

## God, Life, and Everything Tattoo

NO, I do NOT have a tattoo. The likelihood is, I'll NEVER have a tattoo. Frankly, I don't like them aesthetically.

I also don't want to pay the insane amount of money it costs to get, especially if it's something permanent that I might very easily learn to hate.

Oh, and I hate needles.

There are a lot of folks who have tattoos in the world, and I don't begrudge them their body art. But it recently got personal when our son came home from college with a tattoo.

To be fair, as tattoos go, it's nicely done. He put a lot of thought into the design, and the tattoo artist did a good job of rendering his drawing into skin ink. It's a jaguar - to represent his Mexican side of the family - on a shoulder.

But I'm not comfortable with it.

There is a certain part of me that really dislikes virtually all body "improvements." I have never been a fan of makeup and always find that a woman is more attractive without it than with.

I was once tempted to get an ear pierced when it was just beginning to be a big thing for guys to get a pierced ear, but every time I imagined myself with a diamond stud in my ear, it seemed like that was someone else - not me. I have NO piercings on my body.

So why this aversion to body art?

There is actually a theological component to it. In Judaism, there is a prohibition against tattoos. It's based on just a couple of verses such as Leviticus 19:28 "You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Lord."

But I've never been fond of proof-texting - of taking one or two verses of scripture and making an entire rule of life based on it. Besides, Leviticus bans a lot of things we take for granted today.

Rather, the more profound dislike for body altering comes from deeper Jewish thought as expressed in an article titled, "Tattooing in Jewish Law" by Rabbi Alan Lucas (found at [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com)). He writes:

In addition to the fact that Judaism has a long history of distaste for tattoos, tattooing becomes even more distasteful in a contemporary secular society that is constantly challenging the Jewish concept that we are created...in the image of God and that our bodies are to be viewed as a precious gift on loan from God, to be entrusted into our care and [are] not our personal property to do with as we choose.

The long and the short of it for me, then is that we are created in the image of God and are pretty okay just the way we are. I find the vast array of human beings infinitely interesting, joyously diverse and wondrous without necessity of further adornment.

This isn't to say that I want to *ban* tattoos or earrings or lipstick or gages, or even tongue-splitting (which I dislike intensely). Each person can choose for themselves how they see their own bodies. I don't for a moment think that God loves anybody any less because of a tattoo.

And of course, many people use tattoos as a way of honoring someone they love - children, parents, spouses. Others choose to give a message of faith, peace (though messages meant to convey hatred and intimidation are also there).

But I still worry.

When my son showed a friend of our family his tattoo, the friend said, "Better watch out, they're addicting." And I began to imagine him with sleeves of tattoos up and down his arms, with his legs and back covered in ink. The other day I saw a woman at the grocery store who had an endless tattoo running up her neck and onto her face. And the word "addicting" stuck in my gut.

I do worry that one is not enough. From what I can observe, people get one and then think, "Well, that wasn't so bad." Or else they think, "That's it? I was expecting more." And they go for another to get the thrill again. And again.

And I worry about wanting to put something profound permanently on the body only to end up looking ridiculous - like the guy who thought he was writing "Strength" (ironically in Hebrew) on his arm only to discover later that it mean, "Matzah"). I worry about the idea of removing a tattoo that's no longer desired (like the name or names of a former significant other).

Nobody who's getting a tattoo really cares what I think about it - and that's their right. But I would like to encourage anybody who's making any permanent changes to their bodies to step back and think about it.

And keep those needles away from me!