

946 Albert Einstein's "God Letter" (*this is an edited version of my blog 946*)

For me the question is not so much, Who is God - Allah, Jahweh or Jehovah, Christ or Jesus, Shiva, Sat Nam? But rather, What is God? This blog is about Albert Einstein's remarkable letter - the so-called "God Letter" - to the author of a book that apparently espouses orthodox religion (I am unaware of the book). Einstein is clear about it: The belief in God is childish superstition. I most certainly agree with him ... as long as we talk of God as the supernatural agent - deemed our creator - who is actively interested in the affairs of human individuals. But there are many other ways to look at the concept of God ... I try to do that in this book; a good start are my essays GOD 1 and GOD 2. Now we hear that the letter fetched almost \$3m at auction ... almost twice the expected amount. The one-and-a-half-page letter, written in 1954 in German and addressed to the philosopher Eric Gutkind, contains reflections on God, the Bible and Judaism:

Dear Mr Gutkind,

Inspired by Brouwer's repeated suggestion, I read a great deal in your book, and thank you very much for lending it to me ... With regard to the factual attitude to life and to the human community we have a great deal in common. Your personal ideal with its striving for freedom from ego-oriented desires, for making life beautiful and noble, with an emphasis on the purely human element ... unites us as having an "unAmerican Attitude."

Still, without Brouwer's suggestion I would never have gotten myself to engage intensively with your book because it is written in a language inaccessible to me. The word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weakness, the Bible a collection of honorable, but still purely primitive, legends which are nevertheless pretty childish. No interpretation no matter how subtle can (for me) change this. ... For me the Jewish religion like all other religions is an incarnation of the most childish superstition. And the Jewish people to whom I gladly belong ... have no different quality for me than all other people. As far as my experience goes, they are also no better than other human groups, although they are protected from the worst cancers by a lack of power. Otherwise I cannot see anything "chosen" about them.

In general I find it painful that you claim a privileged position and try to defend it by two walls of pride, an external one as a man and an internal one as a Jew. As a man you claim, so to speak, a dispensation from causality otherwise accepted, as a Jew of monotheism. But a limited causality is no longer a causality at all, as our wonderful Spinoza recognized with all incision. Now that I have quite openly stated our differences in intellectual convictions it is still clear to me that we are quite close to each other in essential things, i.e. in our evaluation of human behavior ... I think that we would understand each other quite well if we talked about concrete things.

With friendly thanks and best wishes, Yours, A. Einstein.