

250 Anecdotes About Religion:
Volume 2

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Anecdotes are retold in my own words to avoid plagiarism.

Anecdotes are usually short humorous stories. Sometimes they are thought-provoking or informative, not amusing.

“When any church will inscribe over its altar as its sole qualification for membership, the Saviour’s condensed statement of the substance of both law and Gospel, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and thy neighbor as thyself,’ that church will I join with all my heart and all my soul.”

— Abraham Lincoln.

Chapter 1: From Age to Christmas

Age

- Author Michael Thomas Ford once spoke before a class of children. One child asked him, “How old are you?” When he gave the answer — 30 — he shocked the children, one of whom marveled, “You’re older than my mom,” and another of whom said, “That’s old.” Afterward, the children’s teacher explained that whenever the children asked her how old she was, “I just tell them I knew God when he was a boy. That shuts them up — except for the ones who want to know if He was a good kickball player.”¹
- Pope John XXIII once traveled through a Roman tenement where some blankets covered billboards showing a very shapely Italian actress. The Pope noticed this and told the crowd, “It is good that you do this, but you should realize that I am an old man, and if one of my age is thought to be scandalized by pictures like these, what of yourselves and your children?”²
- In Haifa, a city in Israel, the walls of the subway cars have stenciled on them these words from Leviticus: “You should rise up before the aged.” In other words: When the subway car is crowded, get up and give your seat to an older person.³

Animals

- Wesleyan pastor William Woughter was serving at a church called Buena Vista, located in a rural area near Bath, New York, when he retired. This church had the custom of giving the pastor the fruits of the earth on Harvest Day. One Sunday during harvest, the pastor would be kept out of the church until the farmers had brought in the good things of the earth as presents to the pastor. One Harvest Day, a man named Dean Stewart brought in a live turkey, which proceeded to gobble as Pastor William began his sermon. Pastor William looked at the turkey and said, “If you don’t stop that noise, I will make you preach the rest of the sermon.” The turkey stayed quiet until church was over.⁴
- The Jewish religious leader known as the Baal Shem Tov (the founder of Hasidism) told this story to a rabbi who was too rigid and legalistic: “I was driving a coach with three horses, none of which was neighing. I did not understand why until a peasant saw the horses and shouted at me to loosen the reins. When I loosened the reins, the horses immediately began to neigh.” When the rabbi heard the story, he realized that souls must be free in order to sing — too many restrictions stifle the soul.⁵

Art

- In 1843, Englishman Sir Henry Cole invented the illustrated Christmas card. He wanted to remind his friends to give to the needy during the holidays, so he commissioned an artist to create a scene of a family enjoying a holiday feast while ignoring needy people nearby. He then sent these cards to his friends.⁶
- Louise Nevelson created artworks for the Chapel of the Good Shepherd in St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in New York City. When a reporter asked the pastor why a Russian-born Jew had been picked to create works of art for a Christian chapel, he replied, “Because she’s the greatest living American sculptor.”⁷

Baptism

- One winter, some Dunkers held an outdoors baptism, breaking the ice on a river to do so. After being baptized, one of the men was asked if the water had been cold. He replied, “No, not a bit.” The other man who had been baptized told the preacher, “You better baptize him again, and hold him down a little longer. He hasn’t been cured of lying.”⁸

- Max Weber, the sociologist, once saw a banker in the American South being baptized in a cold stream. When Mr. Weber asked what was happening, he was told that the banker was being baptized so that the people of the town would trust him and so do business with him.⁹

Bible

- Many of us read the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, in which the Pharisee says, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as that publican [tax collector]. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess.” Unfortunately, when many of us read this, we think, “Thank God that I am not as that Pharisee.”¹⁰

- Ellen C. Waller, a Quaker, asked the children in her class to check and make sure that they had the Revised Version of the Bible, from which she was teaching. One child said that she had the wrong version of the Bible, because it wasn’t “Revised” — it was “Holy.”¹¹

Birth

- Elizabeth Cady Stanton once asked why this statement was read in the synagogue each week: “I thank thee, O Lord, that I was not born a woman.” She received the reply, “It is not meant in an unfriendly spirit, and it is not intended to degrade or humiliate women.” However, she was not satisfied with this answer, so she said, “But it does, nevertheless. Suppose the service read, ‘I thank thee, O Lord, that I was not born a jackass.’ Could that be twisted in any way into a compliment to the jackass?”¹²

- Si-tien, a Buddhist priest, asked some men, “Which is more moving: the cries of an animal being killed, or the cries of a woman giving birth?” No one answered, so Si-tien gave the answer: “The cries of a woman giving birth. The cries of an animal being killed is an ending, but the cries of a woman giving birth is a beginning.”¹³

Candles

- New York Yankees Waite Hoyt and Joe Dugan went to church together one day, and Mr. Dugan lit a candle. That afternoon, he batted 3-for-4 and the next day he batted 4-for-5. Therefore, Mr. Waite went to a church and lit a huge number of candles. Unfortunately, he was a pitcher and the opposing team’s batters knocked him out of that day’s game in the third inning. Mr. Waite asked, “How do you explain it? You lit candles and get a bunch of hits. I do the same thing and get knocked out.” Mr. Dugan replied, “Easy. I saw you light all those candles in church, but right after you left I saw two gamblers come in and blow them out.”¹⁴

- Do you know the story behind the tradition of putting candles in windows during the Christmas season? This is an Irish tradition that stems from the days when the Catholic religion was persecuted. Catholic families longed to have a priest come to their house and celebrate Mass on Christmas. To help guide the priest to their house, they put a candle in the window.¹⁵

Censorship

- The Rabbi of Smargon, R' Menasheh of Iliya, became aware that Jewish children were being kidnapped by the Jewish leaders of the town and handed over for service in the Czarist army so that the town could meet its quota. Therefore, R' Menasheh called a public meeting, in which he said, "One who can kidnap a Jewish child and hand him over to the authorities is not worthy of being called a Jew." Afterward, the community leaders told him that he had no right to speak publicly on such a topic. R' Menasheh said, "If that is so, I cannot be your Rav." And he immediately resigned as rabbi.¹⁶

- In the days before typewriters and word processors, Menashe Illyer wrote in longhand a controversial religious book, which he titled *Alpei Menasheh* and then took to a printer. The printer set in type the first few pages, but then he discovered that he disagreed with the contents of the book, so he burned it.¹⁷

Charity

- Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, aka the Singing Rabbi, once filled in at short notice at a Lag B'Omer concert when the star attraction broke his foot and was not able to appear. Because the concert organizer wanted so much to have someone of Rabbi Shlomo's stature at the concert, a deal was made that Rabbi Shlomo would be paid all the money that was collected at the door, minus the expenses of the concert. The concert was a success, and at its end, Rabbi Shlomo was handed \$2,700 in cash, something he was happy to receive because of his chronically being broke. However, a young man came in to ask Rabbi Shlomo for a blessing on his marriage, and Rabbi Shlomo asked why he needed such a thing. The young man had started to observe the Sabbath, and because of this he had lost his job, and the lack of money was starting to affect his marriage. Immediately, Rabbi Shlomo reached into his pocket, took out the \$2,700 in cash, and gave it to the young man.¹⁸

- Comedian Eddie Cantor was known for his fund-raising. A Jew, he raised much money for Israel, but he also raised much money for many other worthy projects. Groucho Marx knew him and his reputation for fund-raising. At the Hillcrest Club, Groucho heard that Mr. Cantor had been in for lunch. Groucho asked, "What time did Cantor say he was going to save the world?"¹⁹

- Writer Peg Bracken saw this sign over an alms box in an Aix-en-Provence chapel: "For the poor, the sick, the ashamed . . ."²⁰

Children

- When Lhamo Dhondrub was two years old, a series of tests was given to him to determine if he was the Dalai Lama, who was believed to be reincarnated each time he died. Some of the tests consisted of offering the baby the choice of a number of objects, only one of which had belonged to the previous incarnation of the Dalai Lama. Each time, the baby chose the object that had belonged to the previous incarnation of the Dalai Lama, although the other objects were often newer, more colorful, and shinier. In one test, the baby hesitated before choosing one of two nearly identical walking canes. The first cane had belonged to the previous Dalai Lama, but he had given it away as a gift. The second cane had belonged to the previous Dalai Lama, and he had used it until his death. The baby chose the second cane. As a result of the tests, the baby was declared the 14th Dalai Lama, and he was renamed Tenzin Gyatso.²¹

- Drought is often a problem in Uvalde, Texas, where Msgr. Vincent Fecher is a Catholic priest. One day, he saw a small child, and he asked her if she was praying for rain. Surprised, she said no, and Father Vincent told her, “You ought to. Jesus listens to little kids like you. So when you say prayers tonight, tell Him that people around here are starting to complain because He hasn’t sent them any rain so far this year.” The little girl promised Father Vincent that she would pray for rain. That night, rain fell — and it fell all the following day, and the day after that, and the day after that. Father Vincent looked at the rain, and he thought, “That darned kid. I had better find her and turn her off, before she drowns the whole lot of us.”²²

- A Sunday School teacher once told her class the story of the Prodigal Son, in which a bad son takes his inheritance while his father is still alive, leaves his family, wastes his inheritance, and driven by hunger, returns home, where his father rejoices to see him and calls for his servants to kill the Fatted Calf and prepare a welcoming feast for his long-lost son. The teacher asked her class this question: “But in the midst of all this joy and excitement, there was one to whom the Prodigal’s return meant not good times and laughter, but bitterness — one who hated the thought of attending the feast. Can anyone tell me who this was?” One child suggested, “The Fatted Calf?”²³

- When Ruthie, the nine-year-old daughter of Quaker humorist Tom Mullen, had a bike accident that resulted in six stitches in her chin, Mr. Mullen was surprised that she didn’t cry. He was further surprised when Ruthie told the doctor, “My daddy told me once when I was hurt not to be a crybaby!” Worried that he might have taught her the wrong thing, Mr. Mullen explained that it is OK to cry when you have an accident that requires six stitches. Ruthie listened, then told her father, “It’s all right, daddy. You can cry if you want to.”²⁴

- During church when he was a child, Stan Banker, who is now a Quaker preacher, used to play games whenever a sermon grew boring. For example, one game was “Quick Add.” He and a competitor would open their hymnals at random, then add the individual digits of the number of a hymn — whoever added the digits first (and accurately) won. Another game with hymnals was to pick a number at random, then see how many turns of the pages it took to open the hymnal at that numbered hymn.²⁵

- A Sunday School teacher once told her class the story of the Good Samaritan, in which a man is robbed, beaten, and left for dead. Some members of society see the man and pass him by, but a despised, lowly Samaritan takes him to an inn and pays the innkeeper to take care of him. The teacher then asked her class, “If you saw a person lying on the roadside all wounded and bleeding, what would you do?” A little girl answered, “I think I’d throw up.”²⁶

- In the Talmud appears the story of a King whose subjects came to offer him any gifts he might choose. The King replied that he already had possession of a kingdom, so ordinary gifts would be useless to him. However, he added, “If you would show love for me, attend to my words. I have children, and I cherish them dearly. If you would show your love for me, then go forth and serve my children.”²⁷

- During World War II, Germaine Belinne and Liliane Gaffney (who are mother and daughter) rescued over 30 Jews by hiding them or giving them false papers. Once, they hid a small Jewish boy named Willie. He was born in 1943, but because of the war, he wasn’t circumcised until 1946. After his circumcision, he pulled his pants down in front of Liliane and said, “Liliane, look! Isn’t it pretty now?”²⁸

- Will, the young son of Walter and Jamie Tevis, wanted to wear sneakers to church, but his mother told him that sneakers were not appropriate for church. When they went to church, two people sitting in the pew in front of them were wearing sneakers. Will pointed to the sneakers and said, “See.”²⁹
- Taking her young pupils to church, a Sister urged them to be quiet, saying, “Try to be so quiet that even Jesus will be surprised we’re coming.” The children were quiet and even walked on tippy-toes, but when they entered the church, one of the children shouted, “Surprise!”³⁰
- When the Dalai Lama was a child, he was fascinated by clocks and often took them apart in an attempt to discover how they worked. The few Tibetans who had clocks quickly learned to hide them when the Dalai Lama was near.³¹
- According to the Irish mother of 1976 Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Corrigan, a baby smiles for the first time because it sees angels.³²

Christmas

- Although usually joyous, Christmas can be a stressful time. In Philadelphia, the Old First Reformed Church, United Church of Christ, always has a Christmas crèche (a representation of the Christmas story with Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus lying in a manger) with live animals. One year, the crèche featured a couple of kids (baby goats). The kids were a big attraction, as they were lively and would sometimes climb up on the back of the cow and walk around. One night, however, they wrecked the crèche — the mannequins representing Joseph and Mary were toppled over, and some of the mannequins representing the shepherds even had their heads knocked off. The pastor of the church, Geneva M. Butz, surveyed the wreckage, then told a passerby, “Isn’t this how many of us feel on Christmas morning?”³³
- Sculptor Louise Nevelson once saw a patch of very bright yellow in a snowstorm. Intrigued, she followed the yellow, which turned out to be a shoeshine box. Impressed by the brightness of the shoeshine box, she offered to buy it from the elderly man who was carrying it, but the man declined, offering instead to show her “the most beautiful shoeshine box in the world.” Ms. Nevelson went with the man, who showed her a shoeshine box that he had created and decorated with flowers, beads, costume jewelry, buckles, bells, and even pretty doorknobs. She was dazzled by it, and so she took the man and his homemade shoeshine box to the Museum of Modern Art. Officials there were also dazzled by the work of art, and they displayed it as a Christmas exhibit in the museum lobby.³⁴
- Enrico Caruso enjoyed giving gifts. One day, Aimé Gerber, paymaster of the Metropolitan Opera Association, left a prized pair of cuff links on his desk. Unfortunately, they turned up missing. Fortunately, a few days later, on Christmas Eve, Mr. Caruso brought him two packages. In one package were the missing cuff links. In the other was a matching stickpin. Mr. Caruso explained, “I want to make sure I get the pattern right, so I swipe cuffs and all while you were away, to show to the jeweler!”³⁵
- In the old West, a man named Uncle Smokey Brown was having some Christmas fun and decided that he wanted to be hitched to a one-horse buggy. After inviting a few friends to ride in the buggy, he pulled it gently for a while, but then he ran away with it, smashing it against the corner of the court house, capsizing it, and dumping his friends on the ground. He paid the

damages for the buggy, but explained that it was his first time being hitched to a buggy and so of course he was skittish.³⁶

- During the holiday season, the American Civil Liberties Union tends to make itself unpopular by insisting on a separation of church and state in such things as Christmas decorations. At a time when the ACLU was insisting on the removal of a large star at the top of the Texas state capitol, governor Ann Richards said, “Oh, I’d hate to see that happen. This could be the only time we’ll ever have to get three wise men in that building.”³⁷

- During a children’s Christmas pageant, a small Joseph carrying a staff led the way down the center aisle of the church. Suddenly, the young Joseph stopped and used the staff to whack one of the parishioners on the head, then he continued down the aisle. Afterward, his horrified mother asked him why he had used the staff to hit the man. The young Joseph replied, “He was making funny faces at me.”³⁸

- In Vienna, opera singer Leo Slezak’s wife once was excited to see a piece of circa 1740 French rococo vitrine in a store window. Her husband told her to go ahead and buy it, but she worried that it was too expensive. Soon afterward, the piece disappeared from the shop window. That Christmas, she received the piece as a gift — Mr. Slezak had purchased it the day after she had mentioned it to him.³⁹

- Opera singer Leo Slezak’s wife received money each month to pay for the household accounts. Whenever Christmas or a birthday rolled around, Mr. Slezak would have his son steal her moneybox and its key and take them to him. He would put extra cash in the moneybox, then have his son return the moneybox and key to their proper places.⁴⁰

- In the family of Quaker humorist Tom Mullen, as part of the Christmas tradition the youngest child opened her presents first. The youngest child was Ruthie, who was not as materialistic as her siblings. For Ruthie a great part of the pleasure of Christmas lay in making her siblings wait a long time to open their presents.⁴¹

- During the Christmas season of 1889, Jane Addams discovered the seriousness of child labor when several little girls refused the candy she offered them. The little girls explained that they worked in a candy factory from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m., and they “could not bear the sight” of candy.⁴²

- On December 20, before the 1998 Nagano Olympic Games, the Canadian women’s hockey team lost 3-0 to the American team at the Three Nations Cup. Canadian coach Shannon Miller was so angry that she commanded her players not to drink alcohol during the Christmas holiday.⁴³

- In the 1940s, African-American singer Marian Anderson threw a big Christmas party where she bought dolls for all the girls and footballs for all the boys. She stored all of the leftover toys in the basement of her nephew James DePreist, so he never ran out of footballs.⁴⁴

- Bass Fyodor Chaliapin and tenor Beniamino Gigli became friends during an engagement in Vienna, where they often ate risotto in an Italian restaurant. Thereafter, they sent each other Christmas cards signed “Risotto.”⁴⁵

- The family of Quaker humorist Tom Mullen had a Christmas tradition of hanging a stocking and wrapping gifts (rubber bones and dog biscuits) for their pet dog, a mutt named Terry.⁴⁶

- When Ohio sportscaster Jimmy Crum was getting his start in radio in the early 1940s, he used to frequently play “The Christmas Song” by Nat King Cole during the summer.⁴⁷
- One Christmas, writer Donald Ogden Stewart gave his wife an all-expenses paid vacation in a maternity ward, to be used the following September 25.⁴⁸
- Deaf children sometimes have a difficult time communicating with Santa Claus — his bushy beard and moustache can make it impossible to lip read.⁴⁹

Chapter 2: From Church to Faith Healing

Church

- One way to protest segregationist businesses is to stop spending your money there. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. organized a boycott of the Montgomery, Alabama, bus company, people started walking. For those people who had to go long distances, car pools sprang up. Donations flowed in to the boycott movement, and Dr. King used the money to buy several station wagons to use for car-pooling — because of the righteousness of the boycott movement, these station wagons became known as “rolling churches.” When the bus company had been hurt in the pocketbook long enough, it ceased to segregate. Riding on the first desegregated bus together were Dr. King, Ralph David Abernathy, E.D. Nixon, and white minister Reverend Glenn Smiley.⁵⁰
- A. Monroe Aurand, Jr., used to attend an inter-denominational church meeting, where members of the Reformed church were asked to stand, then sit, and then the members of the Lutheran church were asked to stand. The chair of the meeting asked Mr. Aurand why he had stood up both times. Mr. Aurand said that he had stood up the first time because he had been born and raised in the Reformed church, and he had stood up the second time because after he had gotten married he had started to attend the nearest church and had become a Lutheran. The chair replied, “I guess it’s OK. I always had a hunch that one had to be reformed before he could become a Lutheran.”⁵¹
- Mexican artist Diego Rivera hardly ever went to church when he was a child. One day, he attended a church service with an aunt, where he saw people praying before statues. Not realizing that the statues were symbols, young Diego thought that the people believed that the statues themselves had power. He grew very angry, and he ran to the altar, then he started shouting, telling the worshippers that they were stupid. Several worshippers thought that he was possessed by the devil; eventually, his aunt was able to get Diego out of the church. (Much later, as an adult, Mr. Rivera announced that he was a Catholic.)⁵²
- Ludwig Bemelmans, author/illustrator of the Madeline series of children’s books, had an Uncle Joseph who was a priest. Very few things upset him, but late arrivals to church services did. At the end of services, when Uncle Joseph walked down the aisle and blessed worshippers with holy water, he used to take a big dip of water and douse anyone who had come to services late.⁵³
- For a long time Russian ice skater Ekaterina Gordeeva was afraid of churches, even while visiting Western countries, because while she was growing up, to believe in God was illegal. (Despite the law, many families hung a religious icon on a wall at home — but in a room where ordinary visitors were not admitted.)⁵⁴

Conversions

- According to the Quakers, speaking in unprogrammed meeting is not something that can be planned; instead, it is a matter of divine inspiration. At least once, remaining silent resulted in a convert. Richard Jordan was a renowned Quaker preacher. Living near him was William Williams, who wanted to hear Mr. Jordan speak. He attended several First-day meetings, but Mr. Jordan remained silent. Thinking that perhaps Mr. Jordan spoke only during weekday meetings, Mr. Williams attended several weekday meetings, but again Mr. Jordan remained silent. However, the meetings — even though Mr. Jordan remained silent — had an effect on Mr. Williams, and he became a Quaker. Only then did the Holy Spirit again move Mr. Jordan to speak during meetings.⁵⁵

- In 18th-century Germany, Suss Oppenheimer, the finance minister of the Duke of Württemberg, was sentenced to death after false accusations were made against him. He was told that he could save his life if he converted to Christianity, but although he was not an observant Jew, he replied, “I am a Jew and I will remain a Jew. I would not become a Christian even if I could become an emperor. Changing one’s religion is a matter for consideration by a free man; it is an evil thing for a prisoner.” He died while speaking the words of the *Sh’ma*.⁵⁶

Courage

- The first three Muslims honored by Israel for risking their lives to save the lives of Jews during the Holocaust were Mustafa Hardaga; his wife, Zayneda; and his father-in-law, Ahmed Sadik. In 1941, the Nazi army attacked Yugoslavia. Mr. Hardaga was a merchant in Sarajevo, and one of his friends was a Jewish factory owner named Yosef Kabilio. The Germans destroyed the apartment building where Mr. Kabilio and his family lived, so Mr. Hardaga invited the Kabilios to move into his house with him and his family. He kept them there, safe from the Nazis, until they were able to move into the Italian-controlled part of Yugoslavia, which was safer. Meanwhile, Mr. Sadik was doing the same thing for the Papo family, who were friends of the Kabilios. This kind of heroism was dangerous, for the Nazis killed people who helped the Jews. Mr. Sadik himself died in a concentration camp because he had been found guilty of helping Jews. When Sarajevo was torn apart by war in 1994, the Muslims were endangered, and the Israeli government brought Mrs. Hardaga, by then a widow, to safety in Israel.⁵⁷

- Muhammad Ali had courage out of the ring as well as in. After Mr. Ali converted to Islam, a fight promoter said that Mr. Ali would have to publicly renounce his faith or he would not be allowed to fight. Mr. Ali absolutely refused to do this, and the promoter was forced to back down.⁵⁸

Deafness

- The Englishman Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), a Baptist preacher, was a wit. Once, an irate woman cornered him and gave him a tongue-lashing, but he merely smiled and said, “Yes, thank you; I am quite well. I hope you are the same.” The woman continued to tongue-lash him, and this time Mr. Spurgeon said, “Yes, it does look rather as if it is going to rain; I think I had better be getting on.” Deceived by Mr. Spurgeon’s pretending to be deaf, the woman finally gave up and left him in peace, saying, “Bless the man! He’s as deaf as a post; what’s the use storming at him?”⁵⁹

- Ludwig Bemelmans, author/illustrator of the Madeline series of children's books, had an Uncle Joseph who was both deaf and a priest. Believers from far away traveled to him to confess because he would watch them until their lips had stopped moving, then say a prayer of absolution of sins.⁶⁰

- Deaf people sometimes are asked to dine at the homes of their hearing friends. In such cases, when prayers are said at the beginning of meals, the deaf person will bow her head but unobtrusively keep her eyes open during the prayer so she can tell when the prayer has ended.⁶¹

Death

- As Zen Master Chuang-tzu was dying, he learned that his disciples wanted to give him an expensive funeral. Summoning his disciples, he told them, "The heavens and the earth will serve me as a coffin and a coffin shell. The sun and moon and stars will decorate my bier. All creation will be at hand to witness the event. What more need I than these?" Hearing this, his disciples responded that they were afraid the birds would eat his body. Chuang-tzu replied, "Above the ground my flesh will feed the crows and kites; below the ground, the ants and cricket-moles. Why rob one to feed the other?" Smiling, he said, "I shall have Heaven and Earth for my coffin. The sun and moon will be the jade symbols hanging by my side. All the planets and constellations will shine as jewels around me. All beings will be present as mourners at the wake. What more could I need? Everything has been taken care of."⁶²

- Preacher Will D. Campbell does not suffer fools gladly. He once met an up-and-coming Southern Baptist, with whom he discussed a proposed expansion of the federal death penalty. Mr. Campbell asked him, "You do believe in the Commandment 'Thou shalt not kill,' don't you?" The man replied that he did. Mr. Campbell then asked him, "Surely you are opposed to this death penalty expansion?" The man replied, "Absolutely not. We sent a letter to the White House in support." Mr. Campbell then told the man, "You are a hypocrite and a jackass."⁶³

- Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl was able to help a man who was having a hard time recovering from the death of his beloved wife two years before. He asked the man what would have happened if he had died before his wife. The man replied that his wife would have suffered horribly. Dr. Frankl then pointed out that "such a suffering has been spared her, and it was you who have spared her this suffering — to be sure, at the price that now you have to survive and mourn her." Because of Dr. Frankl's words, the man was able to accept his suffering.⁶⁴

- Rabbi Rabinowitz, who was both poor and pious, lived above a grocery store in New York City. To let people know where he lived, a sign hung outside the grocery store. When the good rabbi died, he was given a decent funeral, but not enough money was available for a tombstone. Therefore, members of the rabbi's congregation used the sign from the grocery store as a gravestone: "Rabbi Rabinowitz is upstairs."⁶⁵

- When Wilson Mizner lay dying, a minister told him, "Part of my trade is giving such spiritual consolation as I may to those in extremity. Without offense, please let me say that if there is anything I can tell you in this hour or anything you'd care to say to me, I shall be only too happy to oblige." Mr. Mizner replied, "Much obliged, Padre, but why bother? I'll be seeing your boss in a few minutes."⁶⁶

- Cardinal de Polignac once told Marie Anne, the Marquise de Deffand, about the martyrdom of St. Denis, who after being beheaded, carried his head a full league to an area of Paris that is now named after him. The Cardinal sensed that she didn't believe him, so he asked, "Do you deny he carried his head a full league?" She replied, "Oh, no. I question only the first step."⁶⁷
- While on a trip to the Holy Land, Mark Twain visited the reputed grave of Adam. In *Innocents Abroad*, Mr. Twain writes, "There is no question that he is actually buried in the grave which is pointed out as his — there can be none — because it has never yet been proven that that grave is not the grave in which he is buried."⁶⁸
- A young man was dying, but he kept clinging stubbornly to life. A Sister asked why he was fighting so hard to live, and the young man replied, "I cannot die without asking forgiveness from my father." The young man's father arrived, and a couple of hours after being forgiven, the young man died peacefully.⁶⁹
- Thomas Hart Benton and John Caldwell Calhoun were enemies. After Mr. Calhoun died, Mr. Benton was asked, "I suppose, Tom, you won't pursue Calhoun beyond the grave?" Mr. Benton replied, "No, sir! When the Lord lays his hands on a man, sir, I take mine off."⁷⁰
- Alexander the Great once saw the Greek philosopher Diogenes looking at some human bones. "What are you looking for?" he asked. Diogenes replied, "Something that I cannot find — the difference between the bones of your father and those of his slaves."⁷¹
- As Rabbi Yisrael Salanter lay on his deathbed, he told the man who was watching over him that a dead body was nothing to fear. Even as he died, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter was considerate of other people's feelings and did not wish to frighten them.⁷²
- When Wilson Mizner lay dying, his nurse asked if he wanted a priest to administer the last rites. Mr. Mizner replied, "I want a priest, a rabbi, and a Protestant minister. I want to hedge my bets."⁷³
- While on his deathbed, Heinrich Heine was asked if God would forgive his sins. Mr. Heine replied with his last words: "Naturally, God will forgive me. That's His business."⁷⁴
- When the great 19th-century actor Richard Mansfield lay dying, his wife clasped his hand and said, "God is life." He smiled at her and said, "God is love."⁷⁵
- Lord Tenterden was an English judge. On his deathbed, he said, "Gentlemen of the jury, you will now consider your verdict."⁷⁶

Easter

- One Easter, United Methodist pastor Lawrence W. Althouse dressed as an angel to take part in an ecumenical dawn pageant. He was running late, so he drove his car faster than he should have, and a police officer pulled him over and asked if he knew how fast he was driving. Mr. Althouse replied that he didn't know, but he "really had to hurry because I've got to get to the resurrection on time." The police officer looked at Mr. Althouse's halo and wings, then let him go without giving him a speeding ticket.⁷⁷
- Early one Easter morning, humorist Frank Sullivan pushed this message under the apartment door of a friend: "Get up, lazy bones! I've been up for hours! J.C."⁷⁸

Education

- The rural Springport, Indiana, Middleroad Friends Meeting engaged in a worship exchange program with the inner-city Mount Zion Evangelical Missionary Free Baptist Temple. This led to some strange experiences. When the inner-city choir came to the Meeting, the somber-clad Quakers learned how to clap during what for them was normally a period of quiet worship. And when the female Quaker pastor preached in the inner-city church, she had to adjust to a congregation that repeated every phrase worth repeating — fortunately, lots of phrases were worth repeating. The worship exchange, which was definitely different for both churches, was also judged a success by both churches.⁷⁹

- Preacher Will D. Campbell ministers to people who need to be ministered to. He was very active in the Civil Rights Movement, but he also ministers to Ku Klux Klan members. For both blacks and whites (even racist whites), he performs weddings and funerals. Kris Kristofferson, who even before he became famous knew Mr. Campbell, once visited Mr. Campbell's office to ask him, "What the hell kind of place is this? You've got a preacher who marches with Dr. Martin Luther King and also ministers to members of the Ku Klux Klan. I'm a Rhodes scholar, and I don't understand that." Mr. Campbell replied, "Maybe the reason you don't understand is that you're a Rhodes scholar."⁸⁰

- A ruler came to Rumi and asked for spiritual instruction. Rumi replied, "I have heard that you have committed the Quran to memory. Is this true?" The ruler replied that it was true. Rumi then asked, "I have also heard that you have studied under a great teacher the deeds of God's great apostle, as reported in the Jami'u-l-Usul. Is this true?" Again, the ruler replied that it was true. Rumi then said, "You know the Word of God, and you know the deeds of God's great apostle. However, you do not obey the Word of God, and you do not follow the example of God's great apostle. How then can you expect to learn anything from me?"⁸¹

- Mulla Nasrudin wore a turban that indicated that he was a scholar. An illiterate man saw Nasrudin's turban and asked him to read a letter for him. Nasrudin looked at the letter, then told the man, "I cannot read it because the handwriting is so bad." The man became angry and replied, "But you are wearing a scholar's turban, so you should be able to read the writing." Nasrudin removed his turban, then handed it to the man, saying, "You wear the turban and see if you can read the writing."⁸²

- A young, arrogant Zen student named Yamaoka Tesshu visited Zen master Dokuon of Shokoku, hoping to impress him with his wisdom. Yamaoka Tesshu stood in front of Dokuon and began to lecture him, saying that nothing existed and all was emptiness. Dokuon listened for a while, then took his cane and hit Yamaoka Tesshu on top of his head. "Why did you hit me?" angrily screamed Yamaoka Tesshu. Dokuon calmly replied, "If nothing exists, then where did your anger come from?"⁸³

- Rabbi Joseph Katz of Polona met the Baal Shem Tov (the founder of Hassidism) in an unusual way. One day, Rabbi Katz waited in the synagogue for the worshippers to arrive. However, no one came. Startled, and worried, Rabbi Katz left to look for the worshippers. He found them in the marketplace, listening to the Baal Shem Tov teach. Rabbi Katz also listened, and he became a Hassid.⁸⁴

- Sometimes, students told meditation teacher Munindra that they wished to leave him in order to study other religious traditions or that they wished to leave him in order to study under

another teacher. Munindra always let them go without argument. When asked why he did so, he replied, “The Dharma doesn’t suffer from comparison.”⁸⁵

- The great 19th-century actor Joseph Jefferson believed in the description of the loving God in the New Testament as opposed to the description of the vengeful God in the Old Testament. As he was teaching his children about God, one of his sons said, “You never taught us to be afraid of you, Father.”⁸⁶

- A man went to his rabbi and said, “Please help me, rabbi. I have worked hard to understand and to please God, yet I am still an ordinary and ignorant person.” The rabbi replied, “You have learned that you are ordinary and ignorant. That is no small accomplishment.”⁸⁷

Enlightenment

- King Ming-su was unhappy, although he was very powerful, very rich, and without mercy. He asked the Buddhist priest Si-tien to help him find happiness, so Si-tien put something in his hands, then a short time later, he took it away. As long as King Ming-su had it in his hands, he was happy, but when it was taken away from him, he became unhappy again. He asked, “What was I holding in my hands that made me happy?” Si-tien answered, “The present moment.”⁸⁸

- A man questioned the Buddha, asking, “Are you God?” The Buddha replied, “No.” The man then asked the Buddha if he was the son of God. Again, the Buddha answered, “No.” Next the man asked the Buddha if he was a saint or a holy man. Again, the Buddha answered, “No.” Finally, the man asked, “What are you, then?” The Buddha answered, “I’m awake.”⁸⁹

Faith Healing

- Suzanne Farrell, a ballerina with the New York City Ballet, suffered from arthritis late in her career. Out of frustration, and because of the insistence of her mother, she went to a faith healer. Like the other sufferers, she sank to the floor when the faith healer touched her, and while she lay on the floor, she prayed to God to heal her. It didn’t work. When she got off the floor, her hip was still sore, and eventually she received a hip replacement operation.⁹⁰

- Conductor Jeffrey Tate suffers from spina bifida and kypho-scoliosis, which have caused his curved spine. His mother, of course, had hoped for an entirely healthy baby, and after he was born, she wondered why God had allowed this to happen. Unfortunately, a local vicar told her, “You know, if your faith were strong enough, Jeffrey would be made whole.” Of course, she did not return to that church until years afterward.⁹¹

Chapter 3: From Food to Money

Food

- Rabbi Yannai once met a young man who was dressed like a student, so he invited him to dine at his house. While eating, he questioned the young man about various religious topics, but discovered that the young man knew nothing about them. Eventually, Rabbi Yannai asked the young man to say a blessing over wine, but the young man said that was the duty of the host. Rabbi Yannai then asked the young man if he would repeat what he was told. The young man agreed, and Rabbi Yannai said, “A dog has eaten Yannai’s bread.” Angered by the insult, the young man grabbed Rabbi Yannai by the throat, and Rabbi Yannai asked, “What merit have

you that you have eaten at my table?” The young man replied, “Only this — that I have never gone out of my way to be churlish and that I have never seen two men quarreling whom I did not try to reconcile.” Rabbi Yannai cried, “Woe that I have called such a one as you a dog!”⁹²

- Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi decided during a famine to feed any hungry person who showed a good knowledge of the Scriptures. A stranger came to his door asking for food, but when Rabbi Judah asked if the man understood the Torah, the stranger replied that he had no knowledge of it, and so Rabbi Judah declined to feed him. After the stranger had departed, Rabbi Judah’s son wondered aloud whether the stranger had said that he had no knowledge of the Torah only because he had not wanted to use it as a means to get food. Rabbi Judah thought about his son’s remark, then investigated to find out who the stranger was. He discovered that the stranger was an important Torah scholar, Rabbi Jonathan ben Amram. Thereafter, Rabbi Judah fed anyone who was hungry.⁹³

- In 1949, Monsignor Angelo Roncalli (who was later to be Pope John XXIII) was surprised to hear a knock on his door. Because his cook wasn’t working that evening, he answered the door himself and saw Francisque Gay of the French diplomatic corps. Suddenly, Monsignor Roncalli remembered that he had invited Mr. Gay and a few other VIPs to dine with him, and so he and Mr. Gay went into the kitchen and quickly prepared the meal. That evening, Monsignor Roncalli served a *polenta*, explaining to his guests, “Back home they call it the ‘Lord’s dish.’ They call it that because you can always find a little cornmeal and a drop of olive oil in any house, no matter how poor it might be.”⁹⁴

- It’s not unusual for major league baseball players to criticize an umpire. American League umpire Red Jones got tired of being called “Meathead” by the Chicago White Sox bench, so he cleared the entire bench. The next day Mr. Jones was scheduled to umpire another White Sox game, but just before the game started the White Sox bench sang out in unison, “Oh, Mr. Umpire, you won’t have any trouble with us today.” Mr. Jones replied that he was happy to hear the news, then he asked them why they were so sure that they would leave him alone. The White Sox bench sang out, “We can’t call you ‘Meathead’ today because it’s Friday.”⁹⁵

- During the first nine days of the Jewish month of Av, Jews must not eat meat — this is a sign of mourning for the destruction of the temple. However, a sickly child appeared before Rabbi Hayyim of Brisk to ask if he might be permitted to eat meat during the fast days because of his illness. The rabbi replied, “Not only are you permitted to eat meat, but also you must tell your mother that she is permitted to eat meat.” When the rabbi’s followers later asked why he had said this, Rabbi Hayyim said, “A sickly child is a sign that his mother is also sick and needs nourishment.”⁹⁶

- Mulla Nasrudin attended a dinner party at which the host ordered his servant to bring all kinds of good dishes, including figs boiled in milk, which Nasrudin was particularly fond of. The servant brought all the dishes his master had ordered, but forgot the figs boiled in milk. After eating, the host asked Nasrudin to read from the Koran. Nasrudin turned to the passage beginning, “By the figs and the olives and Mount Sinai ...” and read “By the olives and Mount Sinai ...” The host interrupted, “You forgot the figs.” “No,” replied Nasrudin. “Your servant did.”⁹⁷

- Each Saturday evening, Rev. William G. Campbell of St. Savior’s Anglican Church in Vermilion, Alberta, prepares the unleavened bread for the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday. He always makes sure to set aside some of the crusts for his wife to use when she

prepares Caesar salads. Whenever Rev. Campbell is asked how he spends Saturday evenings, he replies, “I render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.”⁹⁸

- Because an aged Catholic priest had become deaf, people going to confession were accustomed to write out their sins on a piece of paper and pass the paper to him in the confessional. One day, a sinner slipped a piece of paper to the priest. The priest read the paper — “Fish sticks, two cans of beans, bread, milk” — then passed the note back to the sinner. The sinner looked at the note, then exclaimed, “Mother of God, I’ve left my sins at the grocery store.”⁹⁹

- At a visit to Pendle Hill, Bacon Evans was served a very small, very simple meal — watery soup and a few crackers — so that the money thus saved could be used to feed hungry people. The other people present at the dinner knew that Mr. Evans was a courteous man, and they wondered what he could find to compliment about so poor a meal. Mr. Evans rose to the occasion — he told his hosts, “That soup was salted just perfectly!”¹⁰⁰

- A baron went to visit Zen master Hakuin to learn what he taught. A peasant woman had just delivered some peasant food — millet cakes — to Hakuin, and he offered the baron some of the millet cakes. However, the baron was accustomed to rich food and could not bring himself to eat peasant food. Hakuin told the baron, “Force yourself to eat it; you will get to know the misery of the common folk. My teaching is nothing but this.”¹⁰¹

- According to an ancient story, Abraham invited a stranger into his tent for a meal. However, the stranger began to curse God, so Abraham quickly threw him out of the tent. That night, Abraham prayed, “Today, I defended Your Honor and Your Glory by sending away a blasphemer who cursed You.” God replied, “This man has cursed Me for 50 years, and yet I have given him food every day. Couldn’t you put up with him for one meal?”¹⁰²

- During a famine, Monobazus, the king of Adiabene, spent all his money to feed the hungry. His relatives told him that he was squandering his money, but he replied, “All of our ancestors stored up treasures of money for this world. I also stored up by using my money to feed the hungry, but I have stored up a treasure for my soul.”¹⁰³

- Dr. Louis Finkelstein, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, kept a strictly kosher diet. While in Paris, he and a group of rabbis ate only in kosher restaurants. On leaving Paris, Dr. Finkelstein joked, “I can’t understand all this fuss people make about French cooking. We have the same things at home.”¹⁰⁴

- Renaissance businessman Agostino Chigi was so wealthy that at a dinner he gave for Pope Julius II, servants brought in each course on solid gold plates. After everyone had been served the course, the servants did not wash the solid gold plates and reuse them — they threw them into the Tiber River.¹⁰⁵

- A Sunday School teacher once taught about Jesus’ feeding 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, then asked her class how Jesus could do this. One pupil replied, “My mommy makes ‘Clean the Refrigerator Soup’ with just a little bit of food; maybe that’s what Jesus did.”¹⁰⁶

- Pope John XXIII disliked eating alone, even though according to custom the Pope was supposed to eat alone. He once said, “I have read the Gospel over carefully without finding a

single passage which prescribes that one should eat alone. As we know, Jesus loved to eat in company.”¹⁰⁷

- The fourth pillar of Islam is to fast annually during the month of Ramadan. This focuses the mind of followers of Islam on Allah — and it encourages the giving of help to people who never have enough to eat in any month.¹⁰⁸

- When is the best time to eat? According to Mulla Nasrudin, “If you are rich, the best time to eat is when you are hungry. If you are poor, the best time to eat is when you can afford it.”¹⁰⁹

God

- While staying in Scotland, Peg Bracken spoke with a woman who had once regularly received telephone calls from God. The first time it happened, she was going through a time of trouble — her husband had recently died, her son had broken a leg, she was worried about insurance, etc. — and a telephone call came for her in a place she had not told anyone she would visit. She answered the telephone, and a voice said, “This is God.” Of course, she asked, “God who?” The voice answered, “Your good friend God. I just want you to know you’re doing fine. And don’t you go worrying about Ritchie’s leg now. It’s going to be as good as new.” For six months, she received these mysterious telephone calls at least once a week. She never recognized the voice, and she never totally believed that God was speaking to her, although she didn’t want to totally disbelieve either. Once, she started to ask the telephone operator to trace the call, then she changed her mind. After six months, the telephone calls stopped, but things were going well for her and her family by then.¹¹⁰

- Professional baseball teams have chapels that their players can attend. However, one season the Seattle Mariners weren’t playing well, and management wondered if religion was a bad thing for the players; after all, should a professional baseball team turn the other cheek and say “It’s God’s will” when it gets beat? Wouldn’t it be better if the players got angry when they lost? A football player made perhaps the best comment about this controversy. Seattle Seahawk Steve Largent was aware that Mariner management had made some bad trades, so he said, “It doesn’t surprise me that the Mariners want to get God out of their locker room. They’ve gotten rid of all their other good players, too.”¹¹¹

- Arturo Toscanini, the famous conductor, once explained to his musicians why he sometimes became so angry at them: “You see, God tells me how the music should sound, and then *you* come in the way.” Sometimes, rehearsals would go exactly right and the music sounded the way God had told Toscanini how it should sound. Once, after rehearsing Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, the musicians gave Toscanini a standing ovation, but he told the orchestra, “It isn’t me — it’s Beethoven.”¹¹²

- When Fran Capo was thinking about becoming a stand-up comedian, she asked God for a sign. She also stated that if God made becoming a stand-up comedian really easy, she would consider that to be a sign. Shortly afterward, she went to her school, where she saw a notice that said, “Comedy Auditions.” To make the sign from God even clearer, the auditions were to take place within two blocks of her house.¹¹³

- A woman dreamed that she walked into a new store and found God behind the counter. She asked, “What do you sell here?” God replied, “Everything your heart desires.” The woman replied, “That’s wonderful. I want peace of mind and love and wisdom and happiness and

freedom from fear. Not just for me. For everyone.” God smiled and then said, “I think you have Me wrong. We don’t sell fruits here. Only seeds.”¹¹⁴

- Some friends of Mark Twain wrote him a humorous letter for his birthday, but then discovered that they did not have his address, because he was so often globe-trotting. So the friends addressed the letter: “MARK TWAIN. LORD KNOWS WHERE.” A few months later, one of the friends in the group received a note from Mr. Twain: “HE DID.”¹¹⁵

- In 1976, the Missionaries of Charity opened a home in a very poor section outside of Mexico City. The Sisters were surprised by the requests of the poor people they were there to serve. Despite their poverty, these impoverished people did not ask for food, medicine, or clothing. Instead, they said, “Sisters, talk to us about God.”¹¹⁶

Good Deeds

- Rabbi Israel Salanter went to the synagogue to observe the Yahrzeit (one-year death anniversary) of his father and to recite the mourner’s Kaddish. Also at the synagogue was a man present to observe the Yahrzeit of his daughter. Because Rabbi Israel was mourning the death of his father, he was given precedence in reciting Kaddish, but he saw how sad was the man who had suffered the loss of his daughter. At the time when the mourner’s Kaddish was to be recited, Rabbi Israel allowed the other man to recite it, thus giving up his right of precedence. Was Rabbi Israel showing disrespect for the soul of his own father? No. Rabbi Israel said later, “I have indeed caused my father’s soul to perform a *Gemiluth Hessed* — a deed of kindness — towards the soul of that poor childless woman (this man’s departed child, his daughter). A deed of this nature carries through it more for the repose of the departed soul of my father than a Kaddish.”¹¹⁷

- Enrico Caruso could be very generous. One day, he visited the Metropolitan Opera to try on some new wigs for his costumes. While he was there, a man brought Mr. Caruso some of his non-Metropolitan Opera earnings, placing several notes for \$500 each on a counter. The man in charge of the wigs was very impressed, saying, “Such a lot of them! Why, if I had only one, I could take my wife home to Europe for all summer, to see our folks!” The man in charge of the wigs went about his duties, then left. He was surprised later to find \$500 in one of his pockets, and he rushed back to Mr. Caruso to apologize and to say that he had no idea how the money had gotten into his pocket. Mr. Caruso explained, “I put it in while you were so busy with the wig. You said you could take the missus to Europe if you had one of those bills. So now you have it and you shall go!”¹¹⁸

- Is it ever a good thing to pretend that God may not exist? Yes. Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov worried about people who saw someone in distress, then said a prayer for the distressed person and walked away, leaving it to God to take care of the distressed person. Therefore, whenever the good rabbi saw someone in distress, he would help that person, pretending that God did not exist and that only human beings could help that person. For himself, however, he had faith that God would help him. (The good rabbi was well aware that having faith in God does not mean that we have no obligation to help distressed people.)¹¹⁹

- One of the things you learn from a liberal arts education is that people are capable of great evil and they are also capable of great good. In telling which people will do what, you can’t apply criteria of sex, race, religion, nationality, or cultural origin. Instead, as Viktor Frankl points out in *Man’s Search for Meaning*, only two “races” of men exist: the race of decent men,

and the race of indecent men (the term “men” here includes both sexes). Even among the World War II concentration camp guards, a few were capable of at least small kindnesses.¹²⁰

- Late in her life, dancer Josephine Baker fell on hard times and lost her home. Coming to the rescue was Grace Kelly, aka Princess Grace of Monaco. She offered Ms. Baker an apartment in Monaco, and Ms. Baker was based there for the rest of her life. (Fortunately, Ms. Baker died only after a triumphant return to Paris with a gala benefit titled *Josephine* for Monaco’s Red Cross.)¹²¹

- Tenor Enrico Caruso was capable of great kindness. He once saw a beggar shivering outside his hotel, so he gave him his fur-lined coat. Mr. Caruso owned many clothes, so many that people asked why he had such a large wardrobe. To such inquiries, he replied, “Two reasons. First reason, I like. Second reason, other people like. Also, I give to people who ask.”¹²²

- As a missionary to coal miners, Vincent van Gogh gave away his good clothing to the poor and dressed in shabby clothing. One day, a baker’s wife with whom he had boarded saw him and asked why he had given away his good clothing. Mr. van Gogh replied, “I am a friend of the poor like Jesus was.” Not impressed, the baker’s wife told him, “You are no longer normal.”¹²³

- During the Holocaust, Oskar Schindler saved over 1,000 Jews who worked for him. After the war was over, he said, “I knew the people who worked for me. When you know people, you have to behave towards them like human beings.” When he died, he was buried, as he had requested, in a Catholic cemetery in Jerusalem.¹²⁴

Happiness

- According to biblical law, if a farmer forgets any sheaves of grain and leaves them in the field at harvest time, the farmer cannot gather them. Instead, they must be left to be gathered by the poor and by strangers. In the *Tosephta Pe-ah* 3:18 is the story of a man who once forgot some sheaves of grain and left them in the field. When he remembered the sheaves, he was very happy and ordered his son, “Go and sacrifice a bull as a burnt offering, and another bull as a peace offering.” His son asked why he was so happy fulfilling the commandment regarding the forgotten sheaves — even happier than when fulfilling all the other commandments. The father replied, “The All-Present One gave us all the other commandments of the Torah, so that we obey them intentionally. But this is a commandment that we can fulfill only unwittingly. For if we had intentionally left that measure of wheat on the field, we would have been unable to observe this particular commandment.”¹²⁵

- Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk could be blunt when he felt that bluntness was needed. A miser once asked him, “Do you think that I shall enjoy the world to come?” Rabbi Mendel replied, “You do not enjoy this world for which you have toiled. How can you expect to enjoy the world to come for which you have done nothing?”¹²⁶

Heaven and Hell

- A homophobe once said to lesbian comedian Judy Carter, “All homosexuals are going to hell.” She replied, “So, people like Michelangelo; Leonardo da Vinci; James I of England, who commissioned the King James translation of the Bible; Mary, Queen of Scotland, England, and Ireland; and my homosexual brothers and sisters with the gifts of compassion, faith, love, and

understanding are going to hell. And people who judge, hate, kill, and despise are going to heaven. Help me on this one ... where do I want to go?"¹²⁷

- Occasionally, politicians are given introductions that make them appear to be saints. Brooks Hays once said to one such introducer: "If you do not go to heaven for charity, you will certainly go somewhere else for exaggeration or downright prevarication." Of another such introducer, Mr. Hays said, "I hope that the Lord will forgive this man even as He does heathens, atheists, used-car salesmen, and fishermen."¹²⁸

- A man died and went to the Pearly Gates, where he demanded to be let in to Heaven. The angel at the Gates asked what he had done for his fellow man on earth, and the man said that on four separate occasions he had given a quarter to a beggar. The angel asked St. Peter what should be done with the man. St. Peter replied, "Give him his dollar back and tell him to go to Hell."¹²⁹

- Sir Winston Churchill was the Prime Minister of England during World War II, and a major reason why Adolf Hitler and his Nazis were defeated. To relax, Sir Winston used to paint, and today his paintings sell for as much as \$245,000. He once said that he planned "to spend a considerable part of my first million years" in Heaven painting.¹³⁰

- When Calvin Coolidge was Governor of Massachusetts, a couple of state legislators got into an argument, and one legislator told the other to go to Hell. The insulted legislator complained to Governor Coolidge, who told him, "I've looked up the law, and you don't have to go there."¹³¹

Language

- Quaker weddings can be tough, especially on people who are unaccustomed to speaking in public, since the groom and bride are supposed to face the members of the Meeting and recite their vows without aid from other people. One Quaker bride was so nervous that she promised to be "a loving and faithful husband." And even though James Hogge, who later became a Member of Parliament, was accustomed to speaking in public, he completely forgot his vows and got through the wedding ceremony only with the help of his bride, who whispered the words to him and encouraged him with a kiss.¹³²

- Civil rights lawyer Maury Maverick, Jr., once represented atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair. When he first saw her, she had been in jail for three days, so she was very glad to see him and inadvertently said something funny. Mr. Maverick passed the remark on the reporters, and the next day a morning paper had a big headline: "Atheist Tells Maverick, Thank God the ACLU Is Here!"¹³³

- Language can be ambiguous. While a priest was giving a homily in a Catholic school, a little boy started talking. Not wanting the homily to be interrupted, a Sister asked one of her young pupils, "Go up there and tell him to stop talking." The young pupil walked past the talking boy, went up to the priest who was giving the homily, and said, "Sister said you should stop talking."¹³⁴

- In East Germany, Peter Mann wanted to become closer to his Jewish roots, but religion was suppressed in that country. He finally found a professor who could teach him Hebrew, but the professor first made him sign a statement saying that he was not learning Hebrew for religious purposes. His learning Hebrew had a positive effect on him, and he began to pray every day.¹³⁵

- When soon-to-be-artist Vincent van Gogh started an evangelical course, he labored under the handicap of not wanting to learn Hebrew or Greek. During one lesson, when he was asked if a word was in the nominative or the dative case, he answered, “Sir, I really don’t care.”¹³⁶

Letters

- In the late 1950s, a mentally ill black woman stabbed civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., sending him to the hospital, where doctors saved his life by removing a rib and part of his breastbone. The injury was so serious that his doctor told him, “If you had sneezed, you would have drowned in your own blood.” Many letters came for Dr. King. One letter that meant a lot to him said this: “I am a ninth-grade student at the White Plains High School. While it shouldn’t matter, I would like to mention that I am a white girl. I read in the paper of your misfortune and of your suffering. And I read that if you sneezed you would have died. I’m simply writing you to say that I’m glad you didn’t sneeze.”¹³⁷

- Country comedian Jerry Clower got a lot of fan mail. Looking through a stack of mail one time, he came across a letter that had his own return address on it. He opened it, saw that it was from Sue, his daughter, and read, “Dear Mother and Daddy, thank you for being such fine Christian parents. You show me how I ought to act. Love, Sue.”¹³⁸

Mass

- The Chrism Mass was once held in the small town of Uvalde, Texas, because its location made it fairly easy for other priests to travel to it. The church’s priest, Msgr. Vincent Fecher, wanted to have a good turnout, so he talked it up from the pulpit and filled the church with the children’s choir. The Mass was a grand success, and to Father Vincent’s surprise the Chrism Mass was held at Uvalde again the following year. This time, the children were on vacation, so there was no captive audience, but Father Vincent once again talked up the event from the pulpit, and once again the church was filled. Father Vincent’s superior attended the Mass, and he remarked on how full the church was. Father Vincent replied, “Oh, it’s always like that.” He also says that when he made that remark, “My Guardian Angel gasped indignantly, but I had a feeling that the Lord only smiled.” (By the way, the Chrism Mass was held a third year in a row in Uvalde, and the church was filled yet again.)¹³⁹

- Composer Gioacchino Rossini had a sense of humor. In 1863, he wrote his “*Petite Messe Solennelle* (Little Solemn Mass)” for “12 singers of three sexes.” The Mass is not little, and it is not solemn. His wife, Olympe Pelissier, also had a sense of humor. After Hector Berlioz disrespected one of her husband’s operas, she sent Mr. Berlioz a pair of donkey ears.¹⁴⁰

Meditation

- William Baker Evans, a Quaker, used to set aside time early each morning for meditation and prayer. Unfortunately, for many people, such a regimen can lead to smugness. Fortunately, Mr. Evans was aware of this tendency. He once said, “The trouble with getting up early was that it made me smug all morning and sleepy all afternoon.”¹⁴¹

- Why practice meditation? When Munindra was asked that, his students listened closely to his answer, hoping to hear something profound. Munindra answered, “I practice meditation to notice the small purple flowers growing by the roadside, which I otherwise might miss.”¹⁴²

Money

- In Kahilischock lived a Jew named Zalmon Schlim, who became ill while traveling in a distant city. Knowing that he was dying, he wanted to give 10,000 rubles to another Jew from Kahilischock, Feivel Harzbrecher, to take home and give to his wife. However, Feivel was unwilling to take the money to Kahilischock, even for a commission. Desperate to get at least some money to his wife, Zalmon finally told him, “Since I am dying, take the 10,000 rubles and give my wife as much of it as you want.” Feivel then accepted the money, and after Zalmon had died, traveled to Kahilischock, found Zalmon’s wife, and told her, “Your husband gave me 10,000 rubles, with the understanding that I should give you as much of it as I want — here I give you 1,000 rubles.” Of course, the widow did not think that 1,000 rubles was a fair amount, so she appealed for help to Rabbi Mendele Chacham. The rabbi heard the case, then ordered Feivel to give the widow 9,000 rubles, explaining, “You were instructed to give to Zalmon’s wife ‘as much of the 10,000 rubles as you want’ — and how much do you want? You want 9,000 rubles, so this is the amount you will have to give to her.”¹⁴³

- Rabbi Eizik, son of Rabbi Yekel of Cracow, Poland, had a dream telling him to undertake a long journey to Prague, then dig up a treasure, which was buried under a bridge leading to the king’s palace. After he had this dream for the third time, Eizik, son of Yekel, went to Prague and located the bridge. However, the bridge was heavily guarded and he was afraid to dig under it, so he looked at the bridge day after day. The captain of the guard noticed him and asked what he wanted, so he told him. The captain then laughed at him, saying that the dream was ridiculous, and that he had had a similar dream — his dream had told him to go to Cracow and dig up a treasure buried under the stove of Eizik, son of Yekel. Eizik went back home to Cracow, dug up the treasure under his stove, then used it to build a House of Prayer.¹⁴⁴

- A wealthy man was dying, so he made out a will, leaving his books to a *yeshivah* (theological college) and his money to his children. The Chofetz Chayim suggested that he make a different will, leaving his money to the *yeshivah* and his books to his children. He explained, “The *yeshivah* already has books, and by your leaving your books to your children, they may decide to read them. On the other hand, your children have the ability to earn money, as you did. The students of the *yeshivah*, however, are engaged in study and have no head for business.”¹⁴⁵

- The sons of Texas preacher Edwin Porter worked while they were growing up, something that Rev. Porter encouraged because idle hands can be tempted to do the work of the Devil. Although the money the boys earned was theirs, Rev. Porter kept an eye on it and on how his boys spent it. Whenever he saw that one of his sons was tempted to spend money on something that Rev. Porter — and in his opinion, God — didn’t approve of, he would borrow the money until the temptation had passed, then repay the money with interest.¹⁴⁶

- In York, England, Quakers sometimes passed through a Toll Bar on their way to the Friends Meeting House to worship. The Toll Bar was free to preachers going to church to preach, but Quakers do not preach unless called by the spirit to preach. Whenever the Toll Bar attendant asked the Quakers if they were going to preach, they replied, “We are going to hold a Quaker Meeting; it is likely that we shall preach, but if we do not we will tell thee on our return and pay toll both ways.”¹⁴⁷

- The spiritual leader Ho Chi Zen (a figment of a satiric mind) used to accept students. Outside the door of the room where he taught, he left a basket and a sign that said, “If you wish to donate, do so before class.” He always watched his students to see who donated money and

who did not. If any student donated money three classes in a row, he kicked that student out for being excessively gullible.¹⁴⁸

- A man's donkey was dying, so he vowed to Allah that if Allah saved the donkey's life he would sell it for one dollar. The donkey did get well, so the man brought the donkey into the marketplace, along with a cat which he set on the donkey's back. "For sale. A donkey for one dollar," shouted the man, "provided that you also buy my cat, whose price is \$1,000."¹⁴⁹
- English Prime Minister William Gladstone, an Anglican, once spoke with Father Healy and criticized an Italian priest who claimed to be able to rescue souls from Purgatory — for 25 lire per soul. Father Healy, however, was unwilling for his religion to be criticized, so he replied, "Tell me of any other church, Mr. Gladstone, that would do it at that price."¹⁵⁰
- An old Scotsman was once approached by a Salvation Army lass who held out her tambourine to him and asked, "Will you give a shilling to the Lord?" The old Scotsman asked how old she was, and she said 16. He then said, "Well, I'm 79, and I'll be seeing the Lord before you will, so I'll just hand Him the shilling myself."¹⁵¹
- A new Sunday School teacher named Rolf E. Aaseng once got so annoyed at a church piano that wouldn't play E-flat that he ordered the church superintendent to have it fixed — "even if I have to pay for it myself." The superintendent sent him the bill, and he did have to pay for it himself.¹⁵²

Chapter 4: From Music to Prejudice

Music

- During the 1930s, African-American contralto Marian Anderson sang several spirituals and other religious songs in the USSR, where religion was outlawed. Therefore, she was not surprised that the interpreter announcing her program tried to play down their religious nature. For example, the interpreter would say that Ms. Anderson was going to sing "an aria by Schubert" instead of saying that she would sing Schubert's "Ave Maria." However, the audience knew exactly what she was singing, and when they wanted an encore, they shouted out religious titles such as "Ave Maria," not "an aria by Schubert."¹⁵³
- During a rehearsal of "For Unto Us a Child is Born," sung by the Royal Choral Society, Sir Malcolm Sargent was displeased. He admonished the singers, "Just a little more reverence, please — and not quite so much astonishment."¹⁵⁴

Names

- When Gonxha (Agnes) Bojaxhiu announced her intention to become a nun, Lazar, her brother, who was a soldier, reacted with disbelief because his sister was a vivacious young woman. But Gonxha replied that Lazar was proud to be serving a king who ruled over a few million subjects, while she would be serving the King of the entire world: God. Later, Gonxha became better known as Mother Teresa.¹⁵⁵
- A warrior appeared before Mulla Nasrudin to ask for a honorific name. The warrior said, "Mulla, all the great warriors of the past have had honorific titles with the name 'God' in them;

for example, ‘God-Gifted’ and ‘God-Accepted.’ What name can you give to me?” Nasrudin replied, “God forbid.”¹⁵⁶

- Before a United States men’s ice skating championship competition, Evelyn Kramer, a coach from Lake Arrowhead, California, told skater Michael Weiss, “Hey, Michael, good luck. You could be our first Jewish national singles champion.” Mr. Weiss replied, “Uh, I’m Methodist.”¹⁵⁷

- At Ferney, Voltaire built a church. This inscription appeared over its porch: *Dei Erexit Voltaire*. Translated: “Voltaire Erected [This] to God.” Visitors used to look at the inscription and remark, “Two great names.”¹⁵⁸

New Year’s Eve

- Buddhists believe that there are exactly 108 sins, and at Buddhist temples on New Year’s Eve they hit a bell exactly 108 times, always waiting for the sound of one bong to die down before they hit the bell again.¹⁵⁹

Parents

- When Jay Leno was growing up, one firm rule he had to follow was to never take the Lord’s name in vain. His mother used to tell him, “People might steal money because they have to eat. Or maybe they get into a fight to protect somebody, then they go to prison. But there’s no reason to ever take the Lord’s name in vain.” After Jay grew up and became a famous comedian, he and his father were watching a fight between Roberto Duran and Sugar Ray Leonard on television. A fighter was hit hard and fell — and in the excitement Jay took the Lord’s name in vain. His mother heard him, walked into the TV room, and BONK — she hit him on the side of his head with a pot. Then she told Jay, “You’ll not say that in this house!” His father agreed with his mother.¹⁶⁰

- Someone once questioned Rabbi Joseph Telushkin’s assertion that early Judaism promoted strong parent-child relationships. The questioner asked, “Isn’t it true that God’s first commandment to Abraham was that he leave his father’s home?” Rabbi Telushkin replied, “It is true. But he was 75 at the time; he was entitled.”¹⁶¹

Passover

- During Passover Jews eat unleavened bread because their ancestors didn’t have time to cook leavened bread as they fled out of Egypt. Rabbi Israel Lipkin Salanter usually supervised the cooking of the unleavened bread (matzos) for Passover; however, one Passover eve he was too ill to go to the bakery to supervise the cooking, so two of his pupils offered to go in his place. Before leaving, they asked the rabbi if there was anything special that they should do while supervising. The rabbi answered, “Yes. See to it that the woman who does the mixing of the ingredients is paid well for her work — she is a poor widow.”¹⁶²

- In 1978, refusenik Yosef Mendelovich celebrated Passover in a Soviet prison. The candle was made of bits of string and a few drops of oil. The bitter herbs — *maror* — appeared in the form of mustard that had originally been intended as a therapeutic plaster for a back problem. The greenery was supplied by an onion bulb that had been soaked in water. The wine came from raisins in water. The most important item — the Haggadah — Mr. Mendelovich had previously

copied into a small notebook before giving the original copy to another refusenik — Anatoly Sharansky.¹⁶³

- A rabbi once preached a sermon about rich people giving to poor people for Passover. After giving the sermon, the rabbi felt that the sermon was only partially successful — the poor were ready to receive, but the rich were not ready to give.¹⁶⁴

Patience

- A Sufi teacher spoke about the virtue of patience. As he spoke, a scorpion stung his foot repeatedly. His followers eventually noticed the scorpion and asked the teacher why he had not moved his foot away from it. The teacher replied, “I was discussing the virtue of patience. I could hardly have spoken about patience without also setting an example of patience. I would have been ashamed before God.”¹⁶⁵

- At Ferney, Voltaire played a daily game of chess with Father Adam, a Jesuit. One hopes that the father was a patient man, for when Voltaire was losing, he would overturn the board, playing the game to the end only when he was winning.¹⁶⁶

Persistence

- A man named Pen-ju came to the Buddhist priest Si-tien and said, “In my life I have tried to accomplish something remarkable, but I have failed. Can you teach me how to do something remarkable?” Si-tien agreed to teach Pen-ju, and the first task he set for him was to make a pair of sandals out of straw. After many attempts, Pen-ju succeeded in making a pair of sandals that satisfied Si-tien. Next, Si-tien told Pen-ju to stand in the mud, then walk out of the mud, and clean his sandals. In addition, he told Pen-ju to do this over and over again without stopping, except for meals and sleep. Pen-ju complained that this work was completely unnecessary, but Si-tien said that unless he did it, he would teach him nothing. After several weeks had passed, during which time Pen-ju had cleaned his sandals thousands of times, Si-tien told Pen-ju, “Before, you were unable to accomplish anything remarkable because you lacked persistence. Now you have learned persistence, so go out into the World, apply your persistence to an important task, and accomplish something remarkable.”¹⁶⁷

- Hong-su asked the Buddhist priest Si-tien, “Can you teach me how to be more persistent when confronted with a difficult task?” Si-tien replied, “Find a four-leaf clover, then bring it to me.” Hong-su searched two hours for a four-leaf clover, but he was unable to find one, so he returned to Si-tien and said, “I can’t find a four-leaf clover.” Si-tien replied, “Find a four-leaf clover, then bring it to me.” Hong-su searched the rest of the day for a four-leaf clover, but he was unable to find one, so he returned to Si-tien and said, “I can’t find a four-leaf clover.” Si-tien replied, “Find a four-leaf clover, then bring it to me.” After searching for two days, Hong-su found a four-leaf clover, and he brought it to Si-tien and asked, “Now can you teach me how to be more persistent when confronted with a difficult task?” Si-tien replied, “Bring me another four-leaf clover.”¹⁶⁸

Politics

- Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina was active back when Joe McCarthy was making it hot for anyone who believed in the Bill of Rights. He once rose in the Senate and told a story about his Uncle Ephraim going to church although he was nearly crippled by arthritis. The preacher asked various members of the church, “What has the Lord done for you?” All of the members

described various good things the Lord had done for them, but when the preacher asked Uncle Ephraim, he replied, “Brother, the Lord has mighty near ruind me.” Senator Ervin then said, “And that is what Senator McCarthy has done to the Senate.”¹⁶⁹

- Hillaire Belloc was noted for his honesty. He was warned when he was running for a seat in the House of Commons that being a Catholic was a drawback and if he wanted to be elected, he should keep his religion a secret. Instead, he told the voters, “I am a Catholic. I go to Mass every day.” Taking a rosary from his pocket, he continued, “As far as possible, I kneel down and tell these beads every day. If you reject me on account of my religion, I shall thank God that He has spared me the indignity of being your representative.” The voters did not reject him — they elected him.¹⁷⁰

Practical Jokes

- Knowing that yawns are infectious, a group of Quaker girls once played a joke at meetings while at school. Whenever a person of authority — a teacher, an elder, a minister, an overseer — looked at them, one or more of them would yawn. Then they watched with delight as the yawn passed from one person of authority to another. The girls felt that there was nothing wrong with this game, as they played it only when a meeting went past its normal closing time.¹⁷¹

- Thomas Aquinas was a huge man, both physically and mentally. Once a brother monk decided to play a joke on him. The monk looked out a window and said, “Come quickly — look at the cow flying.” Aquinas jumped up and looked out the window — and saw nothing, of course. The monk began to laugh, but Aquinas told him, “I thought it more likely that a cow should fly than that a monk would lie.”¹⁷²

- Some gurus are also rascals. One rascal guru got great amusement from his more gullible students — if any of them asked how he had become so wise, he used to tell them that he was thousands of years old. One especially gullible student believed this and said, “It’s amazing how human you are.” The rascal guru replied, “After a thousand years or so, you go native.”¹⁷³

Prayer

- Rabbi Eliezer understood the proper length of a prayer. A man once prayed for a long time, and some people complained, “What a prayer elaborator this man is!” But Rabbi Eliezer replied, “Has he really prayed longer than Master Moses, of whom Deuteronomy 9:25 reports that he once prayed for 40 days and 40 nights?” Then another person prayed for a very short time. This time, some people complained, “What a prayer abbreviator this man is!” But Rabbi Eliezer replied, “Has he really offered a shorter prayer than our Master Moses, of whom Numbers 12:13 reports that he once offered a prayer of only five words, ‘O God, pray heal her’?”¹⁷⁴

- Christian author Judy Esway was feeling very discouraged, and she prayed, saying that she wished Jesus would walk into her living room, sit down in the striped chair, and say to her, “Judy, why don’t you come over here and sit on my lap and tell me all your problems?” Just then, her husband walked into the living room, sat down in the striped chair, and said to her, “Judy, why don’t you come over here and sit on my lap and tell me all your problems?” Ms. Esway writes, “Thank you for answering my prayer, God. And thank you for my husband, who follows the prompting of your Holy Spirit.”¹⁷⁵

- During family prayers, some friends of country comedian Jerry Clower took turns praying. When it was the four-year-old's turn to pray, he started praying for Mr. Clower's family. He said, "Dear Lord, God bless Mr. Clower, God bless Ray, God bless Amy, God bless Sue, and God bless" Here he couldn't think of the name of Mr. Clower's wife, so he started all over again — and still couldn't remember her name. He tried to say the prayer a third time, but even then he couldn't remember her name, so he finished the prayer with, "Lord, please bless that woman what lives with Mr. Clower."¹⁷⁶

- Just before performing on the balance beam during the individual apparatus competition at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, gymnast Shannon Miller said this prayer: "God, I'm in your hands. I'm going to do the very best I can. I know I wouldn't be here if I wasn't supposed to be — if I wasn't capable of doing this." She did her very best on the balance beam — and she won her second gold medal of the games.¹⁷⁷

- In Eastern Europe, many Jewish prayers showed a familiarity with God: 1) "Dear God, you help complete strangers — so why not us?" 2) "Lord in Heaven, blessed be Thy Name, we know You love the poor — so why do You help the rich?" 3) "Dear God, all we ask of You is a bit of bread to stave off our hunger and some rags to keep out the cold — the whiskey we'll buy ourselves."¹⁷⁸

- As a boy, Richard Goode practiced at the piano, playing of course the same pieces over and over. A neighbor, Rabbi Ginzburg, once asked Richard's father why his son did this. Mr. Goode replied, "Rabbi, haven't you been saying the same prayers over and over since you were a child?" Afterward, Rabbi Ginzburg often could be heard humming to himself Richard's piano music.¹⁷⁹

- As choreographer George Balanchine lay dying in a hospital, ballerina Suzanne Farrell stopped by to see him. Mr. Balanchine knew that Ms. Farrell's knees had been bothering her, so he asked how her knees were. She said, "My knees are great; I could do anything." Mr. Balanchine smiled and said, "Oh, I'm so glad, because I've been lying here praying for your knees."¹⁸⁰

- Mark Twain once stayed over at the house of a friend. The next morning, he was seen standing at the top of the staircase. His friend said, "What's the matter? Why not come on down?" Mr. Twain asked, "Family prayers over yet?" Hearing that they were over, Mr. Twain said, "All right then, I'll come down."¹⁸¹

- Dolores Curran says that when you teach young children to pray, you should be prepared to hear some strange prayers, such as, "And Jesus, please hit Danny for me because he took my Big Wheel."¹⁸²

- Peg Bracken's grandmother occasionally ended her prayers by saying: "And if You'll just tend to Your business, Lord, I'll tend to mine."¹⁸³

Preachers

- Reb Yaakov Krantz was a traveling preacher who was very popular and very well paid. Another preacher, who was envious of Reb Krantz' success, complained to him, "You and I are both preachers. You and I both borrow ideas from others. When you preach, the synagogue is crowded and you are handsomely rewarded, whereas I have to speak to practically bare walls, and I hardly make my expenses. Tell me, what is the secret of your success?" Reb Krantz

replied, “You and I can be compared to two sorts of thieves. One steals a piece of leather and sells it for one ruble. The other takes the leather, makes a pair of fine shoes out of it, and sells them for 10 rubles. The first is a common thief; the second, an artist.”¹⁸⁴

- A young clergyman was nervous about giving his sermon, so he asked an older clergyman for advice. The older clergyman said that he had suffered from the same problem, and he advised the young clergyman to take a pitcher of martinis to the pulpit with him. The martinis were clear like water, and the young clergyman could take a sip whenever he felt nervous. The young clergyman accepted the advice, gave his sermon, then asked the older clergyman to critique his performance in the pulpit. The older clergyman said, “I have three comments to make. First, don’t put olives in the pitcher. Second, don’t gulp — sip. Third, Daniel slew the lion — he didn’t beat the hell out of it.”¹⁸⁵

- Elton Trueblood, a Quaker, was committed to equality in ministry. One day, he was invited to preach at a large university. He met with other clergy before the service, and eventually the host pastor told everyone that it was time for them to put on robes and clerical vestments. Mr. Trueblood asked, “Is it required that we wear robes in religious settings?” The host pastor, somewhat flustered, said that it was not required, and Mr. Trueblood replied, “In that case, I’ll be glad to do so.”¹⁸⁶

- A friend was driving country comedian Jerry Clower around Savannah, Georgia, when the friend said, “John Wesley used to be pastor of that church.” Mr. Clower immediately said, “Stop,” and they went into that church. About the experience, Mr. Clower says, “I felt a tingling all over. Here’s a man that put one foot on Europe and one foot on the United States and preached and started Methodism.”¹⁸⁷

- At a New England Yearly Meeting, two very educated Quakers by the names of Rufus Jones and Augustus T. Murra, spoke. However, one elderly Quaker worried that the learned discourse of the two gentlemen was way over the heads of their audience. After the gentlemen had spoken, she said for everyone to hear, “Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs,’ not ‘Feed my giraffes.’”¹⁸⁸

- Woodrow Wilson’s father was a Presbyterian minister who was paid by his congregation for preaching. One day, a friend said to Reverend Wilson, “Your horse looks very well, Reverend Wilson. Much better than you do.” Yes,” Reverend Wilson agreed. “You see, I keep my horse, but I am kept by my congregation.”¹⁸⁹

- A preacher was more than ordinarily long winded during his Sunday sermon. One bored parishioner asked another, “What follows the sermon?” The answer came back: “Wednesday.”¹⁹⁰

Prejudice

- Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach once invited a woman named Chaya Adler in his congregation to go with him to visit a Hasidic man. She tried to beg off, saying that her skirt was too short to be seen in a Hasidic community and that the men there might be shocked, but Rabbi Shlomo insisted that she accompany him. While there, Rabbi Shlomo introduced her to everyone, saying, “Everybody should meet my sweetest friend, holy sister Chaya. Do you know that she is an outstanding scholar and learns Hasidic thought brilliantly?” The Hasids were all pleased to learn from speaking to her that she was studying the thought of the Ishbitzer Rebbe. Later,

Ms. Adler thought about the visit, and she realized that Rabbi Shlomo was breaking the barrier of stereotypes that both she and the Hasidic men had. She says, “On that day, both they and I learned a valuable lesson: to suspend judgment and look beyond dress and appearance for the divine spark that resides in each soul.”¹⁹¹

- When John F. Kennedy, a Catholic, ran for President, he was frequently asked if a Catholic could become President. In part, people were worried that a Catholic President would have divided loyalties — to the Pope and to the United States. In reply to the question when asked by a high school student, Mr. Kennedy pointed out that he had pledged his loyalty to the United States when he entered the U.S. Navy, when he became a U.S. Representative, and when he became a U.S. Senator: “If I was qualified to serve my country in those other capacities, I am qualified to serve it as President.” He added, “No one asked my brother Joe [a pilot who died in action in World War II] if he had divided loyalties when he volunteered and died for his country.”¹⁹²

- On January 1, 1965, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) held a dance in San Francisco. Before the dance, the religious ministers and gay members of the organization let the police know about the dance, thinking that the information — and the sponsorship by religious leaders — would prevent the police from disrupting the dance. No such luck. The police showed up and arrested several gay men and lesbians, and a police officer even told a minister, “If you’re not willing to enforce God’s law, we will.” The arrests resulted in massive negative publicity for the police department, and a judge dismissed all charges against the gay men and lesbians.¹⁹³

- When country comedian Jerry Clower was 12 years old, he was confused and bothered by some of the racist things that happened in his home state of Mississippi. One night, a black man was beaten, and the following Sunday, young Jerry asked in his Sunday School class, “What about the beating they gave the man last night?” His teacher told him, “Don’t you ever bring that up in this church again. There are just some things that you don’t discuss.” Once young Jerry became a Christian, he knew that he couldn’t be prejudiced and be a “maximum Christian,” so he overcame his prejudice toward blacks and sought to love everybody.¹⁹⁴

- Long ago, a man with an Eastern European accent wanted to rent an apartment in a building managed by an anti-Semite. The manager noticed the man’s heavy accent and said, “We don’t rent to Jews.” The man replied, “I’m a Christian.” The manager didn’t believe him, so he decided to test him. The manager asked, “Who is our Lord?” The man replied, “Jesus Christ.” The manager asked, “What was his mother’s name?” The man replied, “Mary.” The manager asked, “Where was he born?” The man replied, “In a stable in Bethlehem.” The manager asked, “Why was he born in a stable?” Fed up, the man replied, “Because bigots like you wouldn’t rent apartments to Jews.”¹⁹⁵

- Groucho Marx hated prejudice. (You probably remember that when he was excluded from a beach club because he was Jewish, he asked, “Since my children are only half-Jewish, can they go into the water up to their knees?”) Once, he joined a club for Jews only. He and his brother Harpo immediately worked to change the rules so Gentiles could join. Danny Thomas was one of the first people to take advantage of the new rules.¹⁹⁶

- On June 3, 1972, in Cincinnati, Sally Priesand became the first woman ordained as a rabbi in the United States. Some congregations refused to accept her as a student rabbi after her fifth year of study, and some congregations refused to accept her as a rabbi after her eighth year of

study. However, she eventually became an assistant rabbi at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York.¹⁹⁷

- Just before World War II, a Jew in Vienna wanted to emigrate to avoid the coming destruction. He went to a travel agent, who showed him a globe and asked him where he wanted to go. However, every time the Jew named a country, the travel agent replied that the country had a quota, or didn't accept Jews, or there was a long waiting period for a visa. Finally, the Jew asked, "Do you have another globe?"¹⁹⁸
- During World War II, a French monastery hid several Jewish children, including Pierre Weiss, from the Nazis. A picture of Jesus was found under Pierre's pillow, and he was asked why he had put the picture there. Pierre explained, "Jesus was a Jew, and in order to save him from the Gestapo, I hid him."¹⁹⁹
- A homophobe once said to lesbian comedian Judy Carter, "I love the sinner. I just hate the sin." She replied, "Do you really love *me*? Then don't fire me from my job, don't take away my constitutional rights, don't take my children away from me, don't murder me ... that is, if you love *me*."²⁰⁰
- Back in 1977, Anita Bryant organized a campaign against gay men and lesbians that started in Dade County, Florida, then spread nationwide. Some supporters of the anti-gay campaign put this bumper sticker on their cars: "Kill a Queer for Christ."²⁰¹
- An African-American man got on a subway, sat down, opened a Yiddish newspaper and began to read. A Jew tapped him on the shoulder and asked, "Black isn't enough for you?"²⁰²
- Danny Kaye once said that he'd emigrate to Israel if he were younger. Why? He explained, "There, if somebody calls you a dirty Jew, it's just because you haven't taken a bath."²⁰³

Chapter 5: From Problem-Solving to Zen

Problem Solving

- Two women asked Rabbi Saul of Tiktin to resolve a dispute. Each claimed that a 5-ruble note belonged to her. The rabbi took possession of the 5-ruble note, then asked the two women many questions, but was unable to determine to which woman the 5-ruble note really belonged. Therefore, he went into another room, leaving the door ajar so the two women could overhear him, and talked to his wife. He told her that he was having a hard time deciding to which woman the 5-ruble note belonged — for one thing, the 5-ruble note had a torn corner, and neither woman had mentioned it to him. When he returned to the two women, one of the women told him that she had just remembered that the 5-ruble note had a torn corner. The rabbi replied, "In that case, this 5-ruble note is not yours because it does not have a torn corner." He showed the note to her, then handed it to the other woman.²⁰⁴
- While traveling, Zen master Zenko came across a ruined temple. He examined the temple and decided to restore it. However, there was a problem: How to raise the funds necessary for rebuilding the temple? Taking thought, Zenko posted signs saying that he would burn himself to death on a certain day, and if any people cared to donate money, he would allow them to watch. On the day of the scheduled suicide, Zenko meditated silently on top of a huge mass of firewood, then he opened his eyes and told the crowd of people watching him, "While I was

meditating, the saints all told me, 'It is still too early for you to think of leaving the world. Put up with this world for a while longer, and stay here to save living beings.' Therefore, I can't burn myself to death today." Zenko then took the money the crowd had donated and used it to restore the temple.²⁰⁵

- A woman complained to R' Eizel Charif that she had been abandoned by her husband and that he refused to support her; therefore, she wanted a divorce, but her husband refused to give her one. R' Eizel Charif summoned the husband, who said that he would give his wife a divorce if she would give him a large sum of money (which his wife, a poor woman, did not have), but without the money, there would be no divorce. R' Eizel Charif took Maseches Kiddushin from his bookcase, opened it to the first Mishnah, then showed the volume to the husband and said, "See what it says: 'She acquires herself [that is, goes free] in [one of] two ways ... by divorce or through the death of the husband.' Now you can choose by which of the two your wife will acquire her freedom." The husband decided on the divorce.²⁰⁶

- One problem faced by many religious people is how to avoid persecution. The story behind the game of dreidel is serious. Jews were forbidden to worship, but they worshipped anyway, gathering together to study the Torah. At these times, they had money and a dreidel nearby. When soldiers came near, the Jews gathered around the dreidel and pretended to be gaming. Early Christians did something similar by decorating their houses with holly. Holly was sacred to Saturn, and so by decorating their houses with holly, early Christians avoided trouble because pagan soldiers thought they were dedicated followers of Saturn.²⁰⁷

- Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was a good problem solver. All the clans around Mecca wanted the honor of repairing the Ka'ba shrine, so the clans worked together so that all could share the honor. However, the greatest honor lay in replacing the sacred black stone, and the clans could not agree on who would have that honor. Fortunately, Muhammad came up with a solution. He advised that the sacred black stone be placed on a cloak and a representative from each clan be stationed around the cloak. That way, working together, representatives from all the clans could lift the sacred black stone into place and all the clans could share that great honor.²⁰⁸

Rabbis

- Rabbi Nissen Telushkin noticed several times that a rich man with a high standing in the community insisted on sitting at the back of the synagogue although he was entitled to a seat up front. This man carefully watched to see if anyone noticed that he had chosen a humble seat. Finally, Rabbi Telushkin said to the man, "It would be better if you sat up front, and thought that you should be seated in the back, rather than to sit in the back, and think the whole time that you should be seated in the front."²⁰⁹

- The wife of Rabbi Wolfe of Zbaraj quarreled with her female servant. Because they could not settle the quarrel, the two women began to leave for the rabbinical court. However, when Rabbi Wolfe got up to go with them, his wife told him, "I don't need your help." Rabbi Wolfe replied, "That is true. Everybody knows and respects you, but no one knows and respects this poor servant girl. I am going with you to help her and to plead her case."²¹⁰

- For the 1991 Emmy-winning *Simpsons* episode "Like Father, Like Clown," Rabbi Levi Meier and Rabbi Harold Schulweis provided religious expertise. Their names appeared as technical

consultants in the credits, and immediately Rabbi Schulweis became a celebrity in the eyes of his congregation. He said, “I became an instant hero among my young people. I was cool.”²¹¹

- A visitor from the United States visited Polish rabbi Hafez Hayyim and noted that the rabbi’s house was filled with books, but had only a table and a bench for furniture. “Where is your furniture?” asked the visitor. “Where is *your* furniture?” asked Rabbi Hayyim in turn. “My furniture? But I’m only visiting here!” the visitor said. Rabbi Hayyim replied, “So am I.”²¹²

Royalty

- You’ve heard of the Cadbury bunny, haven’t you? The Cadbury Chocolate Works used to be owned by George and Elizabeth Cadbury, both Quakers. King George V and Queen Mary once visited the Cadburys, who took them on a tour. Mr. Cadbury took off his hat during the tour, but Queen Mary was worried about his catching cold, so she requested that he put his hat back on, but he declined. Queen Mary then said that she would ask her husband the King to tell him to put his hat back on, but Mr. Cadbury again declined to put on his hat. Mrs. Cadbury then said firmly, “George, put on your hat.” Mr. Cadbury — and King George V — put on their hats.²¹³

- During the Restoration in England, Dr. Robert South was preaching to Charles II when he noticed that several members of the congregation were sleeping through his sermon. Keeping his presence of mind, he called to one of the sleepers, “Lord Lauderdale, let me entreat you, rouse yourself; you snore so loud that you will wake the King.”²¹⁴

Sabbath

- Edwin Porter was a strict Methodist preacher who was active in Texas during the first half of the 20th century. As a strict preacher, he didn’t believe in having ragtime music played during the family’s musical Sunday afternoons, although love songs and of course gospel were fine. One day he asked his oldest daughter, Katie, to play something on the piano. Katie decided to play the newest ragtime hit, “Twelfth Street Rag,” but she told her father it was a new song titled “Love in My Heart.” Rev. Porter liked the new song so much that he asked his daughter to play it three times.²¹⁵

- Stand-up comedian Marc Weiner, creator of the finger puppets known as the Weinerettes, ran into some problems when he began to observe the Sabbath, which for Jews begins at sunset Friday. Of course, Friday evening is a big day for Gentiles to go to comedy clubs, and in observance of the Sabbath, Mr. Weiner declined to work then. Fortunately, some club owners are willing to work around his schedule.²¹⁶

- A Jewish man married a Gentile woman although his father advised him not to. Later, the man told his father that he had been right: “That woman will drive me to the poorhouse. The rabbi told her that it is a sin to do business on the Sabbath, and now she won’t let me open my store on Saturdays.” His father replied, “See. A Jewish man is a fool if he marries a Gentile.”²¹⁷

Satan

- While working as a stand-up comedian in Oklahoma, Jay Leno saw that many members of the audience had something written on the soles of their shoes. Later, he asked the promoter about it and discovered that a local preacher had told members of his congregation to write

“Satan” on the soles of their shoes because just by walking around they could stomp out Satan.²¹⁸

- A Christian was caught backsliding, so his pastor told him, “When you are tempted, say, ‘Satan, get behind me!’” The backslider replied, “I do say that, but Satan says, ‘All right, I’ll get behind you. It doesn’t matter who is in front as long as we are both going in the same direction.’”²¹⁹

Scripture

- Some people treat the Bible as a device of divination by opening it at random and pointing blindly to a verse, repeating the process as many times as necessary. Rolf E. Aaseng is very much against this practice. In teaching his Sunday School class, he has the students imagine that they try it and point first to Matthew 27:5 (“Judas ... went off and hanged himself”), then imagine that they try it again and point to Luke 10:37 (“Jesus replied, ‘You go, then, and do likewise’”).²²⁰

- Henry Cadbury, an early 20th-century scholar, professor, and Quaker wit, stayed away from telling risqué humor with one exception. Sometimes he told about staying in a hotel room in which a Bible had been placed. In the Bible was a listing of verses for various problems, including “Worried? See verse so and so. Troubled? See verse so and so. Lonely? See verse so and so.” After the listing for lonely, someone had written: “Still lonely? Call Mabel at 123-4567.”²²¹

- Retired teacher Laytham Fitch remembers a time when a schoolboy asked him if animals went to Heaven. Mr. Fitch didn’t know the answer, but the schoolboy felt strongly that animals do go to Heaven. When asked why he believed that, the schoolboy quoted Scripture: “Jesus said, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’”²²²

- A woman mailed a package containing a Bible to her son at college. When the postal employee asked if the package contained anything breakable, she replied, “Only the Ten Commandments.”²²³

Sermons

- William Douglas was a Presbyterian preacher. Ordained on May 6, 1898, he spent time preaching to people in Minnesota, California, and Washington. While in Dot, Washington, he was prepared to give a sermon, but only one person, a cowboy, was in attendance. He offered not to give the sermon, but the cowboy said, “Well, if I had 40 horses to feed and went out looking for them with a load of hay and could find only one horse, I don’t think I’d let that one horse go hungry.” Rev. Douglas then gave the sermon, which lasted over one hour. At the end of the sermon, Rev. Douglas shook hands with the cowboy and asked what he had thought of the sermon. The cowboy replied, “Well, if I had 40 horses to feed and went out looking for them with a load of hay and could find only one horse, I don’t think I’d give the whole load to that one horse.”²²⁴

- A traveling preacher in pioneer days was about to mount the pulpit in a new town when the town’s leading citizens warned him not to preach against the liquor trade, since a businessman in the liquor trade — a man who contributed liberally to the church — was going to be present. Next they warned the preacher not to preach against adultery, as an adulterer — who contributed liberally to the church — was going to be present. Then they warned the preacher

not to preach against cursing, as a man who used swear words — and who contributed liberally to the church — was going to be present. The preacher asked, “Well, what can I preach against?” The town’s leading citizens advised, “Preach against the Jews — they haven’t got a friend in this town.”²²⁵

- Village idiots, before jokes about them became politically incorrect, were often characters in stories, where they more than held their own against their supposedly more intelligent neighbors. In “Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character,” Dean Ramsey writes of Jamie Fraser, a village idiot in the parish of Lunan, in Forfarshire. Mr. Fraser stayed awake during a sermon, although many people around him fell asleep. The minister noticed this and chastised the congregation, saying, “You see, even Jamie Fraser, the idiot, doesn’t fall asleep, as so many of you are doing.” Mr. Fraser had pride, and he disliked being called an idiot, so he told the minister, “Aye, but if I hadn’t been an idiot, I might have been sleeping, too.”²²⁶

- Many candidates applied for the position of rabbi at a synagogue, and one candidate announced that he was ready to demonstrate his fitness for the position by preaching a sermon on any topic the congregation chose. On the day of the demonstration, this candidate was handed a blank piece of paper. Turning to the congregation, he said, “Friends, this blank piece of paper was supposed to contain my subject. However, I look at the first side and see nothing. I look at the second side and see nothing. This reminds me that God created the world out of nothing. I shall therefore preach on the subject of divine creativeness.”²²⁷

- George Whitefield preached almost to the end of his life. He died on Sept. 30, 1770, after having preached an open-air sermon the day before. A friend told him that he should be in bed instead of preaching, but Mr. Whitefield looked toward the heavens and prayed, “Lord Jesus, I am weary *in* thy work, but not *of* thy work.”²²⁸

- The Rev. Tatham was a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. He also was known for preaching very long sermons. At the end of one of his three-hour sermons, only one other person was left in the church. During the sermon, this person had died.²²⁹

- While in Edinburgh, Sydney Smith gave a sermon. After noticing that the congregation was composed mostly of women, he preached on this verse from the Psalms, “O, that *men* would therefore praise the Lord.”²³⁰

Sunday School

- As a child in Sunday school, Michael Thomas Ford and the other students were fascinated by the Flannelgraph — a board covered with felt on which Bible stories could be enacted using paper dolls which stuck to the felt because of a material on the back of the dolls. One Sunday, when the teacher was out of the room for a few minutes, young Michael and the other children got a chance to enact their own scene with the paper dolls. However, the scene they chose to enact was not wholly appropriate for a Sunday school — they enacted a scene from *Saturday Night Fever* using the St. Paul paper doll to represent John Travolta’s character.²³¹

- In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, young Tom wins tickets each Sunday by reciting a few Bible verses — the tickets, when numerous enough, can be exchanged for a plainly bound Bible. Mark Twain’s Sunday school had the same system except that the tickets entitled a child to borrow a religious book from the Church library. In his later years, Mr. Twain claimed that he won his tickets by reciting the same five Bible verses each week.²³²

Theft

- Nicholas Waln (1742-1813) was both a Quaker and a wit. While living in Philadelphia, he became aware that someone was stealing wood from his woodpile. By keeping careful watch, he learned that his next-door neighbor was the culprit, so he arranged to have a load of wood delivered to the neighbor. Instead of being pleased with the gift, the neighbor felt insulted and angrily demanded of Mr. Waln what he meant. Mr. Waln replied, "Friend, I was afraid thee would hurt thyself falling off my woodpile."²³³

- While on a Boy Scout trip as a young boy, Matt Groening took a Gideon Bible from a motel — he thought that it was free. He then underlined all the "dirty parts" in it. Of course, he got into trouble. Incredulous, his scoutmaster screamed, "You *stole* this Bible on top of everything else?"²³⁴

Tobacco

- Charlie W. Shedd used to have two collections. One collection consisted of portraits of Jesus. As a young pastor in Houston, Texas, with the help of his congregation, he had collected these portraits, which now are displayed in the "Faces of Jesus" room at the Jekyll Community Presbyterian Church on Jekyll Island, Georgia. The other collection consisted of pipes, which he enjoyed smoking. However, one day, while sitting in the Faces of Jesus room, he started wondering, "In which of these faces would a pipe look good?" The answer was none, so he decided to get rid of his pipes and stop smoking. While on vacation at Playmore Beach, Rocky Mount, on the Lake of Ozarks, he put his pipes in a bag, rowed out onto the lake, and dropped the bag overboard. The next day, the bag of pipes had washed up on the beach in front of his cabin. But pastor Shedd was not to be dissuaded. He and his wife rowed back out on the lake, where they dropped the pipes one by one into the lake. This time, the pipes stayed put.²³⁵

- Rev. Gustave Weigel, S.J., once lit a cigar and began puffing on it contentedly following an interfaith dinner. A fundamentalist Protestant looked on, disgusted, and asked, "Don't you Catholics believe that the body is a temple?" After the priest replied, "Yes," the fundamentalist asked why he was putting smoke in it. Father Weigel replied, "You put sausage in it."²³⁶

War

- During World War II, Gertrude Babilinska helped save the life of a Jewish boy named Mickey in Poland during the Holocaust. His parents had died, and she had promised them that she would take care of him. During the war, Mickey became ill and Ms. Babilinska was forced to take him to a German doctor. After the doctor had treated Mickey, she tried to pay him, but he refused payment, saying, "No, you have helped feel like a man." Because of this, she realized that he knew that Mickey was Jewish. After the war, Ms. Babilinska took Michael to Israel so she could fulfill her promise to his parents to raise him as a Jew.²³⁷

- When World War I broke out, the Austrian emperor asked Pope Pius X to bless his country's cause. The Pope declined, saying, "I do not bless war; I bless peace."²³⁸

Wisdom

- According to a Sufi legend, after God created Adam, He commanded the angel Gabriel to allow Adam to choose one of the three most precious pearls in the treasury of heaven. Gabriel therefore showed Adam the pearl of wisdom, the pearl of faith, and the pearl of modesty.

Adam chose the pearl of wisdom, but when Gabriel attempted to lift the other two pearls to return them to the divine treasury, he was not able to. The pearl of faith and the pearl of modesty then said to Gabriel, “We will not separate from our beloved wisdom. We could not be happy and quiet away from it. From all eternity, we three have been the three compeers of God’s glory, the pearls of His power. We cannot be separated.” Even today, wisdom is found in the company of faith and modesty.²³⁹

- Pope John XXIII once met a boy who had been born a Jew but who had converted and been baptized into the Catholic faith. The Pope urged the boy to continue to support the Jewish community, saying, “By becoming a Catholic, you do not become less a Jew.” At the Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII said, “We do not intend to conduct a trial of the past. We do not want to prove who was right and who was wrong. All we want to say is, Let us come together. Let us make an end to our divisions.”²⁴⁰

Work

- The caliph Omar once met a group of people who were loafing around and doing nothing. When they answered that they were people who trusted to God for everything and put their affairs in His hands, Omar grew angry and said, “You are nothing but parasites upon other people’s work. The person who truly trusts God first plants seeds in the earth, then puts his affairs in God’s hands.”²⁴¹

- Chaplains are employed by the Armed Forces. In this case, we have the government paying the salaries of priests, rabbis, and preachers, but such an expense has been judged necessary by the government. The Bill of Rights grants everyone, including soldiers, the right to the free exercise of their religious beliefs, and chaplains are necessary for that to occur.²⁴²

- The town’s leading citizens met at a dinner celebrating the 75th anniversary of a business. The mayor praised the business, pointing out that 75 years is a long time and an important anniversary, then he asked if anyone in the audience represented a firm that had been in business longer than that. A preacher stood up and said, “I have that honor.”²⁴³

- Sydney Smith, a clergyman and a wit, was once accosted by a county squire who angrily told him, “If I had a son who was an idiot, by Jove I’d make him a clergyman.” Sydney calmly replied, “Very probably, but I see that your father was of a different mind.”²⁴⁴

- As a boy, actor Rod Steiger was a Gentile surrounded by Jews. This came in handy, as he readily found work in the neighborhood — lighting stoves for Jewish families on the Sabbath. The neighborhood women referred to him as a *Shabbos goy*.²⁴⁵

Yom Kippur

- Before Yom Kippur, Rabbi Israel Salanter was walking on a public street when he met a crying man. Rabbi Salanter spoke to him and discovered that the man was terrified of the judgment that would be made against him on Yom Kippur; Rabbi Salanter also noticed that the man’s public display of grief and terror was upsetting other people in the street. Therefore, Rabbi Salanter advised the man, “Your heart is a private place, and so you may cry there as much as you want. However, the street is a public place. Remember that you do not have a right to burden other people with your personal problems.”²⁴⁶

- While in prison, a Jew was told that he could choose one day of all the days in the year to perform the *mitvos* [commandment, worthy deed]. The Jew thought hard. Which day would be best to perform the *mitvos*? Would Yom Kippur be best? Finally, the Jew made his decision; he would perform the *mitvos* the very first day he could because when it comes to performing the *mitvos*, no one should procrastinate.²⁴⁷

- Ed Asner, who played Lou Grant on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, says that the worst mistake he ever made in his life was to play football on Yom Kippur when he was 17. Although the coach said the team needed him, the team would have won without him. Mr. Asner says, “I certainly would have been closer to a man had I obeyed God rather than Caesar.”²⁴⁸

Zen

- Zen Master Tung-shan knew that he was dying, so he prepared himself for death by having his head shaved, taking a bath, putting on a ceremonial robe, and saying goodbye to the other monks. He then appeared to have died, so the other monks began to cry. Suddenly Tung-shan opened his eyes and said, “We monks are supposed to be detached from all things transitory. In this consists true spiritual life. To live is to work; to die is to rest. What is the use of groaning and moaning?” After his speech, he ordered a “stupidity-purifying” meal for the other monks. Once the meal had been eaten, he said, “Please make no fuss over me! Be calm as befits a family of monks! Generally speaking, when one is at the point of going, he has no use for noise and commotion.” Then he meditated for a short time before dying.²⁴⁹

- Two Zen masters, Gudo and Daigu, once visited a high-ranking official who wished to learn Zen. Gudo flattered the official. However, Daigu told Gudo, “Nonsense! Even though this person is a high-ranking official, he knows nothing about Zen.” After listening to the two Zen masters, the high-ranking official built Daigu a temple and studied Zen with him.²⁵⁰

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Appendix B: About the Author

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor's degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a Master of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy. Yes, I have my MAMA degree.

Currently, and for a long time to come (I eat fruits and veggies), I am spending my retirement writing books such as *Nadia Comaneci: Perfect 10*, *The Funniest People in Comedy*, *Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose*, and *William Shakespeare's Hamlet: A Retelling in Prose*.

If all goes well, I will publish one or two books a year for the rest of my life. (On the other hand, a good way to make God laugh is to tell Her your plans.)

Appendix C: Some Books by David Bruce

Anecdote Collections

250 Anecdotes About Opera

250 Anecdotes About Religion

250 Anecdotes About Religion: Volume 2

250 Music Anecdotes

Be a Work of Art: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

The Coolest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in the Arts: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

Create, Then Take a Break: 250 Anecdotes

Don't Fear the Reaper: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Dance: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 4: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 5: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 6: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Neighborhoods: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Relationships: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Television and Radio: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Theater: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 1: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Maximum Cool: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Religion: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Reality is Fabulous: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Resist Psychic Death: 250 Anecdotes

Seize the Day: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Notes

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Source: Michael Thomas Ford, *It's Not Mean If It's True*, pp. 112-113.

[← 2]

Source: Louis Michaels, *The Humor and Warmth of Pope John XXIII*, p. 12.

[← 3]

Source: Wayne Dosick, *Golden Rules*, p. 17.

[← 4]

Source: William Woughter, *All Preachers of Our God & King*, pp. 58-59.

[← 5]

Source: Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire*, p. 41.

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Source: Meg Cabot, *Holiday Princess*, p. 5.

[← 7]

Source: Michael Cain, *Louise Nevelson*, pp. 95-97.

[← 8]

Source: A. Monroe Aurand, Jr., *Wit and Humor of the Pennsylvania Germans*, p. 29.

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Source: Ron Chernow, *The Death of the Banker*, p. 92.

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Source: Tom Mullen, *Seriously, Life is a Laughing Matter*, p. 33.

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Source: William H. Sessions, collector, *More Quaker Laughter*, p. 92.

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Source: Michèle Brown and Ann O'Connor, *Hammer and Tongues*, p. 123.

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Source: Adam Podgórecki, *The Stories of Si-Tien*, p. 23.

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Source: Joe Garagiola, *It's Anybody's Ballgame*, p. 93.

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Source: Gerald Fuller, *Stories for All Seasons*, p. 9.

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Source: Shmuel Himmelstein, *A Touch of Wisdom, A Touch of Wit*, pp. 226-227.

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Source: Menahem G. Glenn, *Israel Salanter: Religious-Ethical Thinker*, p. 3.

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Source: Yitta Halberstam Mandelbaum, *Holy Brother*, pp. 24-27.

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Source: Eddie Cantor, *The Way I See It*, p. 3.

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Source: Peg Bracken, *But I Wouldn't Have Missed It for the World!*, p. 47.

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Source: Louis G. Perez, *The Dalai Lama*, pp. 20, 22, 24.

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Source: Msgr. Vincent Fecher, *“The Lord and I”: Vignettes from the Life of a Parish Priest*, p. 26.

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Source: Dick Van Dyke, *Faith, Hope, and Hilarity*, p. 20.

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Source: Tom Mullen, *Seriously, Life is a Laughing Matter*, pp. 51-52.

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Source: Stan Banker, *Walk Cheerfully the Middleroad*, p. 114.

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Source: Dick Van Dyke, *Faith, Hope, and Hilarity*, p. 20.

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Source: William B. Silverman, *Rabbinic Wisdom and Jewish Values*, p. 33.

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Source: Gay Block and Malka Drucker, *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust*, p. 96.

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Source: Jamie Griggs Tevis, *My Life with the Hustler*, p. 65.

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Source: Louis G. Perez, *The Dalai Lama*, p. 27.

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Source: Anne Schraff, *Women of Peace: Nobel Peace Prize Winners*, p. 55.

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Source: Geneva M. Butz, *Christmas in All Seasons*, pp. 19-20.

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Source: Michael Cain, *Louise Nevelson*, pp. 56, 59.

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Source: Rose Heylbut and Aimé Gerber, *Backstage at the Opera*, pp. 181-182.

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Source: Don Hampton Biggers, *Buffalo Guns & Barbed Wire*, pp. 85-86.

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Source: Molly Ivins, "Merry Christmas to all," Creators Syndicate columnist, Dec. 23, 2004.

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Source: Ken Alley, *Awkward Christian Soldiers*, p. 44.

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Source: Walter Slezak, *What Time's the Next Swan?*, pp. 207-208.

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Source: Walter Slezak, *What Time's the Next Swan?*, pp. 206-207.

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Source: Tom Mullen, *Middle Age and Other Mixed Blessings*, p. 123.

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Source: Moira Davison Reynolds, *Women Champions of Human Rights*, p. 8.

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Source: Andrea Broadwater, *Marian Anderson: Singer and Humanitarian*, p. 114.

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Source: Irvin C. Poley and Ruth Verlenden Poley, *Friendly Anecdotes*, pp. 36-37.

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Source: Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Wisdom*, p. 324.

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Source: Darryl Lyman, *Holocaust Rescuers: Ten Stories of Courage*, pp. 45ff.

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Source: Jack Mingo, *The Juicy Parts*, p. 34.

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Source: Cal and Rose Samra, *Holy Humor*, p. 140.

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Source: Ludwig Bemelmans, *My War with the United States*, p. 68.

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Source: Roy K. Holcomb, Samuel K. Holcomb, and Thomas K. Holcomb, *Deaf Culture Our Way*, p. 88.

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Source: Sushila Blackman, compiler and editor, *Graceful Exits*, pp. 41-42.

[← 63]

Source: Joseph Sweat, "Nothing Sacred." 1 December 2005
<http://www.nashscene.com/Stories/Cover_Story/2005/12/01/Nothing_Sacred/index.shtml>.

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Source: Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 135.

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Source: Lawrence J. Epstein, *A Treasury of Jewish Inspirational Stories*, p. 111.

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Source: Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, Oxford Mark Twain, p. 566.

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Source: John F. Parker, "*If Elected, I Promise*," p. 234.

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Source: Lore and Maurice Cowan, *The Wit of the Jews*, p. 43.

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Source: J. Bryan III, *Merry Gentlemen (and One Lady)*, p. 217.

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Source: Shams al-Din Ahmad Aflaki, *Legends of the Sufis*, p. 53.

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Source: Charles Downing, *Tales of the Hodja*, p. 25.

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Source: Chih-Chung Tsai (editor and illustrator) and Kok Kok Kiang (translator), *The Book of Zen*, p. 29.

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Source: a Reuter's article by Paul Majendie that appeared Jan. 5, 1998, on www.yahoo.com/headlines.

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Source: Tom Mullen, "Walking Cheerfully." Reprinted in J. Stanley Banker, et. al., *Quaker Lite*, pp. 25-26.

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Source: Rabbi Joseph H. Gelberman, *Zen Judaism: Teaching Tales of a Kabbalistic Rabbi*, p. 19. The pages of this volume are unnumbered, but I started counting with the Introduction as page 1.

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