, implies incontestibly a design and a designer, a purpose and the mind that purposed it. We cannot know that spirit, that mind, as we know an object--by our senses; for there are many things very more near at home that we do not know by our senses. There are things very real and very sure that the most delicate microscope cannot see. As for example, a human thought. No eye has seen it, no sense has ascertained it. You cannot see it. It is not of the things that can be seen; and yet there is nothing more real in your life than that spiritual something which you call a thought.

God created this universe not necessarily in time. There is a creation which is above time. There may never have been a time when the world did not exist, and yet we may rightfully say that the world is the creation, the emanation of God. Man creates a thought, and yet there was perhaps never a time when a living man did not create



thoughts. The world is the photograph of the spirit; the world is the mirror, the reflection of God. It is therefore, in a sense, less real, because it only represents the absolute reality, which is God. God dwells in this world, which is His reflection. The world represents him, but He has not exhausted the full content of His being, and His reality is not exhausted by this reflection of him which we call the Universe.

I can cast my voice through a small instrument which you call the radio, and that voice of mine will travel through infinity; it will never be destroyed; it will always endure. Now that voice is part of me. I live in that voice. It carries my message. I create it, and yet I, the content, the full content of my being is not exhausted by that voice.

I can send a thought through space that will reach a man ten thousand miles away from here. I live in that thought; that thought carries part of my personality. It is I, and yet that thought is less than I am because I am the creator of it.

I say, while God dwells in His universe, while the universe is God, the content of God, the fullness of God, the completeness of God, is not exhausted by His universe. The world, the universe, changes, grows and decays and grows again. It is subject to the accidents of time and place. God, who fashioned it, is changeless, perfect, and eternal.



That is, perhaps, my first faith, my first belief. And my second belief is this: that the universe which God created is one, for everything has had its origin in one, animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic. The unitary cell and the homosapiens are all of one. They differ in degree but not in kind. Everything that is--the stone and the plant and the beast and the Spinoza of the human race may all be reduced to that one substratum, that basic sea of endless energy which is stirred and moved and guided by one omnipotent purpose.

Everything belongs in the universe; everything is linked to one basic purpose; nothing is strange or foreign, and nothing just happens. This purpose unfolds itself in the life of the plant, and the beast, and the individual man, and nations, and solar systems, and universes. It is one, and everything within that universe is related. You cannot stir a flower without the troubling of a star; you cannot spin a top here but what its vibrations will widen and reach out and touch the uttermost sphere of the universe.

That is my second belief. And my third belief is this: that this purpose which we call God is perfect; that the universe is the dwelling place of a perfect plan, which to us, because of our finitude, because of our frailties, oftentimes appears imperfect and inadequate. The private in an army, the soldier in an army of millions, sent upon an unpleasant mission, will sometimes say, "Why, that mission upon which I am sent is useless and foolish." And he



will rebel against it; and oftentimes the captain will think that a certain maneuver is senseless and wasteful and meaningless, but only he who is at the head of that army, the general in whose mind the whole campaign has been planned, can know whether an individual act or movement or motion or maneuver has meaning or not.

There is evil in the world, but there is evil only in our world, in the world of men, and that evil is real. There is sin and suffering and war and cruelty, but all these things have a purpose and a meaning, and evil itself, in relation to the vaster scheme of God, is good.

How do we know this God? We do not know Him as we know a stone or a plant or a geometric formula. We know Him as we know when a thing is beautiful, when a thing is good, when a thing is true. We know him, in other words, by the whole grasp of our being, by our complete personality. God reveals himself to man most in moral values. God is truth, and God is goodness, and God is grace. It may not be our goodness and our beauty and our truth, but, after all, our beauty and our goodness and our truth is a groping, an outreaching, a quest for the divine wisdom and goodness and grace, and that quest of the human soul is the most divine thing in us, and the most real thing in us. Our sense for beauty, our passion for truth, for righteousness, for goodness, is a much more real thing--and I should like to have you realize that--our craving for truth and goodness and beauty in the world is a much more



real thing in our life, even if they are spiritual, than steel or concrete, which are the most dominant facts, the most controlling facts in our life.

And if we reach up through these avenues of the good and the true and the beautiful, then do we approach the throne of God, do we approximate the divine attributes. No man has ever realized his life or ever found the meaning of life in food; no man has ever found any meaning of life in dress; and no man has ever found the meaning of life in passion. But some men have, when they heard a perfect harmony, or when they saw a scene of unutterable beauty, or when they loved with a sacrificial love,--some men have then caught some meaning of life.

When one sees beauty, or when one performs an act of supreme goodness, or when one's mind reaches to a truth, why there is a release within the human soul; there enters a glow and an illumination; there comes about an enrichment of personality, an emancipation of the human soul, which, when the seer and the prophet and the dreamer of old expressed in moments of ecstasy, he fell upon his knees and worshipped, for he knew that God was then speaking to him. That is how men know and experience God.

Now, to this God I should like to pray. He needs not my prayers, but I need to pray. That is how I approach Him. That is the rhythm of my soul on its eternal pilgrimage. He will not answer all my prayers. Perhaps it is better so. But when I pray--and one does not always pray



when he utters prayers--but when I pray really, there are certain doors open and certain veils held apart. I see more clearly, and my own will and my own purposes are purged and purified and strengthened, and I know that my prayers are answered.

I should like to attune my life to God's life; I should like to bring myself in harmony with His purpose, and the only way I know of doing that is by living on that high plane of moral values which are the reflexes of God's true essence. I know, and you know, and every living man knows that when he is in the midst of a noble enterprise, whether it be in the pursuit of righteousness, whether it be in the quest of beauty, whether it be in the performance of an act of love or charity, he knows that he is approaching the ultimates of life, that he is approaching a reality which cannot be doubted, and which is the greatest reality of life. He is approaching God.

And I know, and you know, and all men know that when we pursue that which is unrighteous and not good and not true and not beautiful, that we are moving in the direction of the shadows, that we are falling into the depths, that we are being estranged and removed from that purpose which we call God. And that, my friends is reward, and that, my friends, is punishment--here and hereafter.

There is no other reward but nearness to God, and there is no other punishment but estrangement from God. God does not reward us with wealth; God does not punish us



with sickness. The good have suffered sickness and the evil have enjoyed wealth. Reward is not in things material, nor is punishment in things material. The reward of the good life is goodness, and the reward of the evil life is evil. Kinship with God, or estrangement from God--that is Providence.

I believe in accepting everything that has been allotted to me, humbly and in resignation. Happiness I accept as a gift; sorrow as a test. "Yea, even though he slay me, yet do I hope in him." "Thy will be done," said a sage once, "even if it be my undoing."

He is my God in life; he is my God in death. It may be that my life is immortal. It may be that He has imparted to my frail being and to the frail being of all the children of man the gift of life eternal; but it may also be that I am only a spark out of the great fire, a spark which shines for a moment and then dies. But what matters that if I die or men die? God lives, and as long as God lives my life and my death are not meaningless.

"In His hands I <sup>am</sup> trust my spirit, when I sleep and when I wake; and with my spirit my body, too. The Lord is by me. I shall not fear."

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# Why I Believe - And What I Believe In.

1. Our dearest tasks still, his spiritual resources as, his material even so often, else they will diminish thus neglect and poor husbandry. We should especially try to reexamine the premises upon which his life convictions are based, and to weigh and revise these convictions themselves when found necessary. When good actions men to habit it is well. When intell. ideas bec. habitual it is not well, for <sup>then</sup> there can be no intell. progress - Most m. men without their rel. ideas - accept them with little ado - and pay them the homage of lip and knee. But ~~even these~~ <sup>even these</sup> men at times, <sup>esp. during moments of crisis - esp.</sup> turn upon their ideas which have lodged themselves comfortably in their ears and demand of them their <sup>credentials</sup> passports! ~~Then turn~~ <sup>They must</sup> ~~then record our eyes to us~~

2. Of the primary convictions of my life is the belief in Belief - I believe that man should believe, ~~has a right~~ & must believe and is justified in his belief. I refer now to no particular belief of that more anon - I mean the duty and need and right to exercise the privilege of believing when we pass beyond the boundary of the known, and the knowable, the gift of faith in the domain beyond that alone the demonstrable and ascertainable -

Why do men believe? It is folly to assume that thousands of generations of men have been <sup>they are</sup> ~~hardwired~~ <sup>by parents</sup> & rel. mercenaries into believing things which are not so. Men believe for the very same reason that they breathe.



when life assaults the citadel of our sanctity -





They could not live without it. There are many false  
beliefs, it is true. But that is due to the false object  
& these beliefs not to belief itself.

3. It is a mistake to assume that there is a realm  
of absolute knowledge and <sup>speaking</sup> certainty - the realm  
of science - and a realm of vague, hazy, subjective  
notions - the realm of faith. Science itself is  
predicated upon certain beliefs and certain con-  
ventions. Sc. speaks in terms of time and space  
and yet no one has ever adequately defined these  
terms. Sc. speaks in terms of cause & effect  
and yet as a law in nature - and yet all that  
we really know is the law of unbroken continuity  
and probability - Sc. weighs and measures  
physical phenomena - and yet in so doing  
always employs the mind, <sup>unwittingly</sup> itself <sup>unconsciously</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>unavoidably</sup> <sup>unwittingly</sup>  
and its categories, themselves <sup>arbitrary</sup> abstractions,  
and the sciences, themselves, faulty and  
relative. Sc. now seems to be reducing  
the whole of the physical world - which we  
regarded as solid, apparent and indisputable  
to a ~~an~~ almost imperceptible stream of electric  
charges - of life in motion and expression -  
Sc. now declares, what rel. intuitively denied,  
that you cannot reduce ~~the~~ life <sup>to</sup> <sup>any</sup> <sup>words</sup> <sup>words</sup>  
to mechanical and chemical terms -











3. The world universe thus created is one - having its  
same purpose is one - animated & maintained as  
one - differing in degree and not in kind! All is  
ultimately reducible to a shrouded sea of endless  
energy - or life - stirred and swept by an omni-  
potent will purpose. over

4. This purpose is perfect. The plan is faultless.  
tho to us who see <sup>as a plan</sup> ~~partly~~ it seems imperfect. The  
private in the army, millions sent on a mission  
may question its reason or purpose. Even the captain  
may fail to understand the reason for a maneuver.  
But the general knows - for evil is real - to us.  
~~For~~ as part of the vast plan it is good.

5. We cannot know God as we know things - by  
our senses - ~~we may~~ <sup>we cannot</sup> ~~know God as we know~~  
we may know Him as we know the when a  
thing is true or good or beautiful, by the whole  
grasp of our being - by our personality. In man  
God reveals Himself most fully in moral values -  
which are more real than steel and concrete.  
God is Truth and goodness and peace - not needs.  
our Truth & goodness & peace - but ours is the quest  
for these values - and the quest is the most  
divine thing is us - and the most real. We first  
approach God nearest - or we seek to approxi-  
mate Truth - goodness - Beauty.

6. Man never found the meaning of life in food



There is nothing in the world that is not linked to  
this Purpose. Nothing is unrelated. Nothing is un-  
important. ~~It~~ Everything finds purpose unifies itself  
in the lives of plants - in the lives of beasts - in  
the lives of men - in the lives of nations. All  
the rivers run into the sea - and tho they  
are in the world their waters are from the  
sea.





a dream or passion. He seems ~~meanings~~ <sup>meanings</sup> when  
he hears a perfect harmony, or ~~sees at a glance~~ <sup>sees at a glance</sup> a  
scene of ineffable beauty - or loves some one with  
a selfless love. Certain springs are released  
in his being - a certain glow and illumination  
comes to him - a certain peace which passes  
all understanding - when that moment comes  
the seer and prophet and dreamer falls down  
and weeps - for he has seen God -

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6. To this God I should like to pray. He needs not  
my prayer; ~~the~~ <sup>He</sup> ~~who~~ <sup>who</sup> needs the gift of prayer. It is  
my way of reaching Him - It is the rhythm  
the soul on its eternal pilgrimage to God.  
He will not answer all my prayers. It is better  
so. But my prayer will unveil certain doors,  
and pull aside veils that hide Him from me.  
My own will and purpose will be strengthened  
as I chant the melody of consecration to  
Him.

7. I should like to attach myself to Him - to this  
Truth - and goodness - and Grace. I know that in  
personal exercises I shall find the harmony - The  
Love of Righteousness & Truth bring me near to Him.  
Un-answered are from Him. This is Reward.  
And there is Punishment. Here and Hereafter.



8. I believe in accepting what is allotted to me  
humbly and in resignation. Happen as a gift  
from Him. Sorrow as test from Him. "Even  
tho I may be yet do I hope in Him" - "Whisper  
I am according to the wisdom, Thy pleasure - send  
a sage - Thy will be done; tho in my own unbelief."

9. In life I belong to Him. In death also. My  
soul may partake of the Eternal fire. It may only  
be a spark of that flame - to die and cease  
to be. - It is whatever he <sup>deeds</sup> ~~deeds~~ <sup>great</sup> for him and  
as long as good him - I shall not fear -





Sermon, The Temple, November 25, 1923

Every so often, one should take stock of his spiritual resources as of his material resources, else they will dwindle through neglect and disappear through poor husbandry. Especially should one try to re-examine the premises upon which the active convictions of his life are based; to weigh, and revise, if necessary, his program for life.

Good acts, when they run to habit, create character. But intellectual ideas, when they run to habit, create opinionated men. The mind stagnates, and intellectual growth ceases.

Most religious men inherit their religion. They accept their religious ideas without much ado, and pay them the homage of lip and knee. But even these men, from time to time, especially ~~when~~ when life assaults the citadel of their tranquility, even these men oftentimes turn upon these comfortable ideas and begin to demand their credentials and their passports.

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Here is a universe as it presents itself to man, a universe whose magnitude man's mind cannot grasp, which endures through eternities, unknowable to man. Here is a spark of this universe, the earth, hurtling through space at ~~a~~ <sup>searsome</sup> maddening pace gallop, drawing its life from a sea of fire <sup>the</sup> sun; fashioned out of particles, each one ~~of which is~~ a solar system in itself; inhabited by myriads ~~of~~ forms of life, organic and inorganic; <sup>life</sup> species are born and die, grow and decay, absorb and are absorbed. Here is a world full of beauty and ugliness, of warmth and satiety, of ~~cruelty~~ cruelty and pity - a vast vexing complexity. Man's mind stands before it all and asks: whence and whither and why? What hand fashioned it? What mind conceived it? What are we doing here? What is our relation to it all?

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Science will take a piece of matter, weigh it, measure it, analyze it, and describe it. We will think that here is objective reality; here is truth which cannot be disputed. Yet science in weighing and measuring objects uses the human mind, which <sup>s</sup>is itself unweighed and <sup>a</sup>unmeasured and unfathomable. Science uses the categories of the human mind, which are themselves abstract; and it ~~uses~~ uses our senses, which are themselves faulty and inadequate and only <sup>r</sup>relative.

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How do we know this God? We do not know Him as we know a stone or a plant or a geometric formula. We know Him as we know when a thing is beautiful, when a thing is good, when a thing is true. We know Him, in other words, by the whole grasp of our being, by our complete personality. God reveals Himself to man most in moral values. God is truth, and God is goodness, and God is grace. It may not be our goodness and our beauty and our truth, but after all, our beauty and our truth and our goodness is a groping, an outreaching, a quest for the divine wisdom and goodness and grace, and that quest of the human soul is the most divine thing in us, and the most real thing in us. Truth and goodness and beauty in the world are more real than steel or concrete, which seem so dominant and controlling in our life.

If we reach up through these avenues of the good and the true and the beautiful, we reach the throne of God. No man has ever realized his life or ever found the meaning of life in food; no man has ever found the meaning of life in dress;



and no man has ever found the meaning of life in passion. But some men <sup>have</sup>, when they heard a perfect harmony, or when they saw a scene of unutterable beauty, or when they loved with a sacrificial <sup>live</sup> - some men have caught ~~some~~ meaning of life.

When one <sup>sees</sup> beauty, or performs an act of supreme goodness; or when one's mind reaches to a truth, there is a release within the human soul. There enters a glow and an illumination. There comes about an enrichment of personality, an <sup>emancipation</sup> of the human soul, which caused the seer and the prophet and the dreamer of old in his moment of ecstasy, to fall upon his knees and worship ~~him~~, for he knew that God was then speaking to him. That is how men know and experience God.

Now, to this God I should like to pray. He does not need my prayers, but I need to pray. That is how I approach Him. That is the rhythm of my soul on its eternal pilgrimage. He will not answer all my prayers. Perhaps it is better so. But when I pray <sup>and</sup> one does not always pray when he utters prayers <sup>when</sup> I pray really, there are certain doors open and certain veils held apart. I see more clearly, and my own will and my own purposes ~~are~~ are purged and purified and strengthened, and I know that my prayers are answered.

I should like to attune my life to God's life; I should like to bring myself into harmony with His purpose, and the only way I know of doing that is by living on that high plane of moral values which are the reflection of God's true essence. I know, and you know, and every living man knows that when he is in the midst of a noble enterprise, whether it be in the <sup>in</sup> pursuit of righteousness, or in the quest of beauty, or the performance of an act of love or charity, he ~~knows that~~ he is approaching the ultimates of life, ~~that~~ he is approaching a reality which cannot be doubted. He is approaching God. And I know, and you know, and all men know that when we pursue that which is unrighteous and not good and not true and not beautiful, ~~that~~ we are being estranged and removed from that ~~purpose~~ purpose which we call God. The one is reward, and the other is punishment <sup>here and hereafter</sup>.

There is no other reward but nearness to God, and there is no other punishment but estrangement from God. God does not reward us with wealth; God does



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not punish us with sickness. The good have suffered sickness and the evil have enjoyed wealth. The reward of the good life is goodness, and the reward of an evil life is evil. Kinship with God, or estrangement from God - that is Providence.

I believe in accepting everything that has been allotted to me, humbly and in resignation. Happiness I accept as a gift; sorrow as a test. "Yea, even though He slay me, yet do I hope in Him". "Thy will be done", said <sup>a</sup> the sage once, "even if it be my undoing."

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He is my God in life; He is my God in death. It may be that my life is immortal. It may be that He has imparted to my frail being and to the frail being of all the children of man the gift of life eternal; but it may also be that I am only a spark ~~in~~ out of the great fire, a spark which shines for a moment, then dies. But what matters that ~~if~~ I die or men die? God lives, and as long as God lives my life and my death are not meaningless.

"In His hands I entrust my spirit, when I sleep and when I wake; and with my spirit my body, too. The Lord is by me. I shall not fear."



One should take stock of his spiritual resources as of his material resources ever so often, or else they will dwindle through neglect, disappear through poor husbandry. Especially should one try to re-examine ever so often the premises upon which the great convictions of his life are based; to weigh, and revise, if necessary, these very convictions from time to time.

Good acts, when they run to habit, create something that is fine; they create character. But intellectual ideas, when they run to habit, create something else which is not so desirable. Our mind stagnates, and intellectual progress is impossible when our ideas become habitual.

Most religious men inherit their religion, and they accept their religious ideas without much ado, and pay them the homage of lip and of knee. But even these men, from time to time, especially in hours of crisis, when life assaults the citadel of their tranquility, even these men oftentimes turn upon these religious ideas, which have lodged with them comfortably for many years, and begin to demand their credentials and their passports.

I have often asked myself why I believe. What is it I believe in? One of the primary convictions of my life is my belief in belief. I believe that man has a right to believe; that man has a need for belief, and that



man is justified in his belief. I have no reference now to any particular belief. Of that I shall speak more anon. I have reference to the right of man to believe when he has gone beyond the boundary lines of the known and the knowable. I mean the privilege of the human soul to exercise faith in those domains which are beyond and perhaps above the ascertainable, the knowable, the calculable.

Why do men believe? It is, of course, folly to assume that tens of thousands of generations of men have been hoodwinked and preyed upon by priests and by religious mercenaries, who have taught them to believe in things that are not so. That is a very naive way of regarding life and man. Men believe for the same reason that they breathe; because they must. The life of man demands faith even as it demands physical sustenance. Of course not everything we believe in is so. There are many false beliefs. But then not all the air we breathe is pure; we often breathe poisonous air. The fault is not in the belief but in the object of such a belief.

Belief, my friends, is the outreaching of the human soul to grasp this confused complex which we call the universe. Belief is the attempt of the human soul to bring order out of chaos, to piece together, as it were, the bits of facts and phenomena which are presented to the human mind; to organize life so that man can live within the universe, can thrive and grow and develop.

Here is a universe as it presents itself to



man, a universe whose magnitude man's mind cannot grasp, a universe which endures through eternities, unknowable to man. Here is a speck of this universe, the earth, hurtling through space at a maddening gallop, drawing its life from a sea of fire--the sun; fashioned out of particles, each one of which is a solar system in itself; inhabited by myriads of forms of life, organic and inorganic; life species which are born and die, grow and decay, absorb and are absorbed. Here is a world full of beauty and ugliness, of warmth and satiety, of cruelty and pity--a vast, vexing complexity. And man's mind stands before it all and asks: Whence and whither and why? What hand fashioned it, and what mind conceived it? And what are we doing here? What is our relation to it all?

Surely the mind of man cannot be satisfied with a few facts which science, descriptive knowledge, gives him. Man must construct certain hypotheses. Man must postulate certain beliefs to make this thing intelligible; to organize it, to make it livable for him.

It is a mistake to believe, friends, that there is such a thing as one world or realm of things that may be known objectively, scientifically accurately, and another realm of vague, hazy, subjective notions which we call the realm of faith or the realm of religion. Everything in life is predicated upon belief. Science, which we regard so objective, so mathematically certain, bases itself upon certain postulates and certain conventions which cannot,



in the very nature of things, be established scientifically. Science speaks in terms of time and space, and yet time and space have never been defined. Science speaks of a law of cause and effect, that an act must have its reaction, and yet all that science can establish is the law of unbroken continuity. Science can never establish a law of cause and effect.

Science weighs and measures physical things. It will take a piece of matter and weigh it and measure it, and analyze it and describe it, and you will think that there you have objective reality; there is truth which cannot be disputed. And yet science in weighing it and measuring it uses the human mind, which is itself unweighed and unmeasured and unfathomable. And it uses the categories of the human mind, which are themselves abstract; and it uses our five senses, which are themselves faulty and inadequate and only relative.

Science is now discovering that what we regarded as matter, that what we regarded as the sure properties of matter, in reality must be reduced through particle and atom and electron to just a stream of electric change, just a sea of energy, which is another word for that spiritual something which we call life. Life in motion and life in manifestation--that is all that matter is.

Science has now come to realize what religion intuitively long ago discovered: that you cannot reduce life, organic life--your life and my life--to chemical and mechani-



cal terms. You cannot weigh and measure and hope to arrive at the mystery and the explanation of life; and so science, too, has a large measure of conviction and hypotheses and faith - a very respectable ingredient of that which we call belief.

We believe, then, because we have to, because without it we could not live and live intelligently. Now what do we believe it? What do I believe in? First of all, I believe in God. No machine creates itself, and no universe just happened. A world so involved, so intricate, and yet so delicately adjusted, implies incontestably a design and a designer, a purpose and the mind that purposed it. We cannot know that spirit, that mind, as we know an object--by our senses; for there are many things very more near at home that we do not know by our senses. There are things very real and very sure that the most delicate microscope cannot see. As for example, a human thought. No eye has seen it, no sense has ascertained it. You cannot see it. It is not of the things that can be seen; and yet there is nothing more real in your life than that spiritual something which you call a thought.

God created this universe not necessarily in time. There is a creation which is above time. There may never have been a time when the world did not exist, and yet we may rightfully say that the world is the creation, the emanation of God. Man creates a thought, and yet there was perhaps never a time when a living man did not create



thoughts. The world is the photograph of the spirit; the world is the mirror, the reflection of God. It is therefore, in a sense, less real, because it only represents the absolute reality, which is God. God dwells in this world, which is His reflection. The world represents him, but He has not exhausted the full content of His being, and His reality is not exhausted by this reflection of him which we call the Universe.

I can cast my voice through a small instrument which you call the radio, and that voice of mine will travel through infinity; it will never be destroyed; it will always endure. Now that voice is part of me. I live in that voice. It carries my message. I create it, and yet I, the content, the full content of my being is not exhausted by that voice.

I can send a thought through space that will reach a man ten thousand miles away from here. I live in that thought; that thought carries part of my personality. It is I, and yet that thought is less than I am because I am the creator of it.

I say, while God dwells in His universe, while the universe is God, the content of God, the fullness of God, the completeness of God, is not exhausted by His universe. The world, the universe, changes, grows and decays and grows again. It is subject to the accidents of time and place. God, who fashioned it, is changeless, perfect, and eternal.



That is, perhaps, my first faith, my first belief. And my second belief is this: that the universe which God created is one, for everything has had its origin in one, animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic. The unitary cell and the homosapiens are all of one. They differ in degree but not in kind. Everything that is--the stone and the plant and the beast and the Spinoza of the human race may all be reduced to that one substratum, that basic sea of endless energy which is stirred and moved and guided by one omnipotent purpose.

Everything belongs in the universe; everything is linked to one basic purpose; nothing is strange or foreign, and nothing just happens. This purpose unfolds itself in the life of the plant, and the beast, and the individual man, and nations, and solar systems, and universes. It is one, and everything within that universe is related. You cannot stir a flower without the troubling of a star; you cannot spin a top here but what its vibrations will widen and reach out and touch the uttermost sphere of the universe.

That is my second belief. And my third belief is this: that this purpose which we call God is perfect; that the universe is the dwelling place of a perfect plan, which to us, because of our finitude, because of our frailties, oftentimes appears imperfect and inadequate. The private in an army, the soldier in an army of millions, sent upon an unpleasant mission, will sometimes say, "Why, that mission upon which I am sent is useless and foolish." And he



will rebel against it; and oftentimes the captain will think that a certain maneuver is senseless and wasteful and meaningless, but only he who is at the head of that army, the general in whose mind the whole campaign has been planned, can know whether an individual act or movement or motion or maneuver has meaning or not.

There is evil in the world, but there is evil only in our world, in the world of men, and that evil is real. There is sin and suffering and war and cruelty, but all these things have a purpose and a meaning, and evil itself, in relation to the vaster scheme of God, is good.

How do we know this God? We do not know Him as we know a stone or a plant or a geometric formula. We know Him as we know when a thing is beautiful, when a thing is good, when a thing is true. We know him, in other words, by the whole grasp of our being, by our complete personality. God reveals himself to man most in moral values. God is truth, and God is goodness, and God is grace. It may not be our goodness and our beauty and our truth, but, after all, our beauty and our goodness and our truth is a groping, an outreaching, a quest for the divine wisdom and goodness and grace, and that quest of the human soul is the most divine thing in us, and the most real thing in us. Our sense for beauty, our passion for truth, for righteousness, for goodness, is a much more real thing--and I should like to have you realize that--our craving for truth and goodness and beauty in the world is a much more



real thing in our life, even if they are spiritual, than steel or concrete, which are the most dominant facts, the most controlling facts in our life.

And if we reach up through these avenues of the good and the true and the beautiful, then do we approach the throne of God, do we approximate the divine attributes. No man has ever realized his life or ever found the meaning of life in food; no man has ever found any meaning of life in dress; and no man has ever found the meaning of life in passion. But some men have, when they heard a perfect harmony, or when they saw a scene of unutterable beauty, or when they loved with a sacrificial love,--some men have then caught some meaning of life.

When one sees beauty, or when one performs an act of supreme goodness, or when one's mind reaches to a truth, why there is a release within the human soul; there enters a glow and an illumination; there comes about an enrichment of personality, an emancipation of the human soul, which, when the seer and the prophet and the dreamer of old expressed in moments of ecstasy, he fell upon his knees and worshipped, for he knew that God was then speaking to him. That is how men know and experience God.

Now, to this God I should like to pray. He needs not my prayers, but I need to pray. That is how I approach Him. That is the rhythm of my soul on its eternal pilgrimage. He will not answer all my prayers. Perhaps it is better so. But when I pray--and one does not always pray



when he utters prayers--but when I pray really, there are certain doors open and certain veils held apart. I see more clearly, and my own will and my own purposes are purged and purified and strengthened, and I know that my prayers are answered.

I should like to attune my life to God's life; I should like to bring myself in harmony with His purpose, and the only way I know of doing that is by living on that high plane of moral values which are the reflexes of God's true essence. I know, and you know, and every living man knows that when he is in the midst of a noble enterprise, whether it be in the pursuit of righteousness, whether it be in the quest of beauty, whether it be in the performance of an act of love or charity, he knows that he is approaching the ultimates of life, that he is approaching a reality which cannot be doubted, and which is the greatest reality of life. He is approaching God.

And I know, and you know, and all men know that when we pursue that which is unrighteous and not good and not true and not beautiful, that we are moving in the direction of the shadows, that we are falling into the depths, that we are being estranged and removed from that purpose which we call God. And that, my friends is reward, and that, my friends, is punishment--here and hereafter.

There is no other reward but nearness to God, and there is no other punishment but estrangement from God. God does not reward us with wealth; God does not punish us



with sickness. The good have suffered sickness and the evil have enjoyed wealth. Reward is not in things material, nor is punishment in things material. The reward of the good life is goodness, and the reward of the evil life is evil. Kinship with God, or estrangement from God--that is Providence.

I believe in accepting everything that has been allotted to me, humbly and in resignation. Happiness I accept as a gift; sorrow as a test. "Yea, even though he slay me, yet do I hope in him." "Thy will be done," said a sage once, "even if it be my undoing."

He is my God in life; he is my God in death. It may be that my life is immortal. It may be that He has imparted to my frail being and to the frail being of all the children of man the gift of life eternal; but it may also be that I am only a spark out of the great fire, a spark which shines for a moment and then dies. But what matters that if I die or men die? God lives, and as long as God lives my life and my death are not meaningless.

"In His hands I am trust my spirit, when I sleep and when I wake; and with my spirit my body, too. The Lord is by me. I shall not fear."

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