

Question and Answer for Desmond Tutu's *God Has a Dream*

What is God's Dream?

God's dream is that you and I and all of us will realize that we are family, that we are made for togetherness, for goodness, and for compassion. In God's family, there are no outsiders, no enemies. Black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, Jew and Arab, Muslim and Christian, Hindu and Buddhist--all belong. When we start to live as brothers and sisters and to recognize our interdependence, we become fully human.

What do you mean when you say that God has no enemies?

God's love is too great to be confined to any one side of a conflict or to any one religion. People are shocked when I say that George Bush and Saddam Hussein are brothers, that Yasser Arafat and Ariel Sharon are brothers, but God says, "All are my children." It is shocking. It is radical. But it is true.

What do you say to someone who can't accept that George Bush could be brothers with Saddam Hussein, knowing what Saddam Hussein had done to his own people?

We in South Africa had the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and we had the most devastating revelations of ghastly atrocities. We could describe them as monstrous, even demonic. But even these torturers remained children of God, with a possibility of being able to change. After all, a thief on the cross was able to repent and Jesus promised that thief, "You will be with me in paradise." Jesus didn't say, "Look at what kind of life you have led up to this point." All of us have the capacity to change, even to become saints.

You are a Christian. Do you think your book has something to offer people of different religions or no religion at all?

I believe so very much. Because love is universal. I mean, you don't have to tell somebody that loving is better than hating. You do not have to believe in God to know that stealing is bad. And we are trying to remind them that all of us are fundamentally good. The aberration is the bad person. God is not upset that Gandhi was not a Christian, because *God* is not a Christian. All of God's children and their different faiths help us to realize the immensity of God. No faith contains the whole truth about God. And certainly Christians don't have a corner on God. All of us belong to God. Even the nonbeliever is precious to God. And one simply tries to remind them that they are made for transcendence. They are made for goodness.

What compelled you to write this book at this time?

I think the fact that we are overwhelmed by so much conflict—or nearly overwhelmed. So many of us feel despair because of all the suffering in our world and in our lives. And one needed to say that God has not finished with God's work. Creation is a work in progress. Evil is not going to have the last

word. God has us as God's collaborators, fellow-workers, and ultimately good—and those who strive for it—will prevail.

So you are optimistic?

Optimism is superficial and can quickly turn into pessimism when things seem not to be working out as planned. God's dream is hopeful. It fills us with a sense that this is a moral universe, which means that there is no way that evil and injustice and oppression can have the last word. During the darkest days of Apartheid, we kept saying, "They have already lost," and they had, because immoral laws and rulers will always topple. People are drawn to freedom like plants are drawn to water. I see myself as a realist, and my vision of hope is based on reality—the reality I have seen and lived.

You say that this is a moral universe and in the book that "God is a God who cares about right and wrong." How do you explain suffering and injustice in the world?

The problem of evil and suffering is important and is not to be dealt with lightly. Our ability to do evil is intimately connected to our ability to do good. One is meaningless without the other. Empathy and compassion have no meaning unless they occur in a situation where one could be callous and indifferent to the suffering of others. It seems that suffering is a part of the very structure of our world and that it is often the way that we grow and learn.

What do you mean when you say in your book that suffering can be ennobling?

It seems that suffering is not optional. It is part and parcel of the human condition, but suffering can either embitter us or ennoble us. I hope that people will come to see that this suffering can become a spirituality of transformation when we find meaning in it. Then it ennobles us and we learn to see the world with more generous, loving, and forgiving eyes.

You say that "God only has us"—what do you mean?

I mean that God works through us and through history to bring about God's dream. God actually needs us. We are God's partners. When there is someone who is hungry, God wants to perform the miracle of feeding that person, but it won't any longer be through manna falling from heaven. Normally, God can do nothing until we provide God with the means, the bread and the fish, to feed the hungry. In so many ways, God uses each of us to realize God's dream.

In your book, you talk about "seeing with the eyes of the heart." What do you mean?

Seeing with the eyes of the heart is seeing the world as God sees it. The eyes of the heart are concerned with essences and not appearances. To address the suffering in the world, we must first learn to see with these new eyes. When we do, we begin to live from a place of love and not hate, of forgiveness and not

revenge, of humility and not arrogance, of generosity and not guilt, of courage and not fear. It is easy to say this but much harder to live it. I have tried to describe how people can begin to see with these new eyes.

You lived with constant death threats but continued undaunted. How can you teach someone to have this courage in their life?

People often ask whether I was afraid. You bet. Especially for my family. All of us experience fear, but when we confront and acknowledge it, we are able to turn it into courage. Being courageous does not mean never being scared; it means acting as you know you must even though you are undeniably afraid. Actually, courage has no meaning unless there are things that threaten, that make you feel scared. Whether we are afraid of physical harm or social shame and embarrassment, when we face our fear instead of denying it, we are able to avoid it paralyzing us.

You talk about hearing God's voice. Can everyone hear God's voice?

Frequently we assume that only a special few can hear the voice of God in their lives but I try to explain that people can "be still," as God says, and know that God is God in and through them. This is why prayer and meditation are so important. If I do not spend a reasonable amount of time in meditation early in the morning, then I feel physical discomfort—it is worse than having forgotten to brush my teeth!

You talk about *ubuntu* in the book. What is it, and how is it important to God's dream?

Ubuntu is a concept that we have in our Bantu languages at home. Ubuntu is the essence of being a person. It means that we are people through other people. We can not be fully human alone. God keeps trying to make us realize we are made for interdependence, we are made for family. When you have ubuntu, you embrace others. You are generous, compassionate. If the world had more ubuntu, we would not have war. We would not have this huge gap between the rich and the poor. You are rich so that you can make up what is lacking for others. You are powerful so that you can help the weak, just as a mother or father helps their children. This is God's dream.

What do you hope your readers get out of this book?

We tend to suffer from a sense of insecurity and inadequacy in our lives because our culture sets such a high store on success. People forget that God loves them as they are. God marvelously, miraculously cares about each and every one of us. The Bible has this incredible image of you, of me, of all of us, each one, held as something precious, fragile in the palms of God's hands. And God says to you, "I love you. You are precious in your fragility and your vulnerability. Your being is a gift." I hope readers, whatever their religion, will have a new faith in themselves and realize just how beautiful they are, how precious they are, how much they truly matter.

In the book you write that “This is a moral universe” and “God is a God who cares about right and wrong.” How do you explain suffering and injustice in the world? (What would you say to a political victim of torture or an innocent person stricken with disease?)

The problem of evil and suffering is important and is not to be dealt with lightly. Our ability to do evil is intimately connected to our ability to do good. One is meaningless without the other. Empathy and compassion have no meaning unless they occur in a situation where one could be callous and indifferent to the suffering of others. In terms of disease, it seems that suffering is a part of the very structure of our world and that it is often the way that we grow and learn.

Did you have any moments when you yourself doubted that God is just?

I got angry, very angry with God, but never doubted that the issue would be resolved through the triumph of good. There were of course times in South Africa when you had to whistle in the dark to keep your morale up, and you wanted to whisper in God's ear, "God we know You are in charge, but can't You make it a little more obvious?" We are free to be completely human and authentic with God. Jeremiah says, "God, you have deceived me." Sometimes I did get furious with God. I officiated at many funerals.

Of all the things you saw during apartheid and the reconciliation, what was the greatest evidence of God's power and love?

It was during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, when we witnessed the ability of victims to forgive their torturers and of former torturers to transform their lives.

How can you apply the principle of reconciliation to the situation in the Middle East--and the cycle of violence, retaliation, and enmity there? How can the two sides ever achieve peace?

One of the things we learned in South Africa is that there is no true security from the barrel of a gun. As we look around the world at recent and current history, we can see that this is true everywhere. The conflict in the Holy Land is one powerful example. I am on the Board of the Shimon Peres Peace Center in Tel Aviv, and I understand the desire Israelis have to live in peace and safety. But as we saw in South Africa there is no peace without justice, and safety only comes when desperation ends. Inevitably it is when people sit down and talk that desperation ends. Negotiations happen not between friends; negotiations happen between enemies. And a surprising thing does seem to take place, at least it did in South Africa: enemies begin to find that they can actually become friends, or at least collaborators for the common good. They come together and then actually they ask themselves, "Why did we take so long to get to this point? Why did so many people have to die?" Of course, you must have leaders who are willing to take risks and not just seek to satisfy the often extreme feelings of their constituencies. They have to lead by leading and be ready to compromise, to accommodate, and not to be intransigent, not to assert that they have a

bottom line. Intransigence and ultimatums only lead to more death as we see now.

Why do you think God create different races and religions in the first place...wouldn't the world have been better if He hadn't?

All of god's children and their different faiths help us to realize the immensity of God. No faith contains the whole truth about God. In South Africa, I used to say, we are the Rainbow people of God. Would the world be as beautiful if God had created only one color of the rainbow?