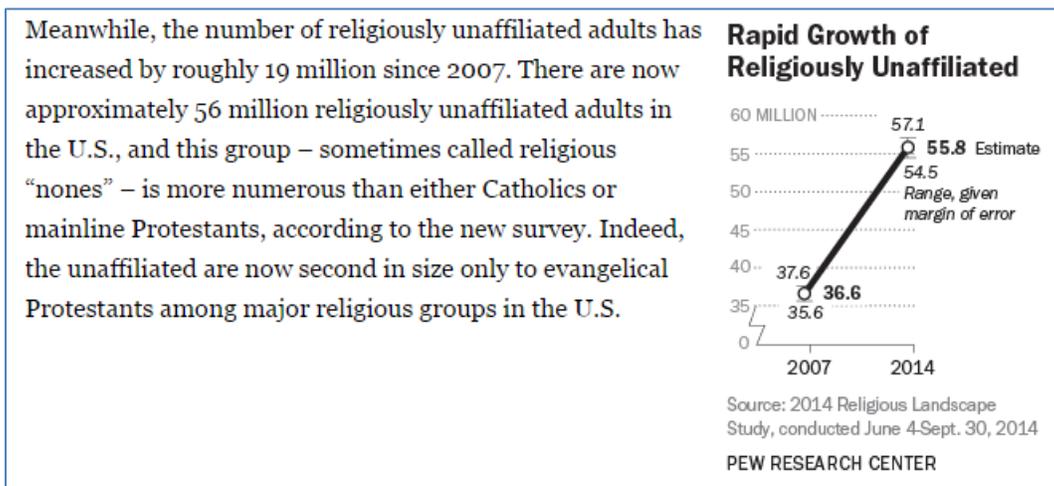


Timeless Transformations

How Will You Check the Box Religious Affiliation: Are You None or Done?

In a recent inspirational message I said if we don't stand for something we will fall for anything. Standing for what we believe in often means we must stand alone. Standing alone is how I felt so many times whether it be my views about how to raise you three beautiful girls, education, career, marriage, and especially when exploring spiritual and religious beliefs. I knew early on, my generation would be transformational. As it turns out it was more than I imagined.

There is a research center called the [Pew Forum's research](#), known as a *fact tank* that informs us about issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. Using quantitative surveys and analyses, they have some interesting trends about how religious values are changing. Their top finding is the "[religiously unaffiliated](#)." It is the fastest growing segment of the population. It grew by 20% between 2007 and 2014, and is now 23% of the population. That is almost one in four people in the United States that classifies themselves as atheist, agnostic, or nothing at all. These are now being called the "nones." That is because if they answer a questionnaire that says what is your religious affiliation they say none. That group has grown significantly and the percent that do affiliate with Christianity is declining. The following is an excerpt from the [research](#).



It's interesting if you study the Unity movement. It gained momentum in membership around the 1970s. That's the same time that I started questioning the religious beliefs that I grew up with and that was before the Internet! Trust me, at that time, I had never heard about Unity or any other religion than Baptist, Methodist, or Catholic. This was a time that I stood completely alone. No one believed the way that I did. This is also when the distinction started to be drawn about what was spiritual versus what was religious. The word spiritual began to be used for private thought and experience of being in touch with a higher power. The word religious was used more for public membership in an institution, or buying into a particular denomination or doctrine. Before that, the words spiritual and religious were synonymous and were used interchangeably.

The definition of spiritual and religious widened for a lot of reasons: the advancements in science; biblical scholarship in terms of who wrote the bible, history, and the times; and the rise of cultural relativism, where people have a greater sense of other points of view. When I think back to how I felt about being religious, I think it was infused with a certain amount of anger and frustration. I thought of it as being negative, dogmatic, judgmental, hypocritical, political, exclusive, and more focused on preserving the institution of religion, which included hoarding lots of money, rather than helping people grow spiritually.

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If you read the Pew research it shows we are becoming more spiritual, multi-faith based, and diverse. We are less dogmatic. When you look at these statistics and try and make sense of it, we are not leaving religion for nothing. We are leaving religion for spirituality. We are leaving to seek something higher, for a greater purpose and a deeper meaning to life. There is an expansion happening not a shrinking. Some of the research says even though church attendance is down, people are reporting a greater sense of connection with something greater than themselves. There was a 7% increase in people saying they have a greater sense of well-being and peace. They feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe. This is the evolution of spirituality. The research shows 80% increasingly define God as a loving presence rather than a judgmental God to be feared. There is a growing awareness that there are many paths to God. People are getting smarter. There is more access to information. Because society is more diverse, we come in contact and make friends with people from other religions. We then find out who they are and what they stand for. It makes it more difficult to draw lines about religion.

A popular author/neuroscientist named Sam Harris published a book called the End of Faith. The only book I have read of his is a Letter to a Christian Nation. But in the book, End of Faith, he blasted religion as being dangerous and absurd. It is said that he stoked the debate about science and religion. It also kicked off the movement in the mid-2000s called the atheist movement. What is interesting is that if you fast forward ten years, in 2014, he writes another book called, Waking Up: a Guide to Spirituality without Religion. I haven't read this book but plan to in the future. In this book's summary, he talks about the value of the spiritual, mystical, transcendent, and contemplative. He says you can only go so far in explaining science and nonspiritual cultural. He even says there are important truths to be gained from the experiences from Jesus, Rumi, Hafiz, Buddha, and other spiritual sages. Sam Harris is a perfect example of the evolution of a well-known spiritual seeker. This type of evolution is just like me and probably you. He's just a public figure and a best-selling author. The following shows a trend of his writings. Very interesting!



So what does this mean for us spiritually? I believe we are in the right place at the right time. We are just where we are supposed to be. So what if we are categorized as the “nones” or stretch that to be Unitarian Universalist, or part of the Unity Movement or Centers for Spiritual Living. I'm proud of that. Here is a perfect example. I attended a Catholic funeral on Friday. I sat next to a co-worker on my team that I really like. I know he is Baptist (just by listening to him in other conversations). As the Catholics in the funeral were kneeling, going through these interesting rituals, and taking communion, he asked me, what religion are you? I said with confidence, my affiliation and membership is with Unity. He said what is that? I said it is a denomination that offers a positive path for spiritual evolution and abundant living. He said, is it based on Christian beliefs? I said yes but is “inclusive” of many religious and spiritual teachings. I smiled. He smiled, nodded his head and said, “Interesting, I'll have to try it sometime.”

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As you mature and look for spiritual associations, I hope you will consider being part of an association, e.g. church or denomination. Find one that is open, accepting, and evolutionary that offers a place to grow spiritually and honors all paths. And as a priority, it inspires you to choose the right path for you. I heard a Unity minister say this the other day, seek to get your answers questioned rather than your questions answered. Don't underestimate the positive aspects of being part of a spiritual community. Research shows people who are, are happier, they are more engaged in the community, they vote more frequently, they are civically minded, and they have strong networks that are meaningful in their lives. I believe there is a growing need for community. We are globally connected but locally isolated. I think about that when I watch the sunset every day.

Maybe it was just the way I was raised early on or some great memories of us going to church with Neenie and Pop: there's a lot to be said for attending a church on special occasions, especially with kids. So what if we have to drive into Houston to do it until our local community evolves spiritually. Maybe it's worth it or at least considering. When you ponder your religious affiliation and consider how you will develop your family values, think about **how you will check the box religious affiliation: are you none or done?**

I love you more than all the religions in the world, all the spiritual perspectives of all time, and all the translations of all religious texts - Love Mom