

Reason To Believe By Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb Quotes

In any case, we cannot take this uncritical, "tolerant" attitude across the board. There are people who deny the Holocaust. Are their opinions worthy of respect? Surely not! Why not? Because they ignore all the evidence. Well, if there is sufficient evidence for the truth of some religion, then it is unreasonable to ignore it. To claim that all religions are equally good, etc., in spite of the evidence, is as unreasonable as disbelieving the Holocaust. Facts — the truth — is a value in and of itself. Searching for it is valuable for the many benefits it brings and for its very essence itself.¹

It is not enough that the idea could be true. Many ideas could be true. Are there any dogs with wings — anywhere in the whole universe? No one can prove otherwise. It could be true. But that is not a good enough reason to believe in dogs with wings. We need some positive evidence that they exist before we accept them.²

Surprisingly, there are religions that do not possess any evidence that their stories are true. They include the Far-Eastern religions of Confucianism, Taoism and Shinto. Those religions offer themselves

¹ 29-30

² 30

as beautiful, inspiring, noble ways of life. They promise certain qualities of feeling and insight. In other words, they speak to some of the things we care about. However, they do not even pretend to offer evidence to think their stories are true. That being so, our project of finding the truth does not apply to them.³

Whenever we are looking for the truth there are alternative possibilities that need to be considered. While our understanding is limited and we can never hope to know complete truth, we want to get the best possible understanding of the truth that we can achieve. In other words, we want to know which of the alternatives is the most likely to be true. We want the evidence to work for some and against others. If the evidence that we find supports all of the alternatives, it does not help us make our decision of which alternative to accept.⁴

The only evidence offered by Hinduism and Buddhism is evidence in certain personal feelings. Since this evidence is not selective, it does not give any reason to think their stories are more likely to be true than any of the others.⁵

³ 30-31

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⁵ 32-33

The story of national revelation at Sinai describes an event that has never happened to anyone else, anywhere. No other nation even claims that its religion started with a public revelation. This story describes an event that would be absolutely unique in all human history.⁶

Imagine one hundred people at the beach: • Fifty are sunbathing on the sand. They are there for two hours. • Fifty are in the water. There is a sudden undertow and the fifty in the water are submerged for half an hour. Of the fifty, forty-eight die and two survive. Whose experience at the beach needs a special explanation? • The experience of the people on the sand is completely ordinary. We do not need a special explanation for how they survived the afternoon. Why should they not survive? They were in no danger. • The forty-eight who died under water do not need any special explanation. Half an hour under water should be enough to cause a person to drown. • The two who were under water for half an hour and survived do need a special explanation. It is not expected that people can survive half an hour under water! Jewish history is like the two people under water. Judaism and the Jewish people have survived for millennia in conditions that should have caused them to disappear. No other culture has done anything like this.⁷

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⁷ 58

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