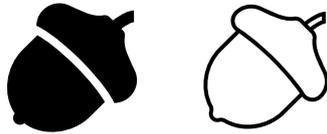


## Chapter Three: Flavours of God



God has a flavour, and everyone's is different. The God I grew up with was a bitter and cruel taskmaster, who played favourites (of course he loved the Israelites best) and killed people on a whim (Sodom and Gomorah, anyone?). The God I live with now is an altogether different affair.

My flavour of God likes women. It likes men too. It thinks that the true expression of our natures is the most important thing. The God I live with now thinks that it's OK to want things, to set goals, and to socialise and share life with all sorts of other people.

And every-now-and-again I get the flavour of God so strongly in my body it's like magic flowing through me; transformational moments; ecstasy.

My favourite religious word comes from East of Eden by John Steinbeck and it's *Timshel*.

I'll tell you Steinbeck's story.

*Some guys are sitting around drinking whiskey and reading Bible. Fair enough.*

*They read Cain and Abel:*

*Cain and Abel are brothers. Cain farms vegetables, and Abel farms sheep. Both brothers give God a share of their produce. God likes Abel's gift and blesses his produce. But God spurns Cain's gift.*

*Cain gets jealous of Abel, and they fight, and Cain kills Abel.*

*God is Mad.*

*He banishes Cain from the land and sends him out to live amongst strangers. Then he puts a mark on Cain's face to show that Cain's done the wrong thing. Finally he says "sin lieth at thy door, and thou shalt rule over him".*

*One of the guys drinking whiskey, thinks this is a strange thing to say. He thinks this is a story that sticks very close to human nature, and those words "thou shalt rule over sin" are lies. Because humans have never ruled over sin, or not enough.*



*So this guy, Lee, gets out another bible and reads the same story.*

*This time God says “sin lieth at thy door, and do thou rule over him”.*

*Well, Lee thinks this is a bit strange as well. Because why would God make human nature what it is, and then command us to change it? Those words, “do thou” are orders, instructions, not to be what we are.*

*So, being a learned man, he goes back to the original Aramaic.*

*The original Aramaic word (according to Steinbeck) is Timshel. Lee’s translation of this is “thou mayest”.*

I like this.

I like it because God is saying *it’s your job*. It’s my job to work on myself. It’s my job to get better. It’s my job to *do better*. And, if I do that, and I’m lucky, I *May* just create a good life. If I put in effort, and I grow, and I live wholly and fully, I *May* just have a chance to experience goodness.

And this is truth.

A typical day with the God of my childhood: My Dad’s wearing his green jumper and nothing else. The green is almost exactly the colour that Mazdas were in 2009. The wool that it’s made of is softer than most acrylic. My Mum made it for him in the 1970’s. It’s beautiful; fair-isle.

I’ve got my small feet on his feet, and my hands are in his hands, and we’re walking across the lounge room. He’s singing a song that’s my name over-and-over again. I can see his balls level with my face. I like putting my mouth on them. They taste kind-of salty and kind-of strange. He’s not very good at washing them. They’re hairy and I like pulling the hair a little with my mouth.

Remembering is like the jolt of a sudden fall. Like walking over an uneven area and tripping and landing on my hands and knees. The dizzying terrifying chaos of the earth that seems so firm and stable abruptly disappearing. The reliable steps I’ve taken a million times before, my body that *knows* how to be upright, suddenly akimbo, askew.

What should we do with Gods such as this?

Isaiah Chapter 2 is God saying to the Israelites: if you’re nice to me and worship me, and treat me well, I’ll be nice to you. But if you’re mean to me, I’ll kill you. This is the bible’s brand of domestic violence.

What do we owe the people who love us? What do we owe the people who hurt us?

To whom do I owe my silence?

There’s a tiny ball of hurt in my heart. It aches. My jaw is tight. My teeth hurt. There’s a bitterness there. I’m ashamed of being cast in the role of slut, and I’m ashamed of embodying that role in my life. I’m ashamed of the parts of me that embody that role now. Also of the parts of me that torment my own body now, belittling, cutting, burning; killing me.



And then there's that life-force, yearning-- yearning to create. As much as I want to die, I want to give, to appreciate, to nurture. To be acceptable as I am, where I am, whoever I am. To be accepted as human, and to be given the courtesy and respect that humans are given by virtue of their humanity alone.

