

The Human Soul's Quest for God

HAROLD S. KUSHNER

It is really so inspiring and heartwarming to look out and see so many of you here. I wish I had learned earlier in my career that the secret of success for a clergyman is to keep the talk the same and come up with a new congregation every week. I am especially gratified by your invitation to come here to Provo and to Brigham Young University. I have been looking forward to this visit ever since we fixed the appointment. This is the only place in America where I get to be a gentile.

In fact, along those lines, I met with some of the students at 9:00 a.m. When we had finished and were just chatting afterward, one of them came up and said, "Rabbi Kushner is a Jew. I know you can be objective about this. What do you think about the major theological confrontation that's coming up this Saturday when BYU plays Notre Dame?"

I can picture some of the undergraduates going up to some of the leaders of the Church and the community and saying, "You know, this is really a big game—national television exposure. Don't you think it would really be wonderful for the faith if we could win? Could you put in an extra prayer for us or something?"

And the administrators would have to smile and say, "Gee, I'm sorry. We're in sales, not management."

Now if we are in sales, what is it we are selling? What is it we are really offering people when we

make the claim that their lives will be richer and deeper and more satisfying if they are committed to a faith system? What is it that belief in God, belief in religion, and involvement with a religious community give a person? My main thesis this morning is a very straightforward one. We in the twentieth century have become so sophisticated, so modern, and so enmeshed in the trappings of the modern world that we have been enriched in a lot of ways and impoverished in a lot of important ways. And I want to put the spotlight on what we lose out on, what we miss when we become modern—so modern that there is no room for faith in our lives.

Reverence

The first gift of a religious commitment is . . . (I am going to have to dust off a word you don't hear very often these days. And perhaps it is a sign of the imbalance of the late twentieth century that this word has become so old-fashioned.) The word is *reverence*—being in the presence of a power so overwhelming that it defines who you are, that you feel small but you don't feel diminished. It is not fear. When you are afraid, you are

Harold S. Kushner, rabbi laureate of Temple Israel in Natick, Massachusetts, delivered this forum address on October 11, 1994.

overawed by something and you want to run away. When you feel reverent, you are overawed but you want to come closer. It is the sense you get when you walk into a cathedral and the architecture says to you, “No matter how important you may be out there, in the presence of God you are really very small.”

Here is a story about what has happened to reverence in our time: You—living here in Provo at the foot of the mountains, going to BYU—don’t have to be reminded that there is something about a mountain that uplifts the human soul. It seems to speak of the effort of the earth to rise up to heaven to meet God halfway, which is why revelations take place on mountaintops.

The story is told of the first two white settlers to travel across the country to Seattle and see Mount Rainier. They looked at it and were absolutely stunned by this beautiful, symmetrical, snow-capped mountain in the Northwest. And they responded, as typical Americans would respond, “Gee, that’s beautiful. Let’s climb it. Let’s show that we’re stronger than the mountain.”

They went to the local Indian tribe and said, “We’d like to hire a guide to lead us up to the top of the mountain.”

The Indian said, “I’m sorry. We can’t do that. That’s our holy mountain. We believe the gods live at a lake of fire [apparently an extinct volcano at the top of the mountain], and it’s not proper for us to intrude on the home of the gods by climbing to the mountaintop.”

The two settlers said, “Now, you guys don’t seem to understand. We’re offering you real money to lead us up to the top of the mountain.”

The Indian said, “No, *you* don’t understand. There are some things that are not for sale. And the home of the gods is one of them.”

But the two settlers kept on insisting and adding to and upping the price, and finally they found an Indian guide who said he would lead them. He led them astray for a while, down into valleys and up hills, trying to tire them out so they would give up. But they were persistent. So he led them partway up Mount Rainier, and he said, “My religion forbids me to go any farther. You are on your own.”

He thought he would never see them again, but these guys were very determined. They got to the top of the mountain, planted a flag, took pictures of each other at the peak, and came down again.

That story was told to me by a forest ranger in Mount Rainier National Park outside of Seattle. She told us the story to make a point about the courage and the dedication of the two mountain climbers. But the message I got from that story was a very different one. I felt very sad that we are so good in this century at putting out sacred fires. We are so good at minimizing the domain of the gods and intruding on holy space and claiming it for our own until we end up with a lot to feel proud about as men and nothing to inspire us—no sense of awe for that which is beyond us.

I would remind you that in scripture, idol worship does not refer to bowing down to statues. Give the ancients a little bit more credit than that. They knew the statue was not God. It was a representation, a symbol of God. Idol worship is not bowing to statues. Idol worship is treating the human as if they were the ultimate. And that, it seems to me, is the sin of idolatry that we commit today. Technology is the enemy of reverence because technology is the worship of the man-made. And ultimately the worship of the man-made limits our ability to worship the divine.

I have no objections to technology. I am very grateful for the jet plane that brought me from Boston to Utah in such comfort. I love my computer that helps me write books. I am grateful for the medical breakthroughs that have enhanced the lives of my family. But when you worship technology as the ultimate, you forget there is anything beyond that. Something gets lost. I will give you my favorite example of this. Most of you undergraduates will not be able to remember it, but some of the older people in the audience will.

Just over twenty-five years ago, in July 1969, astronauts walked on the moon for the first time. If you were alive then, you may remember what it was like. The whole country stopped. Everything closed down. Restaurants were deserted. Movie theaters were empty. Everybody stayed home to watch Neil Armstrong set foot on the surface of the moon for the first time.

The second time astronauts walked on the moon, we didn't stay home. We said, "What time is it going to happen? If I'm back I'll tune it in. If I miss it, I'll catch it on the news tomorrow."

The fourth time astronauts walked on the moon, they had to play a game of simulated lunar golf. "Let's see how the golf ball travels in this low-gravity atmosphere"—because otherwise people weren't going to watch.

"What's on channel four?"

"Men walking on the moon."

"I've seen it. What's on the next channel?"

And finally they had to send a senator from Utah, I believe, and then a schoolteacher from New Hampshire up in rockets because otherwise nobody was going to pay attention.

Now here was the greatest technological achievement of all time—to send people to the moon. It stupefies the mind. To be able to calculate exactly where the moon would be; to send a rocket a quarter of a million miles through space to that exact point; to get the astronauts from the mother ship onto the lunar landing safely, able to breathe; to get them back up to the mother ship; and to return them safely to earth—it was an incredible technological achievement! And by the fourth time we saw it, we were bored with it.

How often can you look at the mountains around here and not be bored? How long can you sit by the shore of a lake and look out at the water and not feel bored? How frequently can you see a sunset and still be thrilled with it? There is something in the natural world, the God-made world, that knows how to speak to our souls in a way that human technology never can. Technology, because it is the worship of the man-made, can never move us like that. Ultimately it will bore us. Ultimately we will grow tired of it. But there is something in us that, when we have some free time, makes us want to go up to the mountains. We want to watch the sunset. We want to sit by the shore and look at the water. Something tells us, "This defines your place in the universe." It gives us the reassuring message that when we have reached the limits of human power and knowledge, there is a greater power that begins

where ours leaves off. Problems we cannot solve are not unsolvable. Questions we don't have answers to don't have to remain unanswered.

Personal Significance

This leads me to the second thing we get out of the faith commitment and a belief in God. When we say, in your tradition and in mine, that there is only one God, that is not a mathematical statement; it is a moral statement. To affirm that there is one God is not the census report from heaven—we went up to count divine beings and couldn't come up with more than one. To say that there is only one God is to claim that there is such a thing as right and wrong. If there are many gods, you cannot talk about absolute right and wrong.

Do you remember what it was like in the *Iliad* during the Trojan War? What one god permits, another god forbids. What one god favors, another god denounces. In a world of many equally powerful deities, the issue is not "What does God want of us?" The issue is "Which god shall I serve? Which god has the power to bless and protect me?" But if there is a single God, then you can claim He has built into the world standards of right and wrong, of moral good and evil, as fixed as the laws of gravity. You cannot claim it is all right to betray your marriage and commit adultery—even if a majority of the people want it that way—any more than you can claim winter should be mild and ice cream should be more nourishing than vegetables. There are some things that simply are there.

I have seen only one Clint Eastwood *Dirty Harry* movie in my life. I don't remember the name of it, but I was describing the plot to a fellow I know who is a big Clint Eastwood fan, and he gave me the name of four movies that fit that plot. But you know, that is okay. I mean, listen, I am a rabbi. If there is one thing I understand, it is that there is a legitimacy in telling the same story year after year. If we do it in church and synagogue, there is no reason why Clint Eastwood and Sylvester Stallone can't do it in the movies.

But this is what I remember about that *Dirty Harry* movie: I have never responded to a movie

the way I did to that one. I was sitting there watching it at home on television. My brain was saying to me, “Why are you wasting time on this junk? This is cheap, manipulative trash.”

And my gut was saying, “Yeah, blow him away. Get out the Magnum and mow him down. Don’t let him get away with it.”

What I learned from that experience is not that Hollywood knows how to make movies that reach my emotions. I think I understood that. What I learned is that there is something inside me—and I suspect there is something inside every one of us—that has an instinctive response to injustice that says, “That’s wrong. Don’t let them get away with it.” There is something in us that recognizes right and wrong, not at the intellectual level (“That’s against the law. He should be punished.”) but at the visceral level, at the feeling level (“That’s wrong. No human being should treat another human being that way.”). And it is there that the sense of morality is born—that these things are not subject to majority vote, that these things are not subject to the individual approval of our conscience. There are some things you simply cannot do. God has forbidden them.

Once again you have to understand that this is not a restriction; this is not a limitation. There is something about that awareness of right and wrong that enhances our humanity, our morality, and our dignity as human beings.

At some level we want to know that what we do matters. What religion gives us when it tells us about good and evil, about right and wrong behavior, is a sense of our significance. You know what it is like? Have you ever had the experience of staying up all Sunday night working on a paper because you want it to be really good? And you hand it in at nine o’clock Monday morning, and you get it back at nine o’clock Wednesday morning with a little check mark next to your name and nothing else written on the paper? And it really looks like the professor didn’t bother reading it? He just gave you credit for doing the work. How did you feel at that moment? You felt cheated. You felt cheated! Why should I knock myself out if nobody is going to know the difference? This is

what the religiously grounded sense of right and wrong gives us—the sense that our deeds matter.

Many years ago I saw a program on television on *The Twilight Zone* about a man who dies and wakes up a moment later at the end of a long line. At the front of the line he sees two doors—one marked “Heaven” and one marked “Hell.” And there is an usher.

The usher says, “Move along. Keep the line moving. Choose either door and walk through.”

And the man says, “Wait a minute. Where’s the Last Judgment? Where am I told if I was a good person or a bad person? Where are all my deeds weighed and measured?”

The usher looks at him and says, “You know, I don’t know where that story ever got started. We don’t do that here. We’ve never done that here. We don’t have the staff to do that here. I mean, look, you’ve got ten thousand people showing up every minute. I’m supposed to sit there with everyone and go over his whole life? We’d never get anywhere. Now move along. You’re holding up the line. Choose either door and walk through.”

And the man walks through the door marked “Hell.”

Do you understand why? Do you know why he did that? I don’t think he did it because he was a bad person and deserved to be punished. I think he did it because he felt like a human being and wanted to be judged. We want to be judged. We want to be taken seriously as moral creatures.

I will give you a very down-home example of how this works. I am a traditional Jew. I observe the biblical dietary laws. There are certain foods I don’t eat. I suspect most of you assume I go around all day saying to myself, “Boy, would I love to eat pork chops, but that mean old God won’t let me.” Not so. The fact of the matter is, I go around all day saying, “Isn’t it incredible? There are five billion people on this planet, and God cares what I have for lunch. And God cares who I sleep with. And God cares how I earn and spend my money. And God cares what kind of language I use.”

Do you see what this does? It doesn’t diminish me by being told there are certain things I may

not do because they are wrong. It enhances me. It turns me into a real human being, somebody whose deeds, whose decisions, and whose choices matter at the highest level.

I am convinced that every human being has an existential need for significance. We want to be taken seriously. That is why it is such a thrill when we get our name in the paper. That is why when you watch the bowl games on television and when the ball goes into the stands, everybody waves to the camera. That is why they are doing it. If you have been seen on television, you really exist; otherwise, you are just a rumor.

Some years ago I was invited to be the speaker at the annual meeting of a Jewish organization of Philadelphia. As part of the publicity, they arranged for me to be interviewed on television on the six o'clock news just before the dinner meeting. Afterward I went right from the TV studio to the hotel where the event was taking place.

The chairperson of the event met me there. He said, "Oh, Rabbi Kushner, I feel so bad. I was working here on the last-minute arrangements. I didn't see you on channel three."

I said, "You do know you're going to be sitting next to me for the next two hours?"

He said, "Yes, but it's not the same."

We have this need for significance. We do incredible things: we go into medical research, we write books, and we invent new patents to know we matter. We do terrible things: people try to assassinate the president, commit crimes—just to know they have an impact on the world.

The religious teach that God cares what you do. There are right ways and wrong ways to live, and they are all taken very seriously. This endows every day—every waking hour of our lives—with meaning at the highest level.

Radical Forgiveness

The third gift of the faith commitment flows from that. If you know that certain things are wrong and you do them anyway, one of the things religion gives you that you cannot get anywhere else—and it is one of the things that a decent person needs—is what I would call *radical forgiveness*,

a sense of cleansing from the sense of inadequacy, from the knowledge we have not been the people we should be.

Some years ago I was invited to speak at Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore, Maryland. I was asked to give a talk at noon to the professional staff, the doctors, the nurses, and the social workers and a public lecture in the evening.

After my noon talk, the chief of chaplains at Johns Hopkins Medical Center came over to see me. He said, "Rabbi Kushner, we've got a patient here who would love to meet you. He read your book. It was very important to him. He wants to know if you could spend ten minutes talking to him. I want to make this very clear: you are under no obligation to do this. If you would rather not, I'll tell him you were tired and very busy. He'll understand. He's a thirty-two-year-old Episcopal minister, and he's dying of AIDS."

I thought for a moment. I said, "Sure, I'll go talk to him."

I followed the chaplain down the corridor feeling terribly noble and virtuous—you know, I am the Jewish Mother Teresa.

He led me to this room. I saw this frail, emaciated figure in bed hooked up to these tubes. I introduced myself. We chatted for a while. He said some nice things about my books.

And then, because I know this is an issue for religious people who have AIDS, I said to him, "Do you ever fear that you're dying without God, that in some way your disease is a punishment for something you did?"

He said to me, "No, just the opposite. It's the only good thing that has come out of this sickness: I found that something I always wanted to believe is true, is really true. No matter how much you've messed up your life, you have not lost the love of God."

He said to me, "When I was a child, I thought I had to be perfect so that people would love me. I mean, if you're perfect, people *have* to love you. What's not to love? And I always tried to be perfect. Then, if I made a mistake I tried to cover up for it and persuade people I was perfect so they would love me. I probably went into the clergy so

people would think I was perfect and love me for it. And every time I did something that I knew was wrong and every time I told a lie to cover up for myself, I was sure that God was as contemptuous of me as I was of myself. But lying here in the hospital with an illness I cannot recover from, I have learned that whatever I think of myself, God thinks better of me. He has not discarded me. He has not given up on me. He is present in this hospital room when I am feeling all alone and scared and terrified.”

He said to me, “I am going to be getting out of the hospital next week, not because I’m getting better but because there’s nothing else they can do for me and they need the bed for somebody else. I don’t know if my congregation will take me back now that they’ve found out I’m gay and I have AIDS and I’m dying. I hope they will. There’s one last sermon I have to preach to them. I have to tell them what I’ve learned here—that no matter how much you’ve messed up your life, God still cares about you. That God loves us despite all our failings. That we have to go out and love ourselves and love our families and love our children despite their failings, the way God loves us. There is a sense of cleansing. There is a message that you don’t have to be perfect. There is the insight that God knows just who we are and loves us anyway. You can’t get it from psychiatrists, from therapists. Their grace comes too cheaply. You can’t get it from your family. It’s very nice that they love you, but you expect them to love you. You need to know that somebody really knows you in all your depravity, in all of your imperfection, in all of your deceitfulness and selfishness—knows who you really are and loves you anyway.”

But what about those of us who don’t feel depraved? What about those of us who don’t feel really terrible, who, although we’re not perfect, make run-of-the-mill sorts of mistakes? What does God do for us? The difference between myself and the atheist—I guess the functional definition of an atheist is somebody who doesn’t care who wins next Saturday’s football game—is not that I do good things and he does bad things. Every one of you knows atheists who are honest, decent,

reliable, and charitable people. There are atheists back home in Massachusetts whom I would trust to hold my wallet while I go for a jog sooner than the leadership of my congregation. The difference is not that I do good things and he does bad things.

The difference is this: When we have both spent ourselves doing the good things we believe in, when we have both exhausted ourselves working for world peace and for understanding between the races and the faiths, when we have knocked ourselves out drying the tears of the bereaved and holding the hands of the faithful and we are just too tired to do it any longer, I have a God to whom I can turn who renews my faith so I can run and not grow weary, so I can walk and not feel faint. The atheist can only look deeper inside himself, and sooner or later he will run dry. The difference is that when we both want to do good and we are tired and we are spent and we are exhausted, there is a God who replenishes my strength so I can keep on going.

No Fear of Death

Now, the fourth, and perhaps most important, gift I get from our religious faith is that it cures me of the fear of death. It can’t keep me from dying—nobody has yet come up with a religion that helps people live forever. Although maybe you know the story of the man who came to his rabbi and said, “Rabbi, if I give up staying up late and drinking and chasing after women and I come to your services every weekend, will that help me live longer?”

And the rabbi says, “No, but it will feel longer.”

Religion may not help you live longer, but I am not sure that is the issue. I think that, as the author of the 23rd Psalm understood so well, the fear is not for the experience of death; it is for the valley of the shadow of death. It is the awareness of our mortality that frightens us, the sense that we are not going to be around forever.

I think Americans betray themselves as a fundamentally nonreligious people. No matter what we tell the Gallup Poll and no matter what we print and stamp on our coins and bills, we

are a fundamentally nonreligious people because we are so afraid of dying. If our faith were more secure, death would not frighten us.

Oat bran—there's your best example. People eat oat bran because they think, "If I can get my cholesterol low enough, I will cheat death and I will live forever." My religion gives me the welcome news that there are easier ways to live forever than eating oat bran.

I don't know what will happen to me after I die. Well, some things I know. I know what will happen to my physical body. That is, it will be interred in the earth, and over the course of time it will decay and return to the earth. That I understand. But I also know there is a part of me that is not physical, a part that I am comfortable calling my soul, which less religiously inclined people will call my personality or spirit. It is everything about me that is nonphysical: my identity, my values, my memories, my sense of humor. Now, because it is not physical, it is not subject to death. My soul cannot die. That is not a religious dogma; that is a scientific fact. It can't be argued with. A soul is immortal because a soul is nonphysical and not subject to death. That much I understand. What I don't understand is what that means.

What does it mean for my soul to survive without a physical body to incarnate it? Will it know that it used to be me? Will it be able to recognize other disembodied souls if it doesn't have eyes and optic nerves to see with? Will it be happy to see these other disembodied souls if it doesn't have glands to control emotions? What will a bodiless, nonphysical soul look like? Does it look like Casper the Friendly Ghost? Does it look like Patrick Swayze in the movie *Ghost*? (I wish it looked like Patrick Swayze.) Not only do I not know the answer, I can't even understand the question: What does it feel like for a soul to exist without a body? I know my soul will survive. I can't imagine that my three-dimensional brain can't get itself around the question What does it feel like to exist without physicality? And so I don't think about it except when I lecture to Christian audiences who ask me questions about the world to come.

What I do instead is try to find my immortality in this world. I have come to believe that the world to come is not another place but another time; the world to come does not refer to another location but to a different time. Hell is not a place full of fire and brimstone and little red figures with pitchforks. Hell is the understanding that if I was sarcastic to my daughter when she was a little girl, she will be sarcastic to my grandchildren, and it will be my fault. Hell is the realization that every time I tell a lie because the truth is embarrassing, I am voting to make this a more deceitful world for my family to live in.

And heaven is not hearts and wings and bright sunshine. Heaven is the awareness that every time I did something good, even if nobody thanked me for it, every time I held back the angry word and resisted temptation and nobody could possibly have known how hard it was for me to do that, the world is changed by the good thing that I did—permanently changed for the better. Oscar Wilde once said, "The nicest feeling in the world is to do a good deed anonymously and have somebody find out." My religious faith tells me that every time I do a good deed anonymously, somebody finds out and the world is permanently changed by the residue of it.

Some years ago I read a book on liberation theology. Are you familiar with liberation theology? It is the school of thought that originated among Roman Catholics, mostly in Latin America, that says the church should be on the side of the poor and the oppressed, not on the side of the rich and the powerful. And for some reason this is very controversial. Anyway, in this book on liberation theology, they tell the story of a young Roman Catholic priest in a certain Central American country who was so outraged by the oppressive nature of the government that he left his church and joined a guerilla group that was fighting against the government.

One day his band of guerrillas was surrounded by government forces. They were going to be captured and maybe killed. One of the other guerrillas said to this former priest, "Well, Father, what does your God have to say to us in a situation like this?"

And the priest had no answer.

But as I read that, it occurred to me that I think I know what the answer is. What God says to people in a situation like that might be, “I cannot guarantee that you will survive, and I cannot guarantee that you will win. I can only guarantee that what you’re doing will not be in vain, that the world will be a permanently braver and cleaner place because you cared enough about this to put your life on the line for it.”

I know the tradition among the Latter-day Saints. I know it and I admire it. I know the tradition to spend two years in missionary activity. I imagine there are some people here who have done that and some people here who will be doing that. There is one thing I want to tell you: You will go out and ring a lot of doorbells and talk to a lot of people, and you may not make many converts. You may come away terribly frustrated. You may feel like a failure. “Why did I waste all that time and effort?” I want you to know it is not wasted. The world is permanently changed by the things you do along those lines. Faith is strengthened. God is enhanced even if you don’t get anybody to sign on because of the example of your caring enough to do that.

When a young man out of the Mormon Church—a Trevor Matich or a Shawn Bradley—who has a career in professional athletics spends two years of his very limited playing span in missionary activity, he wonders if he is making a mistake. I want him and everyone else to know he is not; the world is permanently cleansed and strengthened by a gesture like that.

Our Need for God

I want to conclude with two stories. The first comes out of the classic South American novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) by the Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez. It’s a fantastic, weird book. I say that as a compliment. García Márquez would be pleased to hear his book described that way. In one chapter of the book he tells the following weird story. There was a small town afflicted by a mysterious ailment, a kind of a contagious Alzheimer’s disease where people lose

their memory. They forget. They forget the names of the people around them. They forget the names of everyday objects.

One young man who is unaffected by the disease tries to forestall its effects. He goes around labeling everything. This is a table. This is a window. This is a cow; it has to be milked every day. When he has labeled everything in town, he goes to the town center and puts up two signs. The first sign says, “The name of our village is Micando.” And the second sign says, “There is a God.”

What is García Márquez trying to say in that strange parable? I think he is trying to tell us that as you get older you will forget a lot of things you once knew. It has already started, hasn’t it? You have forgotten your high school trigonometry and American history courses. Over the course of time you will forget the name of the guy who took you to your senior prom. You will forget the phone number of the first house you lived in. García Márquez is saying, “Don’t worry about it. That’s all fine, as long as you don’t forget two things: Never forget the community of which you are a part, because God is found in communities; God is found in the way people relate to each other. And never forget that God exists.”

And that very briefly leads me to the second story. I found it in a book by Elie Wiesel. One day Man comes before God on His heavenly throne and says to him, “Which is harder, to be God or to be Man?”

God says, “What are you talking about? It is much harder to be God. I mean, what do you have to worry about? Life, kids, job—that’s it. I’ve got the whole universe. Planets, galaxies—everything depends on me.”

Then Man says, “Yeah, I suppose. But you have infinite power and infinite time. I’ve got to operate with a deadline. If I had all the time in the world I could run the universe also.”

God says, “You don’t know what you’re talking about. It’s much harder to be God.”

Man says, “How can you be so sure? You’ve never been human. I’ve never been divine. Tell you what. Let’s change places for one second. That’s all. One second. Let me be God. You be

Man. We'll change back. We'll have settled the argument once and for all."

Reluctantly God agrees and gets off His heavenly throne for one second. Man gets on, and, as Wiesel tells the story, in the one second that man is on the heavenly throne, he refuses to give God His throne back. Ever since then Man has been in charge of the world. (See Elie Wiesel, *The Town Beyond the Wall* [New York: Atheneum, 1964], 179.)

I find that a frightening story for two reasons. The first reason is that if there is no God and human beings are in charge of the world, it is as Fyodor Dostoyevsky had one of his characters in *Brothers Karamazov* (1880) say: "If there is no God, then everything is permitted" (see book 11, chapter 4). Why shouldn't we kill and why shouldn't we steal? Why shouldn't we rape and why shouldn't we lie

and why shouldn't the strong take advantage of the weak if there is no God to say it is wrong?

But more important, for those of us who would not take advantage of a situation like that, if there is no God, who is there to inspire us? And who is there to guide us? And who is there to pick us up and wipe us off when we have fallen and dirtied ourselves? And who is there to replenish our love and our hope and our strength when we have used it up? And who is there to promise that what He has not finished in our lifetime will be finished in a later lifetime because He will link one life to another? If there is no God, we are all by ourselves in this universe that is too big and too vast and too cold for us to run.

So, who needs God? I know I do. And I know we do. Thank you very much.