

We were talking after a morning service about the biscuits, the meaning of life and whether God really existed. 'So what is the meaning of life?' someone asked. Another mentioned that they had read that it was man who had created God and not the other way round.

We are a mixed bunch in this congregation. One of the more elderly ones gets a little sharp with us when we start these conversations and says that it is a sacrilege to suggest that God doesn't exist. The younger end, well, the middle aged end really, claim they are no longer card carrying Christians but seekers after truth.

They like to debate and argue with the Bible. They will also say that whether Jesus really existed or not, the message about loving your neighbour, of being a Good Samaritan, is the best one. He is a role model to follow. One cynic asks why people worship Jesus but not his teachings.

At this point one of the other members came wandering over. I have always admired the calm way he seems to live his life. He is one of the quiet leaders of the group. He doesn't drink our tea or coffee but brings a flask of filtered water for himself, because he is a cancer survivor.

Maybe it is that experience that has made him the person he is - but it is more than that, and he told me about it once.

He said even in his youth he was interested in religion and what was the purpose of life. He had been to all the churches and he always found something in them, but not quite enough. He had studied Yoga and Hinduism and they too had been almost spiritually fulfilling.

Then came a time when he was in the doldrums, well, his whole life was, and everything seemed to have lost its purpose.

He took himself off to a quiet place and tried to meditate. There was nothing. He said he became more and more aware of the emptiness of everything. He was meditating and then he seemed to find himself within a total emptiness. It was the strangest feeling.

And then, he said, there was a voice in the emptiness. It didn't belong to anyone. It didn't seem to come from any direction.

'Who are you?' he asked but there was no reply.

He thought that maybe he was listening to the voice of God. 'Is there a heaven and hell?' he asked. 'Yes', was the answer, 'Both exist for those who believe they do exist, otherwise not'.

'So what happens when we die?'

'Those who love their fellow beings are doing God's work. God is alive within them. In fact God is part of them. They do not die. They shed their body and return to God and they become wholly part of God.'

'So', said my friend. 'I have had the message from the source and I believe it. I have tried my best to live according to that wordless message out of The emptiness. I have not always been successful but I do try'.

He stands at our table, sipping his water and listening to the conversation. He knows but does not speak.

Yes, I thought, he knows the meaning of life, but he is no ancient mariner stopping one in three and bursting to tell his story. He is no evangelist with a truth he must perpetually proclaim. I feel that I understand why.

Those who seek the meaning of life must go on their own journey, whether it is through religion or through life experience. They can be told about it by others but they have to experience the journey for themselves.

For some there may not be an emptiness. There may not be a voice, or words without a voice. The spiritual awakening might come at any time and anywhere, in a crowd or in the solitude. It may not come at all and the journey never really end - except we trust we are doing what we should be doing.

Talking about the meaning of life and looking for it could be the first step on that journey.

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