

Dr. Hannah Gale

February 7, 2019

Dear esteemed members of the Connecticut Legislative Committee on Children,

Please oppose HB-7005.

I would like to share my story with you, as I believe that it has something to offer on the question before you today as to whether or not to require the signature of a clergy to an affidavit of religious declaration to exempt from vaccination.

I am adopted. I was one of the babies of the Baby Scoop Era that extended from the end of WWII into the 1970s when birth control became generally available. My mother was a Catholic college student from Pennsylvania, and she was sent to Chicago, where a private adoption was arranged.

My very loving parents were Orthodox Jews and I was raised in a religious home where I experienced Sabbath and the traditions of my parents as part of their love for me. My parents were unusual people. My father was very hard of hearing and so spent most of his time reading. His library was filled with books of history, science and esoteric Judaism ranging from Kabbalistic texts to the Jewish ghost stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Both my parents were lovers of the theater and encouraged me, as I grew up, in my pursuits as an actor and director, despite this meaning that I would often have to rehearse and perform on the Sabbath.

As a student at Loyola University in Chicago I read the works of Catholic philosophers such as Teresa of Avila, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Augustine and Aquinas, and although I went through quite a few moments of spiritual confusion, eventually I was able to see that the God, whose love I could palpably feel in the synagogue on the High Holidays, was also speaking through the visions of these great spiritual leaders. I read the New Testament as part of a class on comparative religion and felt deep in my heart that the words of the Christ in the Gospel of John were not the words of a human being and could only come from God. And so, my personal relationship to God grew as I added the reading of these texts to my personal practice of Judaism. When in doubt, I would turn to the writings of Mathew Fox, a former Jesuit priest and a wonderful writer on the more esoteric aspects of Christianity. I could not share this with my parents, because this was beyond their ability to be ecumenical, but I believed that the spirit that they had raised me in was in line with this expansion of my personal relationship to God.

During graduate school at the University of Iowa I met a friend who introduced me to Nichiren Buddhism and her love and passion for the practice of chanting Gongyo inspired me to begin this meditation practice, something that I continue to do intermittently through today. Through the practice of concentrating on the Lotus Sutra, I have experienced an understanding of karma and reincarnation and the great responsibility of human consciousness.

I have also on occasion gone to receive Darshan from Mother Meera and Ama, where I was able for the first time to pray to God's female aspect and use the word "Goddess".

Through these practices, the truth of the quote from the New Testament: "In my Father's House there are Many Mansions" has become clear to me. This experience of personal growth through the encounter of the similarities in the religions of the world could only be possible in the United States of America, where the fundamental principle of freedom of religion, not only allows, but engenders dialectical and ecumenical experiences.

I recently visited the home of Thomas Jefferson in Virginia and observed that he purposely set in each room busts of individuals with opposing points of view. He did the same with books, placing his copy of the Koran in one corner and his Jefferson Bible in the other.

Most people are not interested in becoming a student and practitioner of multiple religions in our time, any more than they were in Jefferson's time, however much our Constitution may have been designed to encourage this. But some people, such as myself, have become practitioners of their own deeply personal relationship with God as elucidated by the encounters with Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) that they have experienced in their lives.

To whom would I go for such a signature, as is being proposed here today? The Rabbi of my parent's synagogue? Honestly, if Rabbi Miller, ztz'l, were alive today, I believe that he would understand and would give me such a signature, but he, unfortunately, has passed, as have my parents. I cannot go to Mathew Fox, because, although he has meant a great deal to me, he has no idea that I even exist. Should I ask Mother Meera? She doesn't speak, so it's really hard to know what her opinion is on anything, although you get the impression from her look that she loves you despite your flaws.

I hope I have made my point. It is not appropriate given the explosion of multiplicity in religious and spiritual practices here in the United States to expect individuals to have clergy in their personal lives. Many, if not most, younger people are very much on their own personal journeys, as is, perhaps, a natural outflow of the nature of religion in the United States as conceived of by the Founding Fathers.

However, I do believe that it is a reasonable expectation that anyone asking for a religious exemption be expected to articulate what their religious beliefs, in fact, are. And, if they can do so, I believe that there is a clear moral imperative to respect this, as any forced medical procedure is obviously an egregious violation of the inalienable right to one's own body as inviolate.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Hannah Gale, N.D., LAc., Fairfield RTM Representative from District 6