



Splitting Infinity

Science without religion is lame,
religion without science is blind.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

In Geva's recent production of *Inherit the Wind*, the debate over science and faith takes place in a public forum—a courtroom. Though we get to know the townspeople, the defendant and the lawyers on both sides, and though we come to empathize with their struggles and their beliefs, the debate is nonetheless a public one with ramifications that ripple throughout the town and indeed, around the country.

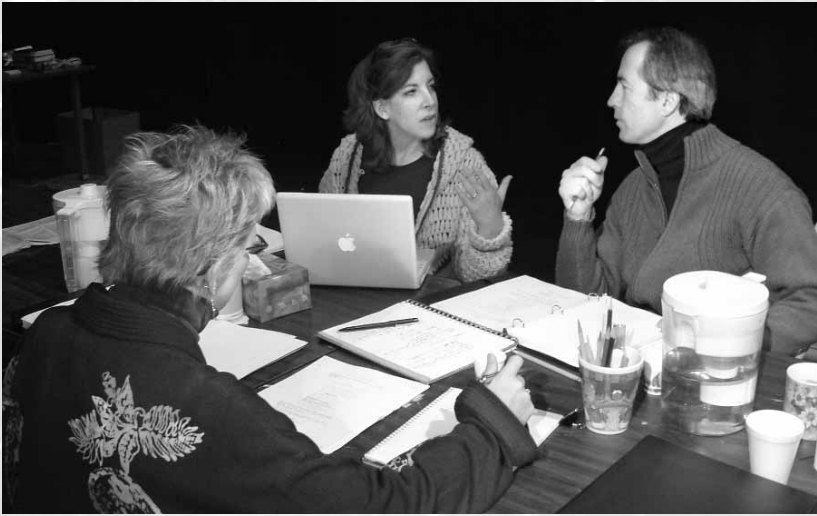


Playwright Jamie Pachino

In *Splitting Infinity*, playwright Jamie Pachino has taken some of those same ideas and grounded them within an intensely personal story. Leigh Sangold, a 49 year-old Nobel prizewinning astrophysicist sets up the ultimate science experiment: she will use physics to try to prove whether God exists. It's a bold proposal—audacious or absurd depending on your point of view. And it's a proposal that jeopardizes her 40-year friendship with Saul Lieberman, a rabbi who has been in love with Leigh for decades. The

debate between science and faith is personalized in the love story between these two characters.

Pachino says she was initially intrigued by a story she came across several years ago about a successful physicist who decided to put his career on the line by writing a book that posited the possibility of proving God's existence through science. "I was compelled by the idea of these people who go on large searches despite what society might have to say about them, and what would propel that



Playwright Jamie Pachino works with Director Mark Cuddy and Dramaturg Marge Betley in a workshop of Splitting Infinity during Geva's Hibernatus Interruptus Festival of New Plays (Fall 2005).

search” for someone who has already achieved success in their field. Venturing into such new and volatile territory is risky, notes Pachino. “It speaks to the mind that is both ambitious, excited by new things, as well as reckless—which makes for good drama. What if this man had very compelling, rational reasons for wanting to do this and he genuinely believed it and wanted other people to understand it and see what he saw?”

Though Pachino began work on the play five years ago, it could hardly be more timely. Questions of the relationship between science and faith pop up in the headlines daily, from the science page to stories of global political events to the op-ed section (though truly, this is a discussion that has been taking place since the days of antiquity). As Leigh says at one point in the play, “Do you have any idea how popular God is right now?” What’s at the root of this current focus, and why does it often seem so contentious, so divisive? “I think most of us have a yearning to understand the world on a broad level, or a yearning for a connection of some sort, and that is just a human quality that crosses all boundaries,” says Pachino. “But there’s the need not only to connect, but to know that you’re right. It comes out of this need to stand on solid ground. I think that’s why people go after science and religion, to find the absolutes, to find the thing that you can say:

**There is more religion in men’s science
than there is science in their religion.**

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Men go out to admire the heights of mountains,
the huge waves of the sea,
the broadest spans of rivers,
the circle of ocean, the revolutions of stars,
and leave themselves behind.

S T . A U G U S T I N E

“That I know for sure. And if I’m sure, then I’m going to tell you about it and if you don’t believe it, then you’re wrong” . . . It’s the ‘If you’re not with us, you’re against us’ philosophy . . . If you can’t find common ground between beliefs, then you’re always going to be divided.”

Those are large ideas that can seem terribly intellectual and distant from our daily experience. Most of us probably land somewhere between the extremes of fundamental religious beliefs and absolute rejection of anything but the material world. Indeed many people concede the possibility of the truth of both scientific discovery and spiritual faith. In Pachino’s hands, the big ideas are always connected to the heart of her characters. Their fears, passions and desires reflect our own. Joseph Campbell (world religion scholar and author of *The Power of Myth*) wrote that science and religion were both—at their most basic level—just attempts to understand the universe and our place in it. In Leigh we see that struggle for understanding. The absolute knowledge that she thought she could attain, and that she thought would satisfy her is now—at age 49—simply not enough. Saul offers her his worldview, but a belief system isn’t something one can lend like a paperback novel. As we see where their life journeys have taken Saul and Leigh, we also watch their younger selves, full of promise and hope—a powerful reminder of the dreams that shape our lives, even as we look back and question the roads not taken.

One of the strengths of Pachino’s play is that it is as layered and complex as real life, impossible to compartmentalize and impossible to make easy judgments about. “The play works on a lot of different levels,” says Pachino. It explores basic questions about “what you left behind in the past, what you believe in the present, relationships that you missed, forgiveness, making that true connection, the cost of being an ambitious woman and the idea of what happens when your star burns so brightly when you’re very young. They all fold into this play, so I think everybody will bring their own personal experience to it and take away something from it. Ideally, I hope that people walk away with an open mind.”



Marge Betley
Dramaturg

JUDAISM & RITUAL: THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

Splitting Infinity takes place during the Jewish High Holidays, the period beginning with Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, and ending with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The High Holidays are also called “Days of Awe.” According to the Talmud, all of man’s actions over the course of the year are judged by God, and on Yom Kippur, judgment is passed. The time in between is known as the Ten Days of Repentance or Ten Days of Penitence. They are “regarded as man’s last chance, through his actions, to influence God to reconsider an unfavorable decision.” As Leigh explains in the play, for the sins that are committed against God, one must seek forgiveness from God, but for the sins that are committed against another person, one must atone and ask forgiveness of that person directly. There are specific services and rituals that are performed during the High Holidays, including fasting from Yom Kippur eve (sunset of the day preceding Yom Kippur) until sunset on Yom Kippur itself. Yom Kippur is generally considered to be the most sacred day of the Jewish religious year.

**The conflict between science and religion
is in reality a misunderstanding of both.**

C A R L J U N G

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