

Y1 – You & Your Parents

Dear: If this book were divided into parts, this would be the start of Part 5 – finally, the final part! Let me remind you about what I tried to address in earlier parts:

- In Part 1 (chapters **A** through **H**) the emphasis was on an individual's emotions and goals, dealing with topics ranging from awareness to happiness. I admit that the “individual” given most attention was me (sorry about that!), but I tried to show how the topics might be important also to you.
- In Part 2 (the **I**-chapters, including the “excursion” **Ix**) the emphasis was on ideas, especially ideas about “the supernatural”. In those chapters, I began to explain to you what I meant by my statement, “Belief in god is bad science...” and tried to show you why I think ‘belief’ and ‘faith’ should be replaced with earned confidence and tested trust.
- In Part 3 (the **J**- through **Q**-chapters, plus the excursion **Qx**) the emphasis was on interactions between and among people and dealt with topics such as justice, kindness, love, morality, and so on. Therein, I tried to explain what I meant by the second clause of my assessment, “Belief in god is bad science *and even worse policy*”, by outlining not only some of the sad personal policies and sick public policies promoted by all organized religions but also the much better policies promoted in humanism.
- In Part 4 (**R** through **X**), which dealt with topics from reasoning to wisdom and then explored prospect for peace and prosperity, the emphasis was on science, with the thrust being to encourage you to place your trust and confidence in the scientific method – because it works!

Thereby, perhaps you'll agree that, up 'til now in this book, I've addressed topics dealing with the individual, with ideas, with society, with science, and thereby pretty much everything – except what's important! In this Part 5, finally the emphasis will shift to something important, namely, you. (☺)

From this Part 5, I hope you'll gain some hints about how you can receive your own “happiness signals”, successfully pursuing your own goals, consistent with your own nature, abilities, and circumstances, and abiding by

your own set of associated values. I'll also continue to promote the worldview of scientific humanists. Thereby, Parts 4 and 5 together contain my recommending that, rather than placing your "trust in God" and "faith in the Lord", you'd be wiser to place confidence in the scientific method and trust in yourself (the latter being a fundamental feature of Zen).

Before beginning this Part 5, however, I should admit something, since it might prepare you for the tenor of what's to come (especially this chapter). What happened was this. I was struggling to finish the **X**-chapters (what a chore!), when your father informed us of your mother's plan to divorce him (and your father's countersuit). As you might imagine, in my usual calm, cool, and collected manner I went berserk. (☹)

As a result, that is, because of the mental intensity of my attempts to try to stop your parents from being so selfishly shortsighted, I found myself unable to concentrate on the topics in the **X** chapter on which I was working. So now, after two weeks of dealing with your parents, I've decided to jump to these **Y**-chapters, which more directly deal with you. Later, when my mental state settles, I'll return to the **X**-chapters.

In this chapter, I want to show you some of what I know and think about your parents' decisions. First, however (and because it's somewhat relevant to your parents' plans), let me mention a part of what I do for "Y" when I'm walking, namely,

Y: One more year to live... yet, constrain yourself...

The idea of "one more year to live" was promoted by someone else (I've lost the author's name, if I ever knew it), encouraging readers to live the next year of their lives as if it were their last. It's a way to try to stimulate people to arrange their priorities and then focus on what seems most important. And as I get older (and as the accuracy of the prediction improves!), I find the concept increasing useful. While walking, invariably I include (signified by the first ellipsis, "...", in the above) that if I have only one more year left to live, what I most want to do most is finish this [*%@*!\$#] book! As for the other ellipsis and how to "constrain yourself", I'll get to those topics in subsequent **Y**- chapters.

Although (as I already mentioned) I don't know the identify of the original author of the idea to live as if it were the last year of your life, recently I read

* Go to other chapters *via*

The Meditations of “the Emperor-philosopher” Marcus Aurelius (121–180),¹ and found that he wrote something similar – and even more perceptive:

Every moment think steadily as a Roman and a man to do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity, and feeling of affection, and freedom, and justice; and to give thyself relief from all other thoughts. And thou wilt give thyself relief if thou doest every act of thy life as if it were the last, laying aside all carelessness and passionate aversion from the commands of reason [and reality], and all hypocrisy, and self-love, and discontent with the portion that has been given to thee.

What an amazing leader Marcus Aurelius must have been! Surely he should be recognized as a Zen master!

And by the way, Dear, notice that I took the liberty to add to the phrase “from the commands of reason” the words “and reality” (or equivalently, I could have added “and data” or “and evidence”), because as I’ve tried to show you in earlier chapters (e.g., in **R**, dealing with “Reason”) and will illustrate further in this chapter with an experience of your father, it’s extremely dangerous to rely on reason unconstrained by data.

In contrast and unfortunately for my grandchildren, when your parents began their divorce proceedings, they didn’t “[lay] aside all carelessness and passionate aversion from the commands of reason [and reality], and all hypocrisy, and self-love, and discontent with the portion that [was] given [them].” Below, I’ll provide evidence to support that statement. First, though, I want to provide you with some background information and ideas, so you might better understand how your parents (two seemingly intelligent people) managed to get themselves into such a god-awful mess, which has now entangled also you.

Let me start by showing you my view of your mother’s position. And at the outset, let me say that I’m both more sympathetic and more critical of her position than your father’s. I’m more sympathetic, because in general, what she’s been doing (with astounding perseverance, style, and even grace) is what she thought was expected of her. But I’m more critical of her, because as far as I can make it out, she never critically evaluated those thoughts and those expectations.

¹ Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/>.

For your mother, it started with her parents' indoctrinating her in the god idea when she was a child – when, of course, she couldn't have been expected to evaluate such an idea critically. As you well know, a child's imagination is essentially limitless, and as all clerics know, if a child's imagination is repeatedly stimulated with the god idea, then even when they become adults, few are capable of overcoming such indoctrination. The biologist Richard Dawkins described the problem well in his book *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion, and the Appetite for Wonder*:²

For the same kind of reason as caterpillars have chumbling, Hoovering jaws for sucking up cabbage flesh, human children have wide open ears and eyes, and gaping, trusting minds for sucking up language and other knowledge. They are suckers for adult knowledge. Tidal waves of data, gigabytes of wisdom flood through the portals of the infant skull, and most of it originates in the culture built up by parents and generations of ancestors...

If your parents tell you something that isn't true, you must believe that, too. How could you not? Children aren't equipped to know the difference between a true warning about genuine dangers and a false warning about going blind, say, or going to hell, if you 'sin'. If they were so equipped, they wouldn't need warnings at all. Credulity, as a survival device, comes as a package. You believe what you are told, the false with the true. Parents and elders know so much, it is natural to assume that they know everything and natural to believe them...

A child is called upon to exercise the exact opposite of credulity in some circumstances: a tenacious persistence in believing an earlier adult statement in the face of what may be a tempting and plausible – but contradictory – later statement... The full recipe, then, is extreme early gullibility followed by equally obstinate subsequent unshakeability.

In contrast, if choice of religion (or no religion) were delayed until adulthood, then people could make informed choice – based on the wit, intelligence, fellowship, etc. of fellow “believers”, based on the logical, philosophical, scientific, etc. content of each religion's “doctrines”, based on the most reliable data about the claims, historical records, predictive content, etc. of all relevant “hypotheses”, or even based on the most impressive music, architecture, pomp and circumstances, etc. of each religion's “rituals”.

Instead, most children (wanting most their parents' love) simply do what their parents desire. And thus your mother became a Mormon (and similarly

² Published by Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1998.

for you). Simultaneously, most scientific humanists just watch in sadness and sympathy to see “the god meme” infect still another human brain – although some of us at least murmur: “Just as there are laws against physical abuse of children, there should be laws against such mental abuse.”

Yet, as sympathetic (and sad) as I am about your mother’s (and your) indoctrination in clearly invented balderdash, adults (by definition) take responsibility for their choices and critically evaluate their worldviews. And if there is a single fundamental rule of critical thinking (or evaluative thinking or rational thought), then maybe it’s what I described in an earlier chapter (19) as follows.

Just as you shouldn’t build skyscrapers on mud and you shouldn’t dwell in a house of cards, you shouldn’t accept ideas uncritically: adjust the strengths of your commitments to various “beliefs” to be commensurate with the reliability of relevant data. Alternatively: for all your ideas, use all available evidence to evaluate the probability of their validity; that is, “believe” nothing; instead, evaluate probabilities and then go with the idea that has the highest expected value. In a word, evaluate!

Which then brings me to my assessment of your mother’s side of your parents’ divorce. On the one hand, I’m extremely critical that she apparently never engaged in the adult activity of evaluating the reliability of her beliefs in “things supernatural”. Her “belief” (that God exists) makes her “feel good” – not realizing that almost certainly what makes her “feel good” about the god idea are the remnants of her parents’ love associated with her “approved” thoughts and behavior (love that was withheld if she didn’t conform). But on the other hand, I’m sympathetic to her position, not only because I think I understand it but also because your father’s vacillations (in particular, his changed ideas about Mormonism) caused her so many problems, threatening the “peace and serenity” (or “sanctity and reliability”) of her delusions.

In the case of your father, I also have some idea of what happened; yet, I’m not certain. All I can do, Dear, is show you what seems to me to have occurred, with my conclusions reached by putting together various bits of evidence. If you’re interested in learning more, you’ll need to talk to him. But let me add: no one can be certain that other people will be telling “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” (i.e., be honest) – even with themselves.

As a preliminary to showing you my assessment of “why” your father participated in your indoctrination, I should mention that, when he was a kid, his mother and I would answer any questions that our kids had about “God” just by saying something similar to: “Well, some people believe [such and such], but don’t worry about it; you can figure it out for yourself when you’re older.” Maybe that’s why, when she was a child, my wonderful daughter would commonly respond to my asking her “philosophical” questions with: “Whadda I know about that; I’m just a kid!”

If I had the opportunity to guide my children again, I’d do it differently. Of course I agree with Schopenhauer that kids shouldn’t be indoctrinated with philosophical or religious ideas, since they can be sources of serious errors, but there are ideas about how to think – ideas that kids can test against their own experiences. Therefore, if I had the opportunity to do it again, I’d respond to their questions about any god with something similar to:

“Well, I’ve found that it’s wise to try to make sure one’s ideas are consistent with all relevant evidence or data. In the case of the god idea, I’ve never found any evidence to support the idea that any god was anything except silly ideas that primitive people concocted thousands of years ago. In those days, so much was unknown: the reasons for floods, the cause of thunder and lightning, how humans evolved, what the stars were, and so on. Now, by testing their ideas against data, humans have found that all the silly ideas about gods are just that: silly speculations. No evidence supports the idea of the existence of any god. Therefore, I consider the god idea to be just another silly idea – but if you ever find any data that supports the god idea, let me know, because I hope I’ll always be willing to change any of my ideas that conflict with relevant data.”

Unfortunately, however, I hadn’t given the matter sufficient thought to say something similar to the above to your father (and his brother and sister).

Meanwhile, they were frequently exposed to the god idea. For example, it’s foolishly (even immorally!) promoted on our currency, on TV (e.g., at the end of essentially every political speech), in the current version of the Pledge of Allegiance (to which your father was exposed every school day), and so on. With such exposure, your father apparently “bought into” the god idea because of, in particular, his brother’s car accident, in which he almost died.

Thus, years after that accident, your dad told me that, in the depth of his anguish over his brother's near death (an anguish that I didn't adequately help relieve, because I was too absorbed in my own), he prayed to God to save his brother's life. Understand, Dear, that your dad was about the age that you are now – a critical age for making such decisions. Apparently he committed himself to “the standard conditional”, something similar to: “God, if you will [save my brother's life], then I promise that I'll...”

As you know, his brother (your “uncle with the beard”) lived; consequently, your dad began to “believe” – and most of the rest you know. You might not have known, however, why your dad so frequently talks about the need to “keep your word”. I don't know for sure, but I strongly suspect that he doesn't do it to preach to others about this “need”; instead, I think he's preaching to himself – reminding himself to keep his own word that he would believe in God, if “God” saved his brother's life.

Now, Dear, as with most of us, probably you can easily see errors in other people's premisses. (Would that we could see our own errors so easily!) An objective observer would first review all the data: your uncle crashed his car into an irrigation ditch, someone called an ambulance, another person leapt into the ditch to hold your uncle's unconscious head above the water, emergency workers freed him from the wreck, he was rushed to the hospital, the doctors worked furiously and competently to bring him back to life, and so on. As I wrote before, I concluded that the only GOD to thank for your uncle's survival was all the “[Human] Greatness On Demand”.³

Simultaneously and totally understandably, though, a frightened, tearful, teenager (your future father), wanting to do all that he could to help his brother, did all that he thought he could: he pleaded to God for help, promising to believe in God if his brother lived. And though probably there's no need, let me add: don't blame your father for his mistaken premiss that it was he, through his commitment to believe in God, that saved his brother's life. If blame is to be placed, it should fall on me, for not alerting him to the obvious “logic trap” in which he became stuck – and, of

³ Incidentally, Dear, occasionally over the years I've tried (but never very hard) to identify other “expansions” for the acronym GOD, as in “Thank GOD that...” Another that I remember (besides [Human] Greatness On Demand) is “Generosity, Optimism, and Determination”. Two others, which I like better and recently have been using more frequently, are: “Greatness Others Did” and “Good Others Do”. Someday, maybe you'd let me know of your “new and improved” expansion.

course, I also blame the clerics, for promoting this damn “logic trap” for the past multi-thousands of years.

The horrible snare in this logic trap is that, in desperation, one sells one’s commitment too cheaply. Thus, Dear, an objective observer might reason in a manner something similar to the following.

“Based on the data, it seems likely that there’s substantially less than one-in-a-billion chance that the boy’s prayer would save his brother’s life. Nonetheless, without prejudging the concept, to test the possibility that a prayer to God will save the brother’s life, let’s require a more stringent test. Rather than just saving the brother’s life, let’s require something else, not to benefit anyone else (which might be rejected by the alleged god because of some identified immorality), but solely to test the efficacy of prayer. For example, God, to demonstrate your supernatural powers, then in addition to saving the brother’s life, how about (for an hour or so) standing Mount Hood on its head and making the Columbia River flow backwards.”

Of course, Christian clerics would immediately respond with their “Thou shalt not put the LORD thy God to the test” or “It’s a wicked generation that seeks a sign”, but those of us still able to think would respond: “That’s bizarre! On the one hand, what, then, is the point of prayer? And on the other hand, surely to your god you don’t expect us to accept any hypothesis without testing it!”

Anyway, Dear, the above is my interpretation (which, of course, could be wrong) for why your father promoted your indoctrination with the god idea. When your father was a teenager, he was snared by a logic trap: if [a simple condition], then [a major, life-long commitment]. Thereby, upon his brother’s recovery and his unsubstantiated assumption (that it was his prayer that saved his brother), your father felt obliged to keep his commitment – and you became a Mormon.

Again, Dear, probably you can easily identify your father’s mistake. In essence, his mistake was that he didn’t submit his hypotheses (e.g., about the existence and capabilities of God) to adequate tests. In reality, the single test that he chose wasn’t much more than: “God, if you’ll make the sun come up tomorrow, then I’ll believe in you.” Then, taking his inadequately tested hypotheses (that God exists, that he could communicate with God, that God

gave a damn about the death of anyone, that God could manipulate the “laws” of the universe at will, and so on) as premisses, your father deduced the unsound conclusion that he should live his life according to the rules defined by a bunch of con-artist clerics, which of course include paying 10% of his before-taxes income to them and indoctrinating his [future] children with the same stupid premisses.

When your father first made his mistakes, I tried very hard to show him his errors, but my efforts were ineffective – in part, I think, because not until years later did he tell me the details about how he fell into the clerics’ logic trap. For most of the subsequent 20 years, I tried to show him his errors, but eventually, I gave up. I came to realize, through experience, that one’s ideas do change and that such “thought transitions” in some cases can be very slow but in other cases can be amazingly rapid. I also learned from experience that, in the case of your father, it was worse that useless to try to point out his error to him: although in later years I essentially gave up trying to show him his error, my disappointment persisted, and a continuous source of contention existed between us, poisoning interactions.

Consequently, in an earlier version of this book (written before your father rejected Mormonism) I wrote the following about your father’s errors:

Dear: I recommend that you just “let him be” and just wait to see if he’ll recognize his errors by himself. Then, possibly when it’s least expected, he may suddenly realize that he violated one of the fundamental features of the scientific method, upon which all knowledge is gained: never stop testing hypotheses.

Maybe someday he will be willing to subject his hypothesis to more meaningful tests. In essence, his hypothesis is that with his mind (via communicating with some “supernatural” power), he’s able to cause some change in matter (e.g., assist in his brother’s recovery). Of course that’s consistent with the New Testament’s claim that “faith can move mountains” – as indeed it can, if the faith is coupled with sufficient labor and/or intelligence, such as the use of dynamite.

Yet, even if, eventually, he develops sufficient courage to face the possibility that he’s in error (and then, subject his hypothesis to tests more rigorous than, in essence, requiring the sun to come up tomorrow), then don’t expect him to discontinue his “belief” in God when the tests fail. As I’ve already seen him rationalize, he might just claim that the failure of his hypothesis to pass some additional test simply illustrates (to him) that he no longer has “sufficient faith”.

And should you then ask him much faith is needed (e.g., to move mountains), then expect him to answer with some version of someone else’s response: “Obviously,

sufficient faith to move mountains.” What that means is that it’s impossible to test his hypothesis, even in principle, which in turn means that his “god hypothesis” contains no information. Again, Dear: if any premiss can’t be tested, even in principle, then trash it, because it contains no information: it’s just a bunch of words strung together meaninglessly.

The lesson that I hope you’ll learn from your father’s experience, Dear, is that any hypothesis must be put to significant tests – even, a never ending series of tests. In contrast, your father adopted a hypothesis that has been extremely significant to his life (and to yours), after only a single flimsy test! Please, Dear, never do that. Never sell your allegiance to a particular hypothesis based on the outcome of a single test!

If your father were going to undertake such a fatal commitment, the least he could have done was specify a tougher test! Not just “God I’ll believe in you if and only if my brother lives” (whereas there could be, and were, a hundred or more reasons why his brother lived), but a test with some teeth in it: “God, I’ll believe in you if and only if my brother lives, you pick up that mountain over there and stand it on its top, tonight you write my name in the skies with the stars, and you stop the Earth from spinning for 3 days without freezing everyone or causing any earthquakes – plus six other tests that I’ll mention after you’ve finished those first four.”

And thus appears the sad truth in Wordsworth’s summary: “The child is father of the man.” But of more significance, Dear, is the lesson that I hope you’ll learn from your father’s mistake: Please, Dear, don’t sell your allegiance to any idea so cheaply as your father sold his allegiance to the god idea. If you are considering adopting an idea, especially an idea that will have a measurable influence on your life, then please submit it to as many difficult tests as is necessary for you to be satisfied with accepting the idea – and even then, accept it only provisionally, with the proviso being that the idea must, in the future, pass as many additional tests as you feel like throwing at it!

Further, Dear, please be aware of the extreme danger of the clerics’ logic trap. If ever you’re in some extremely stressful state, for example, with your own brother or sister or child near death, then don’t make a bargain with the devil. Don’t say: “God, if you’ll intervene, then I’ll believe in you.” If your brother or sister or child should then survive, not only would you then be trapped (either by your honor or your fear of God’s reprisal) into paying the clerics 10% of your salary for the rest of your life, but of more significance, you’d be trapped in mysticism: no longer would you be able to trust that all effects have natural causes, no longer could you believe that you had the authority to make your own decisions, no longer would you own your own brain. As with all religious people, you’d become the clerics’ zombie.

I wouldn’t be surprised if your father will keep his commitment for the rest of his life. That is, I think that he keeps his commitment in part because of his sense of honor (“keeping his word”) and in part from fear (or even terror): fearing that if he

abandons his belief in God, then God will proceed to eliminate his brother – or will take out “revenge” in some other way, for example, by killing one of his children.

One possible way for your father to get out of his logic trap would be for him to have “proof” that God doesn’t exist. But just as no proof can be provided that the air isn’t filled with invisible flying pink elephants, no proof can be provided that God doesn’t exist. And since he’s convinced that his brother’s life depends on the existence of a particular invisible pink elephant – and, who knows, probably he thinks that your life also depends on his continued commitment to that elephant – then there’s nothing that can be done for him, save to give him silent sympathy.

Maybe someday he’ll reach enlightenment, similar to the student who couldn’t solve the koan about how to remove the model ship from the bottle without either breaking the bottle or damaging the ship. “Oh that problem,” said the Zen master, “it’s easy to solve.” And as he clapped his hands he said “Poof! There, your problem is solved.” The student complained that he didn’t understand, so the master added: “Your problem was only a word problem. You’ll never reach enlightenment until you learn to distinguish word problems from real problems.”

Maybe similar will occur for your father. Maybe someday he’ll become enlightened if he realizes the logic trap that he’s been caught in for more than two decades is only a word problem. He started his commitment with the meaningless word “God”, added some more words, and caught his mind in a logic trap, trapped either by his honor or his fear. While others were taking actions to save his brother’s life, he mumbled meaningless words. When his brother’s life was saved, your father assumed that the cause was his telekinetic ability and his communication with the creator of the universe, rather than the obvious cause: the acts of the people who held his brother’s head above water, who called for the ambulance, who pulled him from the car wreck, who transported him to the hospital, the entire hospital staff, and so on. All of them are the people who should be thanked when one says “Thank GOD, i.e., [Human] Greatness On Demand.” Instead, your frightened future father thanked his word God and became amazed at his own powers to save his brother’s life.

Anyway, Dear (as I already mentioned), as the years rolled by, my efforts to show him his errors diminished, as did my desires to help him. That’s my meaning for what I showed you for what I review in “H” when I’m walking:

I’m a hero for how I helped him, but let your hopes go – and if you can’t let your hopes go entirely, then at least work on lowering them. There are others more worthy of help...

Yet, I did continue to support him, first to get him into the Mormon Church (because his own “beliefs” were even more bizarre than those of the Mormons – as hard as that might be to appreciate!), then to get him to restart

his college studies (even to get his degree at the disgraceful Brigham Young “University”), then to marry your mother, then to get his Ph.D. at a reputable university, and so on.

And then, when you were ~12 years old, ~20 years after he was first caught in the clerics’ logic trap, he announced to his mother and me (and, of course, to your mother) that he had “abandoned Mormonism”. According to what he told me, there were two prime reasons why he changed his mind. Putting them together, the single reason seems to be that he apparently hadn’t entirely abandoned the idea that his “beliefs” should be held with strengths commensurate with relevant evidence. Consequently, when he found evidence that Joseph Smith’s *Book of Abraham* was a hoax (as I’ll show you in the “excursion” Yx, dealing with “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”) and when he could no longer accept the “official” Mormon position about how life began (apparently a remnant of the theory of evolution was still in his mind), he jettisoned his Mormon “beliefs”.

When he saw that the *Book of Abraham* was a hoax, he tried (of course) to show your mother. I don’t recall the exact wording of her reported response to your father, but it was something close to: “I don’t want to know; I’m not as strong as you are.” The essence of such a response is astoundingly sad – even sick. It’s equivalent to saying something similar to: “Don’t confuse me with facts; my mind’s made up” or “I don’t want to deal with reality; I like living in my dream world.” Similar could be said (and probably is said) by heroin addicts; as Marx said: “Religion is opium for the masses” – and addicts aren’t about to let a mere matter of reality interfere with their getting their next fix.

Meanwhile, after your father told me that he quit Mormonism, of course I was pleased, but on inquiring further, I found that, simultaneously, he hadn’t entirely jettisoned his “belief” in the god idea. I advised him that if he dug deeper, he’d find that the *Bible* and the *Quran* are just as “flakey” as is the *Book of Abraham* and the *Book of Mormon*. I don’t know if he dug deeper. In fact, what he now “believes” I now no longer care – except in so far as his untested or untestable ideas may damage my grandchildren’s welfare.

With your mother filing for divorce, she has apparently reached a similar conclusion – but for different reasons. As far as I can make it out, your father’s “flip-flopping beliefs” combined with her intransigency in her own beliefs have caused her huge anxiety – as you can well imagine and for

which you probably have substantial evidence. When your father informed us of her action, I reacted with substantial concern for the welfare of my grandchildren – as I’ll show you below. But before showing you details, let me try to give you an overview.

One potential solution to your parents’ problem would be if your father “returned to the fold of the faithful [Mormons].” No doubt your mother would prefer that “solution”, but, Dear, I couldn’t promote it – even if my promotion would yield the result desired by your mother (which is dubious). I couldn’t promote it, Dear, in part because I hope never to be a part of promoting any supernatural stupidity, but in part because (to be honest), I really have relatively little interest in helping either your father or mother toward their “fulfillment” (whatever that means): they’ve already been given ample opportunities; their futures are now in their hands; to me, the ones whose futures concern me are those of a certain group of grandchildren.

And when it comes to my grandchildren, I’m convinced (as I’ve tried to show you in this book) that their futures would be brighter if they jettison all silly ideas about any and all imagined supernatural Jabberwocks in the sky. Consequently, if I promoted your father returning to Mormonism (or any supernaturalism), then I would be simultaneously damaging my grandchildren’s futures. Of course, I think that the threatened divorce (one more marriage destroyed by religion) also has the potential to damage my grandchildren’s futures, but maybe the breakup of your parents’ marriage would be the lesser of the two evils.⁴

The alternative that I therefore explored was to attempt to get your mother to evaluate her “beliefs” – for (what would appear to be) the first time in her life. And of course I realized that such an attempt would be “a long shot”! That is, I tried similar with your father for ~20 years (to no avail); I’ve been trying similar with you (*via* this book) for the past ~10 years (and yet to test if it’ll work!); and I saw that I only had a number of weeks to try to influence your mother. While walking in the desert, I had the idea that maybe I could get her to evaluate her beliefs if I asked her to be “the first

⁴ And of course it’s unfortunate that, as both the clerics’ and the Gnostics’ Jesus predicted, he caused so much strife in families. It’s easy to argue (as I’ve done in an early chapter) that, seeing that he would cause so much trouble in families, Jesus would have been more “moral” (in particular, he would have been of more value to society) if had chosen to protect families rather than participate in their destruction by promoting his primitive scientific model. But I don’t want to go down that path again, which leads to descriptions of the immorality and silliness of both the clerics’ and the Gnostics’ Jesus.

editor” of this book – as you can see from the following e-mail to her [in which, for obvious reasons, I’ve replaced the names of people with their relation to you, identified in “square brackets”; also, I’ve added a few explanatory notes].

To [your mother]:

Maybe if you had your own children, you’d understand better.
[That was supposed to be a joke, to try to get her to “lighten up”.]

When you see someone you love start to make a foolish and terrible mistake, common with children, you try to stop them.

Which then maybe adds to the evidence that it’s better not to have children: they rarely take your advice, and you end up suffering for their errors. It might even be used to argue that it’s better not to love: it exposes a person to potential pain.

But we do, and we suffer for it. We continue to try. It’s almost comical: the sadistic triumph of hope over experience...

So I began to ponder how I might help.

I admit that my first thought was to come there and use my belt on both of you.

Anyone who tries to take actions that will hurt my grandchildren will need to get by me first.

[Your father]: I’ve already been beating on.

You: You think you’re protecting my grandchildren? What a joke. What a sick joke. I had that sick joke played on me – and suffered its consequences all my life. My mother put her love for her “savior”, the Lord Jesus Christ, above all else – of course including my knowing my father. I never forgave her for that, and never will – for her conceit, her arrogance, her selfishness, her stupidity. Do you think that, with their intelligence, your children won’t come to a similar conclusion about you? Think about the remark: “How can you be so stupid?” [A remark that one of your uncles, who rejected Mormonism, made to your mother’s mother.] Can you imagine how it will feel when, one by one, your children will say something similar to you? You’d better start planning, now, how to respond to them in case they quote to you Robert Ingersoll’s: “Human love is generous and noble. The love of God is selfish, because [people don’t] love God for God’s sake, but for [their] own.” You think that you’ll get an “eternal reward” for your actions? You think that you’re protecting the “eternal souls” of your children? Think again...

But probably such beatings are worse than useless; so, I'll try something different.

[Your father]: I've been working on.

You: Okay, here's the deal. The attached "Preface" of my book (entitled "Love Letters from Grampa") provides some background. I've written the book with [you] in mind, but intend it for all my grandchildren – and in fact for all teenagers struggling to define themselves. My plan was to give the book to [you] as a high-school graduation present; it has taken me more than a decade to write; it needs editorial work; my wonderful daughter has agreed to be an editor; my plan is to ask her to start when I'm finished; I'm now asking you to be "the first editor", even though I'm not quite finished the book.

The advantages to me of your being "the first editor" include: 1) the possibility that I might get you to think more clearly, 2) thereby the chance that my grandchildren will not be hurt so badly, and 3) the book needs editorial work.

The advantages to you of your being an editor include: 1) you'll have the opportunity to see how I plan to "pollute" your children's minds (when I think they're ready), and thereby, you'll have the opportunity to develop what you think is an appropriate defense to "protect" them, 2) you might learn something, and 3) the money you'll earn.

Be aware, by the way, that editors needn't agree with the contents of the works they edit. Maybe they rarely do. But they have a job to do, and they do it professionally – which usually means: to continue to work on something, even when you don't want to! Specifically your tasks would be:

1. To identify factual errors (supplying corrections and their references)
2. To identify incorrect attributions or interpretations of other people's ideas (supplying corrections, references, etc.)
3. To identify potentially incorrect interpretations of data, data deficiencies, and similar (supplying recommended changes)
4. To identify cases of my apparently flawed reasoning, inferences, etc. (flagging problems)
5. To identify instances where you think my arguments and opinions could be improved (but doing so while being sensitive that my writing is purposefully emotive, since after all, the title of the book is "Love letters...")

The above list isn't necessarily complete, but should be enough to get you started; note that I'm not particularly interested in spelling or grammatical errors or poorly worded writing; I'll try to clean that stuff up on my first rewrite.

As for the pay, I grant you that what's offered isn't overly generous, but anyway, here it is: \$10 per hour, not to exceed a total of \$10,000. (But note that, since the government won't be involved, it'll all be "after taxes" – but without social security and other benefits!)

There's another "rider". You're not to give me any of your "editorial suggestions" (on your marked up copies of the chapters that I'll send, one by one) until I finish the book. My reason is this: pushing on, to finish the book, is tough enough without going back to clean up earlier chapters – or even to learn about identified inadequacies! My idea: first creation, then criticism. I'll let you know when I'm ready to begin receiving your recommendations / criticisms. As for when you'll receive your "salary": send me bills via e-mail.

I've enclosed both the Preface (as promised) and Chapter 1 (i.e., "A") – the latter to give you some idea about what you'd be getting yourself committed to.

Your move, e.g., let me know when you're ready for the next chapter.

What follows is a copy of your mother's response:

There's a whole lot of stuff that you don't understand here. And your idea that this is caused by religion is completely unfounded. It is based more on an issue of freedom.

Freedom to believe what I choose, even though my spouse changes mid life.

Freedom from financial debt.

Freedom to have people in my home.

Freedom from alcohol.

Freedom to teach my children by example that women should be treated as an equal in a relationship.

I don't expect you to understand.

I have no interest in your book.

Hopefully you will still want to be a part of your grandchildren's lives...

[Your mother]

What follows is a copy of how I responded [with correction to a typo].

Dear: I do understand.

Have you forgotten that I have a wife and a daughter? I bet you wouldn't dare tell them that they're not liberated!

As far as I have been able to make it out, [your father] learned that terrible male chauvinist crap from the patriarchal Mormon Church! But as I already wrote, I'm working on him – exactly on what you surmised that I didn't understand (including his mismanagement and inappropriate management of your family's resources). In contrast, I get an allowance of \$20 a week...

But suppose that [your father] were a communist and that (feeling that communism was critically important and that his children should learn "the truth") he insisted on indoctrinating "his" children in communism. Think of your reaction. Then think of your statement: "your idea that this is caused by religion is completely unfounded."

One obvious question is: Who gets to indoctrinate the kids? A second obvious question is: Is it right to indoctrinate kids in anything? For one (and more than 150 years ago) the philosopher Schopenhauer argued forcefully against it:

"No child under the age of fifteen should receive instruction in subjects which may possibly be the vehicle of serious error, such as philosophy, religion, or any other branch of knowledge where it is necessary to take large views; because wrong notions imbibed early can seldom be rooted out, and of all the intellectual faculties, judgment is the last to arrive at maturity. The child should give its attention either to subjects where no error is possible at all, such as mathematics, or to those in which there is no particular danger in making a mistake, such as languages, natural science, history, and so on. And in general, the branches of knowledge which are to be studied at any period of life should be such as the mind is equal to at that period and can perfectly understand. Childhood and youth form the time for collecting materials, for getting a special and thorough knowledge of the individual and particular things. In those years it is too early to form views on a large scale; and ultimate explanations must be put off to a later date. The faculty of judgment, which cannot come into play without mature experience, should be left to itself; and care should be taken not to anticipate its action by inculcating prejudice, which will paralyze it for ever..."

And thus, from my perspective, it's not a question of your freedom to believe in whatever you want, but legitimate questions about indoctrinating the kids and in what. Further, surely you are not opposed to people "changing their minds" when data recommend that they do so! As for the alcohol, I expect that it'll stop – but you've made a mountain out of a molehill. Chill out. Follow Joseph Smith's lead: have a glass of wine to calm yourself (although personally, I prefer not to drink the stuff). And as for having people you want over to your house, that certainly seems fair – provided you reciprocate and let [your father] have all his communist buddies over for a beer bash! That is, compromise is a two-way street.

As for being a part of my grandchildren's lives, good heavens: that's what I've been working on, at least 8 hours per day, for at least 350 days per year, for at least the past 10 years! I challenge anyone to identify a grandfather who has shown more dedication to the welfare of his grandchildren. My goal (for the book, in which I'm sorry you have no interest) is to show them the bases of their indoctrination in religious nonsense and bases for alternatives based on science (including the obvious scientific basis of morality, unfortunately hijacked by all religions). Thereby, my hope is that they'll be stronger and be able to lead a more balanced and informed life...

PS#1:

In the middle of the night, some thoughts woke me up. Look again at your statements:

It is based more on an issue of freedom.

Freedom to believe what I choose, even though my spouse changes mid life.

Freedom from financial debt

Freedom to have people in my home.

Freedom from alcohol.

Freedom to teach my children by example that women should be treated as an equal in a relationship.

Now, please think about associated responsibilities.

1. "Freedom to believe what I choose, even though my spouse changes mid life."

Unless you live in a dictatorship and you're the dictator, freedom to believe what you choose carries the responsibility to acknowledge and support everyone's equal freedom. Do you support [your father's] equal right? Do you support your kids' equal right – and even take special care that the rights of those whose minds are just forming aren't infringed via indoctrination in silliness? And isn't a mother's indoctrination of her children potentially the most insidious? As did my mother, many mothers use their love (a child's most prized possession) as a club to beat stupid ideas into their children's heads.

As for "even though my spouse changes mid life", there are atrocious possibilities behind that sentiment. Another way to describe "changing one's mind" is "growing up". [You, Dear, were] taught to believe in Santa Claus. When [you] found no data to support the idea and data that conflicted with it, [you] abandoned it. Would you have her not change her mind? Would you not have her grow up? You were

indoctrinated in the silly idea that some giant Jabberwock in the sky is in control of this world. Have you found any data to support the idea? Are you unaware of all the data that conflict with it? And yet you still cling to the idea? Because your mother indoctrinated you, using her love as a club? You haven't changed? Is this to your credit? Think again about the phrase "growing up".

And think, too, of the concept of "belief". It's derived from the Anglo-Saxon root word "lief", meaning "wish". Thus, "be-lief" means "wish to be". Certainly it can be pleasant to convince oneself that one's wishes will actually occur (e.g., that some benevolent father is in control of the world, that "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world", that one can live forever, or whatever), but meanwhile, there's reality (no matter what we wish for).

"Belief" and "faith" are to be contrasted with "trust" and "confidence". Most of the children of the world are indoctrinated with belief and faith as dictated in the dogmas of the various crazy religions. In contrast, an adult develops trust and confidence in science, because the only hypotheses accepted in science are those whose predictions pass every experimental test they're subjected to – and if a hypothesis fails its tests (or is untestable), then it's thrown in the trash can of human mistakes (such as the hypothesis that the sun goes around the earth, that the world is flat, that the earth is only 6,000 years old, that some god made the universe, and so on). You don't need to "believe" that the sun goes around the earth, that the world is approximately spherical, etc. (and you don't need to rely on someone else's "testimony"!); you can test it yourself, experimentally. As someone else wrote: "Religion is the science of children; science is the religion of adults."

And how I hope you're not thinking something similar to: "I've tested my faith and I know it's true." Because that would demonstrate profound ignorance of the meanings of "test" and "true". As any scientist has learned, tests must be performed under stringent conditions, and the concept of "true" is meaningless except for closed systems. In reality (an open system) the concept of "true" has no meaning – we can demonstrate only what's false [better: we can, at best, determine only the probability of the "truth" of any claim]. To explain those concepts adequately would require a book, and since you've already expressed disinterest in mine, then if you don't understand them, I would suggest that you seek their explanations in any of many other books. Learning from them, however, would mean that you would gain new ideas and might lead you to change your mind.

2. "Freedom from financial debt"

As you well know, no one is guaranteed "freedom from financial debt"! To gain such freedom requires constant exercise of huge efforts and responsibilities – and certainly not all are [your father's]. Surely you can't fault [your father] for his huge efforts; even I am in awe of them. But meanwhile, have you made comparable efforts (to save and to earn money)? As for responsibilities, maybe he should be faulted, but did you know that kids cost money? Have you taken appropriate responsibility for how

many kids you'd have, how much was to be expended on them, how big and nice a house you'd have, how many and what quality of cars, furniture, etc., you have, and on and on?

3. "Freedom to have people in my home"

I've already commented some on this, but would add a little more. Thus, what do you mean "my" home?! You mean "our" home – and that "our" carries responsibilities. If it were your house, you could invite in any derelicts, drunks, drug addicts, die-hards, crazies, religious kooks, etc. that you want. But so long as you have a partner and children that need to be protected, then you have the responsibility to take care. Marx said "religion is opium for the masses"; it then could be quite understandable if [your father] didn't want "opium pushers" in the house, near your kids, for whose welfare he feels an understandable and commendable responsibility. In contrast, my father displayed that he didn't give a damn about us.

4. "Freedom from alcohol"

I've also already commented some on this, but would add that you sound similar to my mother. She never seemed to tire of bragging that she was a "tea totaller" – and never tired of criticizing the memory of my father's drinking alcohol. As far as I was (and still am) concerned, she had responsibility for what she drank, but she had no authority (or responsibility) to dictate what another adult did. Furthermore, she had the responsibility to defend another adult's choices (so long as they didn't harm others) and to develop an appropriate image of good father. In contrast, her common criticism (especially of [your great uncle]) was "You're just like your father!" What a hideous way to try to berate a child. Would that he would have had been sufficiently experienced to respond: "I should hope so!"

There is, however, a positive side to our experiences with our mother. I maintain that no one "grows up" until they're capable of realistically evaluating the performance of their own parents. In the case of our mother, her errors were so egregious that our evaluations were relatively easy. Similarly for my daughter's evaluation of me! ([your father] seems to have more trouble; [your uncle] seems to be coming along quite well!) What about your evaluation of your parents? What about your children's of theirs? Or is this threatened divorce your way of trying to make their evaluations trivially simple?!

5. "Freedom to teach my children by example that women should be treated as an equal in a relationship"

No such freedom (or, for that matter, any freedom) is ever granted; freedoms are fought for, expropriated, earned. If you want to be "equal" (although I don't understand why you'd want to be the first female [family member] to stop at that?!), then fight for it – which I assume is what you're doing. So, good for you. As I said before, I'm on your side in your fight – but do keep your wits about you (your mind

engaged, your thoughts and evaluations clear, your expectations realistic) and above all, think about the ones whose welfare is by far of most concern to me: my grandchildren's!

PS#2:

Given your expressed desires for various freedoms, I would recommend that you consider the following from the great American, Col. Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899):

“When I became convinced that the Universe is natural – that all the ghosts and gods are myths – there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell, the dungeon was flooded with light, and all the bolts, and bars, and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world – not even in infinite space.

“I was free: free to think, to express my thoughts – free to live to my own ideal – free to live for myself and those I loved – free to use all my faculties, all my senses – free to spread imagination's wings – free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope – free to judge and determine for myself – free to reject all ignorant and cruel creeds, all the ‘inspired’ books that savages have produced, and all the barbarous legends of the past – free from popes and priests – free from all the ‘called’ and ‘set apart’ – free from sanctified mistakes and holy lies – free from the fear of eternal pain – free from the winged monsters of night – free from devils, ghosts, and gods.

“For the first time I was free. There were no prohibited places in all the realms of my thought – no air, no space, where fancy could not spread her painted wings – no chains for my limbs – no lashes for my back – no fires for my flesh – no master's frown or threat – no following another's steps – no need to bow, or cringe, or crawl, or utter lying words.

“I was free. I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously, faced all worlds. And then my heart was filled with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain, for the freedom of labor and thought – to those who fell on the fierce fields of war – to those who died in dungeons bound with chains – to those who proudly mounted scaffold's stairs – to those whose bones were crushed, whose flesh was scarred and torn – to those by fire consumed – to all the wise, the good, the brave of every land, whose thoughts and deeds have given freedom to the sons of men. And I vowed to grasp the torch that they had held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still.”

Although I heard no more from your mother (and subsequently learned from your father that she had labeled all my e-mail as “junk mail”, sent immediately to trash, not even to be looked at), I sent her still another note,

and although you may be dissatisfied with the tenor of my note, Dear, please be aware that I was trying to move her to start thinking.

To [your mother]:

There are innumerable levels of lies; probably the worst is to lie to oneself. You stated to me “your idea that this is caused by religion is completely unfounded.” But meanwhile, elsewhere there is your published statement [published in a Mormon magazine]:

“I remember how much it hurt at first, and still does daily, that your husband suddenly doesn’t share the same sacred feelings and love of the gospel that you have. It really is a sacred bond between two people that I miss so much now that I don’t have it. I don’t have anyone to discuss sacrament meeting talks with, or share ideas or inspiration with, or just talk about the world and how it is from the same perspective.

“I understand the hurt so well, but am far from finding a solution or any comfort in this situation. I am realizing that, in an odd way, this is good for me in that it is really forcing me to refocus my life in the gospel. I am trying to go back to the scriptures, daily, and pray more sincerely, and question my motives constantly. I talk to the kids more about the gospel and what it means in our lives. I guess, I am trying to not take it for granted. But still I am having a hard time, wondering if I really do feel the spirit, wanting bigger more profound answers to my prayers, waiting for something terrible to happen to [your father], so he will finally wake up and realize what he is doing.

“The pain does dull somewhat over time, though when you pause and think about it, like now, it all comes back and hurts that much more. The sister with grown children should at least take comfort that her kids are married and on their own. They are less dependent on their dad now as far as opinion and example go. In the end, we’ll have to decide for ourselves, and allow everyone else to do the same.”

And so I wonder if your statement to me “your idea that this is caused by religion is completely unfounded” represents your lying to me or to yourself. Yet in “truth” I really don’t care – everyone lies when it appears to be advantageous. The trouble is, many times, appearances are deceptive.

In any event, consider again some of your published statements:

1. “I don’t have anyone to... talk about the world and how it is from the same perspective.”

[Your mother’s name]! What’s the point of talking to anyone who shares your perspective?! How the devil are you going to learn anything new if you just keep

talking to mirrors?! Seek out those who have different perspectives – and in your case, you don't need to do much seeking: [your father] is there to provide you with one, and now, I'm available. But are you listening? Why don't you respond? Why are you so afraid of seeing things from another perspective? Is your 'belief' so tenuous that you're afraid the umbilical cord will break?

2. "I am realizing that, in an odd way, this is good for me in that it is really forcing me to refocus my life in the gospel."

[Your mother's name]! Come off it! It does no such thing! That's the shelter that you've been trained like a puppy dog to run to, and to hide in, whenever real-world problems appear. And now, when you "talk to the kids more about the gospel and what it means in our lives", you're training my grandchildren to similarly run from real problems like little puppies.

3. "But still I am having a hard time, wondering if I really do feel the spirit, wanting bigger more profound answers to my prayers..."

[Your mother's name]! Have you ever examined the data from which the efficacy of prayer can be evaluated? Except in so far as prayer focuses your mind on your problems, it's a totally useless enterprise – which unsurprising is totally consistent with the idea that all gods always were nothing but the figments of primitive and childish minds. Actually, though, prayer is much worse; it's a perversion – as I show in the attached (which is part of what I've written for my grandchildren on the subject of praying). But whereas you've said that you have no interest in my book and that you want to converse only with people who have "the same perspective", then I suppose you'll ignore it, too.

4. "In the end, we'll have to decide for ourselves..."

Yes, Dear, it's up to you – to decide who is lying. Or maybe it's not so much that the clerics of the world are liars as they are just stupid, childish, nincompoops, brainwashed when they were children into "believing" that "god" was anything but a silly, meaningless word, an abbreviation of "I dunno".

It's all so stupid, so sick, so sad, so perverted – and to think that my grandchildren must suffer from such stupidity makes me furious.

Why oh why won't all the "Jesus freaks" of the world listen to what he said. In the Gospel of Thomas there is the following exchange:

113. His disciples said to him, "When will the kingdom come?"

[Jesus answered:] "It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!' Rather, the Father's kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it."

Which brings to mind the wisdom in a poem by Will Carleton, published in his 1891 book “Farm Ballads”:

And I told her [his wife (against whom he had started divorce proceedings) that]
in the future, I wouldn't speak cross or rash
If half the crockery in the house was broken all to smash;
And she said, in regards to heaven, we'd try and learn its worth
By startin' a branch establishment and runnin' it here on earth.

I had some additional, relevant communications with your father (which I may show you in a later chapter), but that was my last direct communication with your mother. As for the outcome, by the time you read this, you'll know. But as I write it, I'm not hopeful.

Below are some quotations (from Aiken's collection) that explain my thoughts better than can I. The quotations are organized under the indicated “heading” (in bold type).

Your mother's “beliefs”:

“A man is his own easiest dupe, for what he wishes to be true he generally believes to be true.” [Demosthenes (c. 384–322 BCE)]

“The doctrine that future happiness depends upon belief is monstrous. It is the infamy of infamies. The notion that faith in Christ is to be rewarded by an eternity of bliss, while a dependence upon reason, observation and experience merits everlasting pain, is too absurd for refutation, and can be relieved only by that unhappy mixture of insanity and ignorance, called ‘faith’.” [Robert Ingersoll]

“Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable... A man full of faith is simply one who has lost (or never had) the capacity for clear and realistic thought. He is not a mere ass; he is actually ill.” [H.L. Mencken]

“‘Faith,’ said St. Paul, ‘is the evidence of things not seen.’ We should elaborate this definition by adding that faith is the assertion of things for which there is not a particle of evidence and of things which are incredible.” [E. Haldeman-Julius]

What a man believes upon grossly insufficient evidence is an index into his desires – desires of which he himself is often unconscious. If a man is offered a fact which goes against his instincts, he will scrutinize it closely, and unless the evidence is overwhelming, he will refuse to believe it. If, on the other hand, he is offered something which affords a reason for acting in accordance to his instincts, he will accept it even on the slightest evidence. [Bertrand Russell]

“[For the true believer]... to rely on the evidence of the senses and of reason is heresy and treason. It is startling to realize how much unbelief is necessary to make belief possible. What we know as blind faith is sustained by innumerable unbeliefs.”
[Eric Hoffer]

“The kindly God who lovingly fashioned each and every one of us and sprinkled the sky with shining stars for our delight – that God is, like Santa Claus, a myth of childhood, not anything a sane, undeluded adult could literally believe in.”
[Daniel Dennett]

“Faith is a great vice, an example of obstinately refusing to listen to reason, something irrational and undesirable, a form of self-hypnotism.” [Richard Robinson]

My doubt that I could get your mother to abandon her “beliefs”:

“It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of what he was never reasoned into.”
[Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)]

“[Lord] Byron’s friend Thomas Moore wrote to a friend in 1818 warning him not to speak of religion or morality, ‘the mania on these subjects being so universal and congenital that he who thinks of curing it is as mad as his patients’.”
[Carolly Erickson]

“When [people] really believe... that it is necessary to do a certain thing to be happy forever, or that a certain belief is necessary to ensure eternal joy, there is in [such people] no spirit of concession. [They] divide... the whole world into saints and sinners, into believers and unbelievers, into God’s sheep and Devil’s goats, into people who will be glorified and people who are damned.” [Robert Ingersoll]

“Those who know that their beliefs are founded in reason are willing to argue their way to victory and are willing to renounce opinions that do not survive such argument. Those who are aware that their beliefs are founded in faith, on the other hand, are unwilling to submit their beliefs to dispassionate discussion and do not expect to change their own beliefs ever. They are perfectly willing, if pressed, to resort to force to change other people’s beliefs by brainwashing children, persecuting heretics, and warring with ‘unenlightened’ adversaries. Religious instruction manipulates the vulnerable psyches of young children before they are able to think for themselves, endeavoring to prevent them from ever acquiring this ability. They never attain an intellectual resistance sufficient to counter the influence of dogmatic precepts, to grow up as free individuals.” [Bertrand Russell]

“Believers are interested in fulfilling emotional and spiritual needs, not intellectual needs. In some cases one might as well try to use reason on a dog. For many people God is primarily a warm feeling. How can one argue with a warm feeling? Arguing with someone who places reason below faith and biblical authority is blowing against the wind.” [C. W. Dalton]

“The origin of the absurd idea of immortal life is easy to discover; it is kept alive by hope and fear, by childish faith, and by cowardice.” [Clarence Darrow]

“It is the true believer’s ability to ‘shut his eyes and stop his ears’ to the facts that do not deserve to be either seen or heard which is the source of his unequalled fortitude and constancy. He cannot be frightened by danger nor disheartened by obstacle nor baffled by contradictions because he denies their existence.” [Eric Hoffer]

“The fervent fundamentalist – whether Protestant or Catholic, Jew or Muslim – is closed to reason and even communication for fear of losing the security of childish dependence.” [Alan Watts]

“It is impossible to reason a man out of something he has not been reasoned into. When people have acquired their beliefs on an emotional level they cannot be persuaded out of them on a rational level. No matter how strong the proof or the logic behind it, people will hold onto their emotional beliefs and twist the facts to meet their version of reality.” [Sidney J. Harris]

“No rational argument will have a rational effect on a [person] who does not want to adopt a rational attitude.” [Karl Popper]

“You can’t convince a believer of anything; for their belief is not based on evidence, it’s based on a deep seated need to believe.” [Carl Sagan]

“And if the Thinker thinks passionately enough, the Prover will prove the thought so conclusively that you will never talk a person out of such a belief, even if it is something as remarkable as the notion that there is a gaseous vertebrate of astronomical heft (GOD) who will spend all eternity torturing people who do not believe in his religion.” [Robert Anton Wilson]

“The mind of the fundamentalist is like the pupil of the eye: the more light you pour on it, the more it will contract.” [Anonymous]

Your mother’s inability to evaluate her thoughts:

“Religion is the masterpiece of the art of animal training, for it trains people as to how they shall think.” [Arthur Schopenhauer]

“A sect or party is an elegant incognito devised to save a man from the vexation of thinking.” [Ralph Waldo Emerson]

“It is only by hearsay (by word of mouth passed down from generation to generation) that whole peoples adore the God of their fathers and of their priests. Authority, confidence, submission and custom with them take the place of conviction or of proofs. They prostrate themselves and pray, because their fathers taught them to prostrate themselves and pray. But *why* did their fathers fall on their knees?” [Percy Byssche Shelley]

“Minds fettered by this doctrine no longer inquire concerning a proposition whether it is attested by sufficient evidence, but whether it accords with Scripture; they do not search for facts as such, but for facts that will bear out their doctrine. It is easy to see that this mental habit blunts not only the perception of truth, but the sense of truthfulness, and that the man whose faith drives him into fallacies treads close upon the precipice of falsehood... So long as a belief in propositions is regarded as indispensable to salvation, the pursuit of truth as such is not possible.”

[George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)]

“A believer is not a thinker and a thinker is not a believer.” [Marian Noel Sherman]

“Absolute faith corrupts as absolutely as absolute power.” [Eric Hoffer]

“In a sense, the religious person must have no real views of his own and it is presumptuous of him, in fact, to have any. In regard to sex, love affairs, to marriage and family relations, to business, to politics, and to virtually everything else that is important in his life, he must try to discover what his god and his clergy would like him to do; and he must primarily do their bidding.” [Albert Ellis]

Your mother’s anger at me:

“There is something feeble and a little contemptible about a man who cannot face the perils of life without the help of comfortable myths. Almost inevitably some part of him is aware that they are myths and that he believes them only because they are comforting. But he dare not face this thought! Moreover, since he is aware, however dimly, that his opinions are not real, he becomes furious when they are disputed.”

[Bertrand Russell]

“...anger is the common substitute for logic among those who have no evidence for what they desperately want to believe.” [Isaac Asimov]

“One does not need to puzzle long over why religionists hate atheists so venomously. Atheists stir up the suppressed doubts of believers to the point of producing anguish. This is the anguish that incited believers to burn heretics and atheists at the stake in olden times to remove the source of the unsettling, disturbing doubts that plagued the believers.” [C. W. Dalton]

Your mother’s desire to wallow in her delusions:

“There is no absurdity so palpable but that it may be firmly planted in the human head if only you begin to inculcate it before the age of five, by constantly repeating it with an air of great solemnity.” [Arthur Schopenhauer]

“No one explains how declarations that are manufactured out of whole cloth, that have absolutely no predictive content and therefore no demonstrable connection with our lives as we live them day by day, are supposed to serve as a guide for planning our future. What such declarations do is to condition every nervous system that takes

them seriously that it is perfectly sane to ignore the world in which we live, and to live instead in a world of pure fantasy. The man who is willing to accept the doctrine of Christian [and, similarly, Muslim and Mormon] faith is one who is willing to relinquish all hope of knowing the truth. He accepts all, doubts never, vegetates. He is a slave, a hollow shell into which others can pour all manner of stupidities. Having a conscience, being honest, are empty phrases for him, as he has relinquished his own right to think and is acting only because others are acting through him. He refuses to be honest with himself, no longer talks things over with himself, no longer meditates, contemplates; he only absorbs like a sponge, without discrimination. If he has convictions, they are metamorphized and petrified lies, and not even his own lies but those of colleagues, priests, and politicians who want to use him. If to accept blindly, without the play of reason, is faith, it follows then that what the world needs is not more faith, but more people who think with their own heads and not with the heads of others.” [Chester Dolan]

“Lemme get this straight, you have ‘faith’ in the existence of the most powerful being you can imagine, who’s your best bud and who you can ask to do favors, and further you have ‘faith’ that when you die you don’t actually cease to exist and become worm food, but your magical buddy invites you to come live with him in the most wonderful place you can imagine, and *we* are the ones for whom truth has become ‘whatever works for you’ or ‘whatever makes you feel good’???” [Bob Enweiven]

“Look, you can either accept science and face reality or you can believe in angels and live in a childish dream world.” [Lisa Simpson of *The Simpsons* TV series]

Your mother’s error of not examining her doubts:

“If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call into question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it – the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.” [W. K. Clifford]

“People, upon finding the ‘truth’, spend the remainder of their lives defending it. Christianity [and similarly, Islam and Mormonism] protects itself against the doubting of its theology by making doubting one of its greatest sins. By contrast, doubting is the greatest virtue of science.” [C. W. Dalton]

“Just think of the tragedy of teaching children not to doubt.” [Clarence Darrow]

“Irrationally held truths may be more harmful than reasoned errors.”
[Thomas Huxley]

“You are never dedicated to something you have complete confidence in. No one is fanatically shouting that the sun is going to rise tomorrow. They know it’s going to rise tomorrow. When people are fanatically dedicated to political or religious faiths

or any other kind of dogmas or goals, it's always because these dogmas or goals are in doubt." [Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen & The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*]

Your mother's error of refusing to learn:

"Those who are enslaved to their sects are not merely devoid of all sound knowledge, but they will never even stop to learn." [Galen (129–199)]

"What is wanted is not the will to believe, but the will to find out, which is the exact opposite." [Bertrand Russell]

"Ideas that cannot be defended by reason and evidence can lead anywhere, and if there is no warrant for one's belief, there is no telling where it will end."
[Paul M. Pfalzner]

"In religion it is particularly easy for intellectual dishonesty to escape notice, because of the common assumption that all honesty flows from religion and religion is necessarily honest whatever it does." [Richard Robinson]

"The rational man seeks the truth gropingly, he knows that his reasoning is only probable, that other considerations will arise to make it doubtful... he is 'open'. He may even appear hesitant. But there are people who are attracted by the durability of stone. They want to be massive and impenetrable, they do not want to change: where would change lead them? This is an original fear of oneself and a fear of truth. And what frightens them is not the content of truth which they do not even suspect, but the very form of the true – that thing of indefinite approximation... They want to exist all at once and right away. They do not want acquired opinions, they want them to be innate; since they are afraid of reasoning, they want to adopt a mode of life in which reasoning and research play but a subordinate role, in which one never seeks but that which one has already found..." [Jean-Paul Sartre]

"The beginning of wisdom is the awareness that there is insufficient evidence that a god or gods have created us and the recognition that we are responsible in part for our own destiny. Human beings can achieve this good life, but it is by the cultivation of the virtues of intelligence and courage, not faith and obedience, that we will most likely be able to do so." [Paul Kurtz]

My sadness at the whole damnable business:

"There is no sadder grief than that which lies at the bottom of a life that has been wrecked through deception." [Lemuel K. Washburn]

"Bertrand Russell viewed faith as, on the whole, contemptible. If religious persons were honest and rational, they would not be religious – with that I agree. But I'm not certain that it's always the fault of the believer that he cannot abandon his absurd fairytales and fables. I often view the religious person not with scorn, but with pity – with the same pity that one would regard a heroin addict or a delusional psychotic.

There comes an odd sinking in my stomach when someone confesses to me his faith, as if he'd just told me he was ill with a terminal disease." [J. S. Burke]

"One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We're no longer interested in finding out the truth. The bamboozle has captured us. It is simply too painful to acknowledge – even to ourselves – that we've been so credulous... Life is but a momentary glimpse of the wonder of this astonishing universe, and it is sad to see so many dreaming it away on spiritual fantasy." [Carl Sagan]

"The tragedy of life is what dies inside a man while he lives." [Albert Einstein]

And meanwhile, the simplicity of the solution:

"Acceptance without proof is the fundamental characteristic of Western religion. Rejection without proof is the fundamental characteristic of Western science." [Gary Zukav]

"NO proof. NO god. NO problem." [Kamian]

And to close this chapter near where I started it, consider the difference between your mother's reaction and the statement by Emperor Aurelius:

If anyone can show me, and prove to me, that I am wrong in thought or deed, I will gladly change. I seek the truth, which never yet hurt anybody. It is only persistence in self-delusion and ignorance which does harm.

In contrast, as a result of your mother's reaction and you father's failures, you get a chance to experience "up close and personal" still another consequence of worldviews colliding, similar to when the Islamist extremists crashed the two hijacked aircraft into the Twin Towers.

In the terrorists' opinion, according to their "beliefs", consistent with their worldview, what they were doing was "right" – in "fact", so "right" that they "thought" that they would be rewarded with instant entrance into eternal paradise. In your mother's opinion, according to her "beliefs", consistent with her worldview, what she is doing is "right" – so "right" that she "thinks" that she will be rewarded with "eternal bliss" of her "immortal soul" in some "celestial paradise." As a result, the Twin Towers collapsed and innocent people (such as certain grandchildren) suffer the consequences of the stupidity of those who hold "beliefs" more strongly than relevant evidence warrants.