

Metaphor and Truth
Rabbi Zoë Klein, Yom Kippur 5762

- Rabbi Klein: There once was a man who was exceedingly curious...
- Andrew: Um, excuse me Rabbi Klein, I'm sorry to interrupt but...I have a question.
- Rabbi Klein: Oh yeah, sure Andrew. You're timing is a little strange, but...What is it?
- Andrew: Why do Indians think cows are sacred?
- Rabbi Klein: Well, I think in the 2nd millennium, there was a belief and a real necessity to protect a limited source of...
- Andrew: Well, what I really wanted to ask you was, how was champagne discovered?
- Rabbi Klein: Seriously? It was a blind monk, named Dom Perignon, who was the cellar master for...
- Andrew: How did they decide the length of a mile?
- Rabbi Klein: Well, in ancient Rome, distance was measured in paces, a pace being...
- Andrew: How do they weigh the earth's atmosphere?
- Rabbi Klein: Well you know how when you look at a weather map they show the highs and the lows...we live at the bottom of an ocean of air...
- Andrew: How did Strativari make violins?
- Rabbi Klein: Do you want the answers or not? I mean, this is really not the time...
- Andrew: Yeah...
- Rabbi Klein: Well, he cut a maple log on the slab...
- Andrew: How was radium discovered?
- Rabbi Klein: Madame Curie.

Andrew: How did they name the lollipop?

Rabbi Klein: Named after a race horse. Do I win a million dollars?

Andrew: How do they measure time?

Rabbi Klein: Some metal bar in Paris that emits...

Andrew: How do they get the stripes in striped toothpaste?

Rabbi Klein: There's a little tube inside the tube...

Andrew: How do homing pigeon find their way home?

Rabbi Klein: I don't know, maybe magnetic fields or infrasound waves? What is it you are really trying to ask Andrew?

Andrew: What I really want to know, Rabbi, is...does God exist?

Rabbi Klein: Yes.

Andrew: Where?

Rabbi Klein: Do you have a self?

Andrew: Yes.

Rabbi Klein: Where?
Let me tell you a wonderful Hassidic story. There once was a King who had no kingdom. He said...

Cantor Kent: Rabbi Klein, every other question you answered directly. Or at least tried to, until Andrew cut you off! Why then, when you talk about God do you always talk in metaphor?

Rabbi Klein: I do?

Andrew: Yes. You barely utter a word about God that isn't metaphor. God is a King. God is a Shepherd. We are a flock. I thought we used metaphor whenever something is not quite true. If God exists, why do you always talk about God in metaphor?

Rabbi Klein: Do I?

Rabbi Gan: You do.

Rabbi Klein: Wow, I guess I must then.
 And there were so many metaphors that I wanted to discuss today,
 God as Creator,
 God as Parent,
 God as Love
 Yom Kippur as Judgment Day...

But perhaps instead of choosing one
pervading metaphor,
perhaps it would be better to talk about metaphor itself.

Not because we are in need of a lesson in linguistics,
but because through metaphor,
and through the understanding of metaphor and how it is used,
we can heal ourselves of everything,
maybe not **cure**,
but heal ourselves of everything.
Everything! That's a pretty tall order,
but I believe in it that much.
It is for me a religion that walks hand in hand with Judaism.
I mean, just about everything in this siddur,
every prayer we utter with whole heart,
is fat with metaphor.
People say metaphor is the language of poetry,
not the language of proof.
But does that mean that all of our prayers
are nothing but fluff?
Does metaphor just "make pretty?"
Are they right when they say
it is the language of poetry
and not the language of proof?
They are most certainly wrong,
and we'll see that metaphor is proof,
in fact it is the ultimate proof,
we'll see that through metaphor
there is healing, and, I believe
there is proof of the existence of God.

And we need to know that.
We need to know how to heal ourselves.
Especially now
when we,
when the world,
has suffered an immeasurable blow.
We need to know how to heal,

and since I am not a magician,
or a psychologist,
or a doctor,
or a sorcerer that can manipulate the forces,
change the past,
alter the future,
all I can give is the thing I most believe in
which is metaphor.
We need to know how to heal,
and we need to know God exists,
because at this time we can't afford
for our prayers to be futile.
And we can do this with metaphor.

But first we have to understand what it is.
Metaphor, as you already know, is the application of a word
to an object it does not literally denote,
suggesting a comparison...
So for example,
If someone says, "My job is a jail,"
everyone understands that the job is not literally a jail,
but that the speaker is making a number of connections
between his working environment,
the boss,
the food,
the contract,
its confined space,
stifling conditions,
similar to being in a jail.

Similar with happier metaphors like "Life is a beach,"
and "Life is a bowl of cherries."
Life isn't literally a beach or a bowl of cherries,
and yet we all completely understand
what someone means by this.
When someone says life is a beach,
no one pictures a polluted beach with rubber tires
and tar-choked sea otters
and responds "Oh, life is a beach? I am so sorry to hear that."

All of us use metaphor all of the time,
and most of the time we are not even aware of it.
Some metaphor is so old, and so essential,
that it is woven into our very grammar.

"It was a bitter fight"

likens fighting to the distinct taste of certain poisons,
“the light is blinking”
compares a light to eyes,
the word “Kindergarten”
is a beautiful metaphor,
that children learning in their rows at school
are a planted garden, blossoming
under the teacher/gardener’s nourishment and care.

There is metaphor in science,
one of the most obvious being
that the brain is a computer,
it processes and stores and files and multitasks.

One of the most pervading, essential metaphors we have
is the metaphor that life is a journey.
It is so deeply ingrained into our thought and into our language
that we hardly realize it.
When someone dies we don’t say “he drank a glass of milk,”
or “he upholstered his couch,”
we say “he’s gone, he’s left us,
he’s passed on,
to the great beyond,
dearly departed.”
When a baby is in utero, she’s “on the way,”
and her birth is her “arrival.”
And in between birth and death
we are either “getting somewhere” or “getting nowhere,”
“going ahead with our plans,”
“getting sidetracked,”
Life is a journey,
we are the travelers,
choices are crossroads,
resources are provisions.

Except for the word “during”
which only refers to time and not space,
we say during the three o’clock hour,
not during the 405 freeway,
along the 405, not during,
all of our language describing time is spatial,
we say at 10 o’clock,
before 10 o’clock
and after 10 o’clock
just as we would say at the stop sign,
before the stop sign

and after the stop sign,
we say through the night
as we would say through the tunnel,
we say between 1 and 2
as we would say between the stoplight and Apple Pan.
And all of these examples that are so basic to how we speak
are actually a metaphor so old and basic
we don't even recognize it,
Life is a journey.

But because it is a metaphor, does that mean that it is untrue?

Take that phrase again, "My job is a jail,"
If the speaker was an actual jailer,
and he said, "My job is a jail,"
we all know that that would not be metaphor.
It would be a fact. He works in an actual jail.
It would be true.
But does that mean that the person speaking metaphorically
who says, "My job is a jail,"
is telling a lie?

Is everything outside of truth false?
When we pray at this season "God is my shepherd,"
because that is a metaphor, is it false?
When we pray with metaphor,
does that mean that we want metaphoric help
which means no help at all?
Is prayer a lie and therefore God a lie?
It sure seems after September 11th
that that Eternal goodness was a lie.
When Rabbi Wolpe says that the Exodus is only metaphor
does metaphor automatically mean it never happened?
Is everything outside of truth false,
or is there a realm that is outside, and above,
truth,
perhaps a God-truth,

can you go higher than truth?

Many semanticists and linguists,
and language purists and philosophers,
claim that metaphor is a parasite on language,
that when we say "my love is a red, red rose,"
or "my job is a jail,"
what we are really saying

is that there is no word in the English language
to express what I mean
and so I will take this word out of context and abuse it to express myself.
They say that when we use metaphor,
we are uncovering a basic fault in human language.
They say that if it is not literal, it is not true.

But I want you to be assured that *it is* truth.
And when we can prove that it is,
than we can show that our most essential metaphors
are also true,
that life is indeed a journey to life everlasting,
that prayer is valid,
that God is our shepherd.

Fact involves left brain intellect.

Fact: "Man is of the species Homo Sapiens."

Metaphor, on the other hand, involves five things:

- 1) Creative intellect,
 - 2) Emotion,
 - 3) Relationship,
 - 4) Spiritual Connectedness,
- and
- 5) Honesty.

The first, Creative Intellect:

Metaphor is the result of the marriage
of right *and* left brain thought.
In the mid 1600s a man named Blaise Pascal said,
"Man is no more than a reed,
the weakest in nature.
But he is a thinking reed."
Creativity and comparison.

Metaphor involves Emotion:

Metaphor also involves the heart,
it involves feelings.
Pascal's words "**Man is a thinking reed**"
is a metaphor that speaks from a *feeling* of frailty,
of mortal awareness,
even fear,
from a feeling of existentialism,
of loneliness.

It is the verbal language of emotion.
Brahams was once asked
what he was trying to say in a piece of music.
He replied that if he could have said it in words,
he would not need to say it in music.
Music is nonverbal metaphor.

Metaphor involves Relationship:

With metaphor,
there is a relationship between
the speaker and the listener
that is powerfully deep.
In our prayer book, when it is written,
“Man is a passing breeze,
our dreams are a shattered urn,”
there has to be a relationship between us
and the words for this to be understood.
When I say “man is of the species Homo Sapiens,”
we don’t really need to have any relationship at all.
I know that you know what that means
and that’s that.
But when Pascal says “**man is a thinking reed,**”
he has to trust that the listener is making,
instantaneously,
a million connections.
It would take volumes to unload that metaphor.
You immediately make a mental list
of qualities of the reed,
brittle,
bending,
sun-drenched,
one of countless others,
anonymous in a field of reeds,
yet solitary,
simple,
with no flower,
yet beautiful,
graceful,
dancing,
shorn,
left,
and forgotten.
And countless other connections.
Yet none of this is spoken.
The speaker trusts that it will happen,

an intricate, deep, understanding is created.
Metaphor *relies* on that relationship,
on that ability for any two people
to immediately strike up a relationship,

when Shakespeare has Juliet say,
“the light that shines comes from thine eyes,”
Shakespeare knows we will not think
Romeo’s eyes
are two halogens.

Metaphor involves Spiritual Connectedness:

The cornerstone of Judaism
is the conviction that **God is ONE**.
God is One is not just a statement of monotheism
meaning there is but one God.

God is One
is a metaphor,
which demands that we take
all of the properties of the number one
and apply them to God.

One is
 singular;
 it is not zero
 and it is not two;
 it implies unity,
 it implies peace and connection,
 as when we say we are “at one”
 with nature, with each other, with the world.

And metaphor affirms the spiritual truth of oneness.

The setting sun made a violent bleeding gash in the darkening sky.

 My love is a red red rose.

Don’t run around like a chicken with its head cut off.

 You are a bull in a china shop.

Man is a thinking reed.

In these metaphors, the-sun-and-blood-and-love-and-roses-and-people-and-
headless-chickens-and-bulls-and- reeds-and-Romeo’s-eyes-and-light-and-work-
and-jail-and-life-and-the-beach-and-bowls-of-cherries,

in the law of oneness,
of spiritual connectedness,
are, indeed, one!

Linked by innumerable threads
they are inextricably one,

because if *anything* is excluded from One,
than it is no longer one,
it is two.
Metaphor, therefore, is language's tribute
to the law of One.

And metaphor involves Honesty:

I mentioned that linguists say
that when a person uses metaphor
he is really admitting
a basic fault in our language to express meaning.
In other words, metaphor admits failure.
Based on this, linguists
would criticize metaphor and call it untrue.
I call any admittance of failure *honesty*.
Isn't that what this season is primarily about?
Admitting failure?
“**Man is a thinking reed,**” says
“I have no other means in my language
to combine the depth of my feelings and fears,
my creativity and my intellect,
my sense of spiritual connectedness...
I have a million thoughts and ideas
and revelations and questions
that I could unload over hours and hours,
or I can simply admit the shortcomings
and futility of language,
and in my *desperation* to communicate
simply say all of that in one easy breath,
“**Man is a thinking reed.**”

Metaphor, therefore is a **HIGHER** truth than fact,
for it involves not a fraction of us,
but **all** of us, mind,
body,
spirit,
honesty,
and relationship.

We do not *live* objectively.
We live in metaphor.
Life is a journey.
And that is the truth.

And when we use metaphor to speak about God,

we are using every part of us to express the highest of all truths.
That's why we use metaphor, because it is what expresses highest truth.

Psychologists have known its power for ages.

One therapist wrote:

*Therapy consists of helping people change their world views. This is done most effectively by using the same languages which created the world views in the first place: **metaphor**, fantasy, ritual, and ceremony.*

And we need to change our world view, and quick,
because we are spiraling fast.

Psychologists have known it,
and poets have always known it,

And now we know it, and we can use it, to heal ourselves.

How?

The actress Camryn Manheim said
the moment she began to love her body
was when her boyfriend said to her,

“Other women are bungalows, and you,
my darling, are a palace.”

He gave her a metaphor through which to love herself.

Recently a woman from
my previous congregation sent me an email
to wish me a good Rosh Hashannah
and to say thank you for a conversation years ago
that had changed her.

How have you changed? I asked.

She reminded me that after her double mastectomy,
I had told her that her chest was a sacred altar,
and that her breasts had been the paschal lambs
that were offered upon it
to redeem her life.

She wrote, “I still think of myself as a sacred altar.”

And it is not just a story we tell,
O you're a bungalow, you're a palace,
you're an altar, it isn't just a story,
a nicety,
it is a truth.
A very high truth.

And we can each unlock that truth about ourselves,
if we can each find our metaphor.

But you have to start slow.

Let's try it...

Look at the back of your hands.
What color is your skin?
And don't answer white or black or olive or brown.
What is the true color,
what is the landscape of your skin.
The skin you wear every day.
Is it sand,
or vanilla wafer brown,
maple syrup,
it is the color of wheat
or parchment,
are you a scroll,
and do age spots spread like overflowing wells,
do they float like lily pads
on the lake of your skin,
your fingers hop like frogs from one to the other,
do have scars like silver eels,
with what would you sculpt you at the quarry,
are you a veined Brazilian marble,
are you coral,
is the natural color of your nails
inlaid glass,
and don't ignore the sheen of your skin,
the **luminescence**,
if sand, which sand?
Is it Bermuda pink sand after the tide has washed it clean,
are you the Hawaiian black sand that glitters in the sun,
are you the gray wet sand two feet down,
are the blue veins in the back of your hands
like the river of Eden,
when you look at the creases of your knuckles
can you see faces in them looking back,
are they smiling,
are they cross,
and your hair,
is it white and clear like water running off a glacier,
like mink,
like straw, spaghetti, silk, fusilli?
And then you can move on
to other things, outside of yourself..
Is your home a jungle,
a gingerbread house,
a jewel box,
is it messy like a cookie tray
after the cookies have been scraped off,
start slow with metaphor,

start slow,
releasing the truths of who you are,
what you are,
and one day,
when you have exercised with metaphor,
you will be walking along,
doing mundane things,
and it will grab you,
the metaphor that is yours and only yours,
and you will be stunned,
and you'll stumble,
and catch your breath,
and you will know suddenly a very high truth about yourself
that encompasses every part of you,
and you will know your destiny.
This metaphor will become your secret name,
and by it you will know yourself,
and you will live in poetry,
in poetic truth.
What a shame it would be not to ever consider
the color of your very own skin,
the poetry of your body, the poetry of your life!

You can be afraid
until you realize that fear is a cricket in a warehouse,
siren-loud but entirely squashable.

 You can be angry,
 until you realize that anger is the acne of your soul,
 it blisters and spews and clogs your chance at love.

You can be unforgiving,
until you realize that not forgiving is a slow poison
in your bloodstream.

 You can be lonely until you realize that loneliness
 is a monster that is fiercely protective, and drives
 everyone away so it can feed on you.

You can be apathetic,
until you realize that apathy is a criminal.

 You can be sorry for yourself,
 until you realize that your sorrow is a lead shoe
 and you are drowning yourself,
 kick it off,

you can be egocentric
until you realize that egocentricity is a hall of mirrors
and you are utterly alone.

 You can think yourself ugly,
 until you realize that a strong self-image

that comes from inside is a Hollywood makeover
with perfect lighting and a little airbrush.
You can be lazy until you realize
laziness is the subtlest form of tyranny.
You can have low self-esteem until you realize
that the seat you happen to choose for Yom Kippur services
is the self-esteem seat, and it is filling you up
as we speak, and it is free, and there are no strings attached,
and you wouldn't be lying to yourself,
you would be *saving* yourself,
and it would be absolutely
one hundred percent TRUE.

Not a partial truth,
not a left-brained truth,
but a whole truth,
a left brain,
right brain,
honest,
personal
and relational
and spiritual
truth.

Now, how do we use that,
all this exercise in metaphor,
to prove God is here,
how do we use it not just to know ourselves,
but to know God.

Our president keeps saying that we are a faithful nation,
that we have faith,
that it is not just *they* who have God,
they who are killing themselves and us
in the name of their God,
in the certainty that that God exists
and that they know God's will,
it is not just they who have God,
but us too.
And we've had national days of prayer,
national prayer-services.
Everyone has been praying.
Everyone's been saying America is a nation of faith.
Sometimes it is a real challenge for us,
we see some Muslims bowing with their foreheads
to the ground and we think it looks like they have God in their lives,

and we see some Christians with a crucifix over their beds
and a silver fish graphic on their fender
and a “What Would Jesus Do” bracelet
and we think it looks like they have God in their lives too,
but don’t think for a second that we don’t,
that the complicated, tragic,
stubborn, educated, beautiful people of the Book
can’t also talk about God.

Through metaphor, we do talk about God,
through metaphor we do know God.

and it is complicated,
so you’ve got to hang on to the magic carpet...

Max Black is the premier essaying on metaphor.
He gives a complicated six-part definition of metaphor
that involves primary and secondary subjects
and parallel implication-complexes,
reciprocity,
and projection,
that is difficult and thorough
and crazy stuff.
I struggled with it.
I stared at it.
I wanted to understand what he was saying,
I wanted to get at the heart of this thing
that I love so much.

Poetry,
Healing,
Religion,
God,
all of it was beginning to come down to one thing,
metaphor,
I started to think about the prophets,
like Jonah,
who fought against forfeiting their normal lives
to become God’s metaphor to a wayward people,
I began to think of the rabbinate,
as my role as a metaphor
until I became confused about where was me
and where was the symbol of me
and I poured over this semanticist’s extremely dry,
non-religious definitions,
when it started to become mantra like,
mystical,

and the words started to whirl,
and re-form,
a chariot of letters,
primary subject, secondary subject,
relationship,
parallel,
reciprocal,
relationship,
when revelation struck
and out of the text emerged the concept
that Max Black never knew he was describing...
Covenant.
Covenant is metaphor.
And I don't mean that covenant is a metaphor for something.
Covenant *is* metaphor.

Metaphor is covenant.
Covenant is metaphor.
And I don't mean that covenant is a metaphor for something.
Covenant *is* metaphor.

What is covenant?
Covenant is the agreement of two parties,
with a primary party, and a secondary party,
that have a conditional relationship,
a relationship that is reciprocal,
where both parties influence each other,
more specifically,
covenant is the conditional relationship between
God and humanity,
where God is the Supreme,
and man the secondary, down here.

Metaphor
is the conditional relationship of two concepts,
a relationship that is reciprocal,
where both concepts influence each other
redefine each other,
for example,
in the metaphor "Man is a thinking reed,"
"Man" is the primary subject, and "the reed" is the secondary,
the word "man" changes how we think about "reed,"
makes us select certain attributes that make the metaphor work,
and the word "reed" changes how we consider "man."
Man is a concept and reed is a concept,
and as they work together in metaphor they change and influence each other.

Covenant is metaphor. The definitions are exactly the same.

In Christianity they talk about word made flesh.

In Judaism,

since worship moved from animal sacrifice to prayer,
we talk about flesh made word.

There has always been confusion between word and flesh,
why?

Because flesh is word,

because we are words.

We are language.

That is why I am bothering examining language at all!

We are language.

We are Godspoke.

Flesh made word, word made flesh,

flesh *is* language,

We were *spoken* into being.

“Let there be,”

God is not speaking *through* us,

God is speaking with us,

Using us to speak.

We are Godspoke.

Our letters are stagnate symbols in ink,

but God’s letters are skin,

of all luminescent colors,

like the skin on the back of our hands

that we tried to *read* earlier,

letters that

that move and grow.

We are each letters

and together we are a statement

a linguistic construct of Godspoke

row after row,

verse after verse

that spells out an epic poem of cosmos and creation,

and if one letter were to be hurt or missing or excluded

the word of God would lose all meter and rhyme and meaning.

God’s language *is* **humanity**.

We pray and spill our words

in the attempt to hear God’s answer,

when all along we are God’s answer,

when the act of praying
is, in God'speak,
the answer to our prayers,
no matter what language one speaks,
or what culture one is from,

When we listen to each other
we hear God's language.
When we look at each other
we hear God's language.
When we touch each other,
we hear God's language.
We are *spoken*,
we *are* God's language

and our covenant with God is God's own metaphor.

And this is where you really have to hang on to that magic carpet,
because I don't want you to fall off.

When I speak a metaphor,
when I say, "**Man is a thinking reed.**"
"man" is my concept of man, and "reed" is my concept of reed,

So too when God speaks this metaphor,
when God speaks this covenant,
when God speaks this covenant between God and humanity,
when God speaks this metaphor between God and humanity,
"humanity" in this covenant is not humanity,
but God's concept of humanity,
and "God" in this covenant is not God,
but God's concept of Godself.

Once again,
when I speak a metaphor,
when I say, "Society is a sea."
"Society" is my concept of society,
and "sea" is my concept of sea.
I don't speak and a society appears,
I am speaking about society,
my concept of society.

So too in God'speak,
when God speaks this covenant/metaphor
between God and humanity,
"humanity" is God's **concept** of humanity,

and “God” is God’s **concept** of Godself.

and that is why we can’t understand God.

Just as you can’t fully understand the word “reed” by hearing it,
you have to see it and touch it and smell it,

we can’t understand *God*

because our whole relationship with God
is God’s own metaphor.

We are not *hearing* the metaphor,

we are in the metaphor,

we ARE the metaphor.

That is why all of our language is metaphor,

because *we are a metaphor*,

my living, breathing self is a metaphor.

Judaism says:

that the moment God began creating the world,

was the moment that God realized God existed.

And that was the question we sort of started with, wasn’t it?

Does God exist?

God Godself had no means before Creation

to know that God existed.

There was nothing to relate, compare, contrast to,

no thing, no mirror,

just blank infinity,

nothing,

and then suddenly,

God realized,

“I exist,”

and that *instant*,

Creation exploded into being.

The instant God realized **“I am...”**

God wondered, “I am...what?”

And we are the what.

In Hebrew the word for “what” and “matter” is the same,

Mah.

God is the I am, and we are the what,

the object of the eternally unfinished sentence,

the secondary subject,

I am, I am, I am, I am what?

And we burst into being.

We are God's metaphor for understanding Godself.
That is why we exist.

If you are an atheist,
 you are right,
in that the God we worship doesn't exist,
because the God we worship is God's *concept* of Godself,
and the God we are in covenant with,
and the God we are in relationship with,
is God's *concept* of Godself,
 but **GOD** does exist,
and our flesh
is God's written, spoken proof,
 we are that language,
man was created in God's image,
we are the symbol of God,
we are the metaphor for God,

but the God that exists is no metaphor,
and has no covenant,
a primary subject with no secondary,
with no relationship,
an **I am** with no **what**,
singular,
solitary,
One.

We are God's autobiography.
We are God's diary.
That is the Book of Life that we all want to get written into this year.
We are the Book of Life.
We are God's diary.
And when one of us is killed before our entire page is written,
before our poem is complete,
a page is torn out of God's diary,
and God's story is incomplete.
And so killing in the name of God
clearly cannot be God's will,
because we were created by God,
for the sake of God,
and to kill is to erase revelation,
and erase part of God as well.
And not just in killing,
but in any way that we silence anyone,
we rip and burn a page of God's diary.
When we embarrass a person,

when we stereotype a people,
when we dismiss someone,
laugh at them,
belittle someone,
abuse someone,
we silence their song,
and tear out a page.

The language of God is humanity
and though none of us are fluent,
to say that it is God's will that I kill you,
is surely a mistranslation.
And though none of us are fluent,
to say that any people is better than another,
more worthy, or chosen,
and the rest are expendable
is a gross illiteracy.

*In fact, whenever you think you do not like someone,
you are misreading them.*

Whenever someone is labeled an infidel,
that person is being misread.

When they call us infidels,
they are saying,

"I cannot read you,
and I cannot bear the frustration
of not being able to read you,
and so I cannot accept you at all."

When what should really be said is,

"I cannot read you,
but I know that because you were created,
you are God's language,
I am not fluent in God'speak,
but one thing I know for sure,
God is trying to say something through you,
just as surely as God is trying to say something through me.
I can't read it,
but I know it."

As soon as you silence people,
through death,
through terror,
through name-calling,
through rage,
through ignorance,
as soon as you silence people,
you silence God.

Our flesh
is God's written, spoken proof,
man was created in God's image,
we are God's hieroglyph,
we are the symbol,
we are the metaphor for God.

We speak in metaphor about God,
because it is the language of the highest truth.
It is the ultimate expression of truth,
of mind,
of body,
of emotion,
and spirit,
it is the language of covenant,
it *is* covenant,

you see,
it is not because we know metaphor,
that we believe in God.

It is because we believe in the metaphor
that we know God.

Just over a month ago,
I officiated at a funeral
for a beautiful man
who had been an extraordinary animator and artist.
He made his work come alive.

Usually at the end of the procession of mourners
who walk up to the closed coffin
to pay their final respects,
I go to the coffin,
and I sometimes touch,
sometimes not,
the wood of the coffin,
and say something.
It is never something planned.
Sometimes I say "Your family is beautiful,"
or "May you be blessed in Paradise,"
or "Forgive me if I was inaccurate at all about your life,"
or "Stay with your family, they still need you,"
I never really think about what I am going to say,
and nobody sees me do it,
but I always feel that it is important for me,

as this person's final officiant
to say something private,
to share some private thought with the departed.

At this particular funeral,
after the long procession,
I walked to the coffin,
and I was overcome by a sudden overwhelming feeling,
an amazing, heavy sensation,
I leaned close, very close, to the head of the coffin,
and then three words came out of my mouth,
from somewhere deep inside,
from some primordial fear or doubt
or something,
I said, "Make God real."

And then my eyes welled up with tears,
and I stumbled away,
down the aisle of the now empty chapel,
the people were filling their cars
to go to the graveside.

Why did I say that?
Where did that come from?
Make God real, it doesn't make any sense.
What is going on inside of me?

And then it struck me,
the man who had died,
he was an animator.
He brought his characters to life,
animated them.
I had somehow, subconsciously,
conjured up an image,
a dream,
of the animator
coming to the rudimentary lines
that my personal theology had roughly sketched out,
and filling them in with color,
and animating them,
and breathing life into them,
and the metaphor
of the animator
walking into Paradise like a Messiah,
and making God real,
unfolded within me,

spread out,
blotting up old doubts,
and old fears,
it filled me up,
like wind in a giant sail,
the way revelation must feel,
and I knew that that metaphor,
of the animator and God,
I knew that it came from outside me,
I knew it was *given*,
and that it was true,
and animate,
and alive,
and that God was real,
and that God is real.

And to answer your question again,
We speak in metaphor about God,
because it is the ultimate expression
of truth, of mind, body, emotion, and spirit,
and it is not because we know metaphor
and therefore we believe in God.

It is because of metaphor itself,
metaphor that does more than “make pretty,”
metaphor that makes real,
it is because we,
a field of thinking reeds,
believe in,
and pray in, and love in, and live in,
and are born in, and die in,
and are healed in metaphor,
that we know God speaks,
and we know God is.