



I longed for clear answers to the messy questions of life: why did suffering occur in the world? How do the cruel rise succeed in the world while the weak suffer? And what about "do unto others"? I tried strictly following the rules, adhering to customs, expressing meek devotion (after all, that's what was expected of a good Born Again girl, or a good Catholic girl.) But I was too angry, I couldn't have a direct connection with God but had to go through a Catholic priest or, contrarily, I had to have just the right connection with God so I wouldn't suffer, or certain people were accepted by God and others couldn't be accepted by God because of -- and I just couldn't stop arguing. Faith mattered to me, I had no idea why, and I was so angry it was depressing.

Finally, when I was 22 my disgust at the hypocrisy I saw in the Christian churches reached a tipping point and I left the church, ending up in a New Age meditation commune: it was so welcoming, so open, so warm, so perfect for me and my partner, as if it were tailor made just for us. After a few years, we realized the "new age" philosophy was really just a bastardization of cherrypicked parts of Taoism, Ojibwe, different martial arts traditions, Christianity, and whatever else the leader thought might work well. Faith still mattered to me, a lot, and here I'd chosen this spiritual turducken and I had no idea why; questioning any of the "teachings" just led to gaslighting, hypocrisy, and the feeling that we were prey. I felt betrayed, stupid, and worst of all, we'd brought a child into this situation.

Hitting rock bottom and feeling betrayed by anything I'd believed in, I found myself at the door of a synagogue preschool looking for a job with my toddler in tow, left to decide if – and how – I could believe in anything again. There, while teaching old testament stories to toddlers, I experienced spiritual sincerity and emotional generosity, and began to discern what mattered to me about faith. Among the grandmothers and grandchildren of the synagogue, I learned that faith is not about the creed or doctrine, but instead discerning what the central, core of me values within my deepest heart. While my path of faith eventually led me back to Christianity, I had learned that my own personal story of faith and belief was different than any creed or doctrine.

As the years passed, my faith grew deeper, my belief became stronger, and I welcome each chance to provide for others the support and guidance that those grandmothers at the synagogue provided to me in my deepest time of need.

Kathrin Gabriel-Jones

kathrin.gabrieljones@gabrieljonescoaching.com