

Faith

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We could say it's the "WWW" effect: "Whatever Works for Whomever." So we "live and let live," mostly without judgment, going about our own practice of WWW.

Yet, how does that actually work out? Someone says that holding a crystalized rock gives them healing energy; another claims their life was "changed" when they chanted to a statue or heard a charismatic "spiritual star" speak. And another "heard a voice" giving life instructions. Some say, "If it makes them feel better, it's OK." But is it healthy, for them, for others? What if it's more like an addictive drug or borders on the delusional?

And what about the fact that many who have non-traditional beliefs can be rather dismissive of traditional beliefs? They may no longer believe that praying to Jesus or Mary "works" but now they pray to another "ascended Being" or "spirit guide" and that "works" for them. They replace one devotion for another.

Can we be critical here? Can we ask hard questions? Are we allowed to be skeptical? Could we ask for some evidence, at least a few facts? And, particularly in our time, is anyone gaining power or getting rich off this "spiritual product"?

Then we have that old, persistent question: Is it true? "It's true for me" is too easy, if you mean anything goes. In my evangelical days, we were fearfully anxious about "Relativism" – there must be absolutes! Not realizing, of course, that we were choosing our "absolute" beliefs relative to our birth, culture and ... our relatives, too.



Seeking the natural source. COURTESY OF CHRIS HIGHLAND

There was something else about that desktop altar in the chaplaincy office. Among the easily recognizable objects and images of religion there were things like feathers, a painted rock, a woven cloth, a poem or drawing. Each of these was a gift from someone on the street, who lived outside, and often outside the religious institutions. These took their place among the "holy things," adding their own "sacred" meaning. Personal gifts left with us, handed to us in a gesture of gratitude. Perhaps they were simply saying that what works for them is kindness and compassion, so that's what they chose to give back.

Maybe it's not "whatever works for you" but whatever works for us, our communities, our world.

Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and interfaith chaplain for many years. He is a teacher, writer, freethinker and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife Carol, a Presbyterian minister, live in Asheville. Learn more at chighland.com.