

Going to Room Temp

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July 10, 2013



Religions differ on what happens next, but pretty much all of them insist that life on the earth is not all there is. Whatever we call it, the sweet chariot will swing low, grab you and take you... somewhere.

Furthermore, nearly all religions understand that your destination depends on how much effort you put into getting things right. Jesus said the greatest commandment is that you love other people, so that's a clue. Jesus also seems to say at various times, that all you get is one shot at life. My Buddhist friends say you not only get unlimited "do-overs," but that you actually have to repeat it until you get it right.

I'm not sure which one I like best for creating happiness. I'm looking for a religion that gives you refunds on broken hearts.

Think of it as a Journey.

Life is a one long road trip buddy movie, starring us. We travel around and learn from each other. We have adventures. Everyone we meet is a test to see if we can love them. Especially those of other races and cultures – that's where it gets real. They don't make race erasers; you have to find it in your heart to make them family.

This would all be a lot easier if we could get a more clear connection to the other side. I'm not complaining (okay I'm complaining), but surely the relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds was not originally meant to be this foggy. Personally, I blame the talking snake.

And hey, maybe the dearly departed actually do communicate with you. Maybe they give you advice, spiritual guidance, racetrack picks. Maybe they boss you around and give you marching orders, or possess you (I totally hate it when that happens). But as for me, I get a lot of crackle and random white noise on my line.

I will now dispense what I am pretty sure is very good advice. Assume God exists. Assume that Jesus (along with Buddha, the Prophet of Islam, the Rishis of India and all the founders and saints of the world's great faiths) are right about the importance of unselfish love for your fellow human beings – giving without expecting stuff in return. Also assume, just to be safe, that you only get one chance to live your life.

I think that when your body peters out, the spirit part of you still has to work on your character. Your flaws here are your flaws there. Getting hit by a bus doesn't mean you suddenly become all-knowing and one with the big cosmic bar magnet of the universe. A selfish jerk here is going to be a selfish jerk over there. God is not an idiot.

There are community and family relationships there. If you're a good and loving person, you will go to where there are others like you. If you're something else, you will take up residence with your kindred spirits in that regard (see "slime pits of hell").

I also think there is love over there, and family and marriage and sex. Yes, sex. I said it and I'm glad. Sex is the highest expression of love available between a husband and a wife on earth. Why would that not be the case over there?

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

I have a friend who had a near-death experience, where he died on the operating room table for a bit. He found himself in the spirit world, standing next to a pool of water with some other people. He held in his hands a thin cord that went down into the pool. He was told that if he let go of the cord he would stay there in the spirit world as his new home. He said it looked like a pretty nice place. However, he decided he still had unfinished business in the physical world, so he elected to hold onto the cord and was revived on the operating table.

I was at this person's house once and we were talking while he was washing dishes. He remarked that "cleaning up the kitchen is like making love to God." Sometimes you can see everything about a person in the blink of an eye, or in one single remark that sums up everything. In this brief moment I saw my friend's entire soul in a microcosm. I was in the presence of an inordinately good and generous person who is comfortable in his own spirituality, is creating happiness based on his decades-long relationship of tangible, organic familiarity with the workaday God that's all about what is, and has nothing to do with any "Supreme Being" as an abstract concept. There will come a time, as it comes for us all, when he will choose to release the cord, but I'm glad he didn't this time.

I wondered if his remark surprised God. I imagine it did, and that it made God smile.