

PAGING MR. BIG

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD WAS MY ENEMY. HE MADE ME feel guilty, bad, and small. I blamed Him for everything—lack of money, lack of self-esteem, lack of love, addiction, HIV. Life was a curse, God was the culprit, I was the victim. I didn't know the meaning of spirituality then. For me, spirituality was New Age baloney. Or later, just another excuse for another drug-fueled group hug on another dance floor. Coming out, I renounced organized religion—in my case, the Roman Catholic Church. After my first lover killed himself because he couldn't reconcile his sexuality with his faith, I renounced God altogether. I concluded that God was a myth for weaklings to ease their misery.

My own misery peaked in February 2001. After an emotional meltdown, I decided to come back to Crystal Meth Anonymous after years of trying to stop the cycle of addiction, insanity, and depression. That week began with a big circuit party. My friends went to the club—I went to a different mass, at St. Francis. I had found myself there before. Even though I had given up on God, St. Francis felt familiar, comforting. The choir, the incense, all that ritual. I was so desperate for help that day, I didn't know where else to go. Old Catholic instincts, I guess. Literally brought to my knees, I wept and “prayed”—yelling and screaming in my head at a God I had decided not to believe in. Later that day, at a CMA meeting, I yelled and screamed some more, still all in my head, hiding in the back, not saying a word out loud.

All the God talk in the rooms irritated, even infuriated me. Don't stress over it, I was told. As long as you trust in anything other than yourself, you're fine. Trust the group. Trust CMA. Trust this way of recovery. Let this be your Higher Power for now. To get over “the God thing,” I replaced the loaded terms *God* and *Higher Power* with a word I could accept: *guide*. I made this program and the people in it my guide. After all, I had nothing left to lose.

Then 9/11 happened. Again, I questioned the existence of any higher power—and meetings provided me with no answers on the subject. A priest at a memorial service I attended that week summed up my doubts by asking, “Where was God on Tuesday?” There it was again, the trust

issue I had with God. Searching for answers, I met the minister of a small interfaith community that had opened its doors just two days before 9/11. God doesn't prevent, protect, or punish, she argued. God simply is, and life simply happens. Good things happen, bad things happen. And when bad things happen to us, they actually happen for us. We may just take a while to see that or may never see it at all. God, she said, is the universe, our common source of life. God is love.

In an instant, these words reframed my addiction, my recovery, and my faith. Here was something I could work with. I scrapped my old beliefs and opened my mind to new ones. I began to look for God in the faces in the rooms. I began to listen for God in the shares. I began to sense God in the energy of a meeting. I began to see my God as what connects us all deep inside, beyond fear, shame, and guilt. I began to pray, clumsily. I chat with my deeper self, usually when I meditate, walk my dog, or write in my journal. I say thanks for the opportunity to be sober today and ask for strength for whatever comes my way, both of which I can find in the rooms, my "substitute" Higher Power. I pray to the universe. And while this is how it works for me personally, there are as many other approaches as people and faiths in CMA. We all get sober somehow, even atheists. I believe we are connected by something stronger than our individual gods. —*Mark P.*