

Rituals

Someone said to me that he believed in God but not in religion. I don't really understand what "Believing in Religion" means. You don't believe in the Constitution of the United States. You accept it, you choose (or not) to abide by it. The Jewish religion is something to be practiced as a way of life that is designed to help you think before you act. The seemingly pointless rituals are to get you into habits of thinking and acting, more than vaguely believing.

But what I think he meant was that he could subscribe to the broader moral imperatives of God's law, being a good person, helping others. The rituals on the other hand were too irksome and meaningless. That was why he didn't want to follow them. That's rather like believing in the idea of charity but not actually wanting to give any money to the poor or a deserving cause. It's all very well to say, "I love music." But what if you rarely listen to it, never go to concerts or buy any music? The importance of music in your life is negligible. It's a joke. Or believing in being fit and healthy but never exercising? Or eating healthy but you only buy Big Macs? If you just down a meal and never think of where the food came from, how fortunate you are, how many others are starving, how important healthy nutritious food is, then you are no different to an animal that takes stuff in at one end and finally expels it at the other. As Aristotle said, the considered life is what we should all be aiming at and religion, in theory at least, is designed for that.

This part of the Torah, about the kosher animals, fish and birds we can eat, is not just a matter of which ones, although there are very good reasons as to why some animals, fish and fowl are preferred to others. You could still make a pig of yourself eating kosher food!!! But the purpose of the rules is to get you to stop and think as you prepare food and as you eat it. To stop and think before you stuff your face.

Happy eating and don't get annoyed with religion for trying to get you to think before you act.