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Living With Other Gods

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Living With Other Gods

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I genuflect in the darkened sanctuary of my church and slide into a cool pew. With a low thud the kneeler hits the floor and I kneel in prayer, concentrating on the blood-red flame of the candle. Christ is in this place, it whispers. Even the silence seems to listen as the answers to my prayers stream through the myriad-colored windows that drench me in richly stained light. I close my eyes, pray for guidance, and just think. God will not mind, and I smile to myself. Outside lies chaos and hatred, but in this place is peace and security. The sanctuary is well named. How can anyone's God be blamed for the evils of this world?"

“Living With Other Gods” Essays



Kristina Braell

Second Place Winner

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Thousands of miles to the East, the sun beats on the sand and every person is a grain in the vast desert. The great windstorm of three years ago blew across a continent and an ocean. Some deny it, but let them explain why the sand in our eyes has shaken strong nations to tears. A thousand pilgrims mingle at the Dome of the Rock, and in a mystic colony, dervishes swirl and dip in an ecstasy of Allah's Word. There is a great strength in joy derived from sacred obedience.

It is dark in the Ganges banks, and the day's last bathers are emerging from their ablutions. Everywhere is the glitter of colorful saris, and jewels on the foreheads of beautiful women. They are stepping on light and eager feet to Shiva's temple, and ahead lies a night of bright and shimmering celebration. Can they hear the ebb and draw of Buddhist chants? Voices rising as one, with smoke, flames, and wind, which will in return, carry their voices to the world's edge.

And an old neighbor; once I saw him standing uncertainly by the door of a rabbi's office, his clothes immaculate as if to hide the uncertainty within. Yet, there he stood in the rain, one hand on the doorknob, and I saw his shoulders heave once with a great sigh

and step inside. When I went to bed that night I could see that lights still shining in the office. There was a great celebration a year later, and I watched it then too, when a new member joined the temple. Once an atheist, this man was inspired by what he witnessed in the Jewish faith and committed himself to it on that day.

My thoughts fall away from me like a curtain and float into the warm corners, where the scent of incense lingers and generations of memories wait and pray. I gather my coat and kneel once more, my fingers brushing my forehead, heart and shoulders in the sign of the cross. Rising, I depart, shutting the door softly behind me and careful not to break the stillness.