

GOD SEARCH

A MANUAL OF EXPERIENTIAL INQUIRY

Prepared for the Temple Beth El Torah Institute

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PREFACE

Why a manual of experiential inquiry about God

In a recent article in Psychology and Judaism, the authors speculated that one of the reasons so many young Jewish adolescents turned to other "cults" for spiritual understanding was the increasing secularization of Judaism.

What opportunities are these adolescents given to explore the different ways in which God has been experienced and understood throughout Jewish history. When the early childhood views of God as a grandfather figure in a long white beard give way, what is there to replace it. Often, then, the recitation of prayers are by rote, 'without a feeling or understanding of the "God" to whom the prayers are offered. Theoretically, in reform Judaism, each individual is free to find his or her own relationship with God. This is considered the meaning of the Avot: God of Abraham, God of Issac, God of Jacob. But without some systematic exploration, how are we to find that relationship. Reform provides the existential opportunity and choice, but what models of a God-focused relationship are offered? There are secular Jews, humanistic Jews, cultural Jews. Reform emphasizes the importance of action and deeds. God is revealed in the following of the Mitzvot, in the doing of service for others. Yet, Plaut has noted, that without a spirit of devotion behind them, Mitzvot themselves can become idols of worship (p), and Abraham Heschel emphasized the importance of the spiritual feelings behind the deeds. The reform movement provides the chance to choose and experience one's God, without having to assume the Torah as

literally revealed, and without having to obey the entire Mitzvot and Orthodox view.

This class provides an opportunity for an experiential inquiry, in which the participants have a chance to consciously focus on their views, feelings, emotions about the nature of God.

No one view will be presented as correct; and as Adin Steinsaltz's father said to this son, "I don't care if you ^{are} ~~become~~ a heretic, ^(Tomei 1/18/88 p. 36) ~~as long as you choose it~~ on the basis of thoughtful learning and exploration of God. ^{[But] I don't want you to be an ignoramus. -- We want our children's views +}

The Jewish tradition is rich in both models of individuals who, though human and with flaws, were God-focused and God-inspired. The tradition acknowledges our human foibles and limitations, and, at the same time, provides an elegant and beautiful way, through meditation, prayer, and focused deed, to approach and experience God.

Our belief is that self-study and God study are connected. We have framed this class as an opportunity to explore ourselves, our beliefs, and our deepest needs as they relate to our humanity and in our place in the Universe. Although the task may not be any easy one--particularly because we believe part of the task involves that we confront whatever limitations there may be in our belief systems, our patterns of thinking and conceptualization, our worldly idols. However, we believe such a search can give us the best possible opportunity to experience all the richness and joy, as well as comfort and meaning that the search for and personal understanding of God can provide.

TABLE OF CONTENTS: EIGHT SESSIONS

Class Discussion Topic	Prayer	Homework
1. Our experience of God, beliefs, views; stories about ourselves	not just words; but feelings.	God references (+/-)
2. What does belief and trust mean; What about free will?	eyes closed silence; sounds; visual	Self-efforts/ God plan?
3. All knowing/all powerful/ all good God: Problems of evil. God as controller of everything?	still small voice	Expt: as if all good God existed: Trust God.
4. Heaven? Death?	YHVH tegragrammaton tzedaka within it	what are your idols? <i>(God's self's idol)</i>
5. Meaning. Your Vow? How can we best serve God	Mecha Mocha: expanding consciousness	Daily Tzedaka.
6. Actions: Tikkun/ Tzedaka; let there Let there be light	Modeh Ani: my every need; Nightly Prayer: forgiveness	guide steps
7. The Torah/its meaning; how we know God	Shema	
8. Final Discussion: Israel: struggle with God <i>what committed to God</i>	Avot	

Re David's message -
Jackie Cohen
July -
Joan

no Jew - rebel
Jew but not spirit
Am - no feeling

FOR PEACE

God Search--Adult--Draft outline---Class One.

1. Start with prayer--MG;

What are they there for--their goals, and take responsibility for them; if this could be an ideal six weeks.

2. Buber's paper on God ?-no)--Nothing by accident. Shabbat bereshit, beginning a new cycle, new opportunity. Adam: where are you. Take responsibility; our choices. Read from Genesis/

3. Each of us have our own relationship with God--consideration and respect for each other's exploration. Avot--God of Abraham, God of Issac, etc. each with personal and different relationship with God;

4. Many paths to that relationship--read from Nachman intellectual, contemplative, mitzvot, etc

5. Exploratory, fun mood, take us beyond ourselves and "ego limitations" - Sweden 3x

6. Conscious attention--kavanah--reminders, gratefulness, trust. expanding of consciousness: meechamocha--

7. Begin where we are--boy in hebrew school story. Add gradually, not with grasping mind, but with joyful - Deut. mind. Accept "not yet" if that's where you are.

8. Paper and Pencil:
When I say the word God I mean
My early memories of God are...

Stanzas:
Leaves tree image

9. Shema: as meditation. Passage about joy of each word. unification prayer

10. Story of Schachter/singing

11. Modeh Ani--song.
Lech Lecha, song

12. Homework--shema in a.m. and p.m. with feeling. notice other times of gratefulness in week.

Shema
Shema

Teacher's Overview of Session One:

This session is an attempt to begin the process of God focusing, and self-focusing in as non-threatening a manner as possible.

This will include names of God, current views of God, earlier views of God; positive and negative aspects of God.

An emphasis that there are no right or wrong answers -- gentleness to each person's view. Trust/ sharing - Disagreement is fine. Modeling to act.

There will be a discussion of the Avot--each person needs to come to an understanding of their own view of God. We will gently suggest the nature of beliefs, and the limitations of beliefs (when used in place of experience), and conceptualizations. And also, just that beliefs can change over time--just like they did from five to now. What they say isn't cast in concrete, but part of their evolution and change. The

manual can be a record for them, a type of diary of where they were at this period in their life.

1st Commandment doesn't say you should believe in God. States as fact. Not a "Thou shalt"

We will state the nature of personal self-disclosure, using Arnold Lazarus's different levels (archery-like target) and then discuss stories about ourselves, our favorite illusions (i.e., I never lie, I can do anything, etc), as well as views of self when younger, and currently.

Finally, homework will be to look at where God is, isn't during the week (e.g., money, in nature); who mentions God's name and in what context (including: parents, teachers, magazines, etc).

*This is an effort to connect "God" in life -- Comp. Shalom 2 Torah study 2 letters
no one talking God in chardays. ^{in their God} read and/or 60 22*

CLASS ONE:

1. Draw a picture of God. Discussion. (Current view of God)

2. What were your views of God when you were five. Discuss.

Show Ken's picture

3. Connect the following with four lines without lifting your pencil:

o	o	o
o	o	o
o	o	o

Discussion.

4. Have you ever experienced God. How. Discuss. (Include what might keep you from experiencing God. What limits our beliefs. Stories about ourselves

God experience

What keeps us from it

Stories.

Discuss: favorite illusion/neutrinos

5. Names of God used in Judaism: (a contest, with teams)

6. Views of self (current/at five/ picture of self; names for self)

7. What I don't like about God that I've been exposed to (get on table);

8. What I do like about God I've been exposed to.

Homework (optional): where do you see God/hear about God/feel God in everyday during the week; e.g., money: in God we trust.

BEFORE WE BEGIN

The young boy sat beside his parents in the synagogue. All around him sat the members of the congregation—his friends, his parents' friends, and many others whom he did not know. All held their prayerbooks before their eyes and prayed the words of the service.

But the young boy did not pray. He did not know the prayers. He had just begun to study at Hebrew school. All he had learned so far were the letters of the Hebrew alphabet—the alefbet.

The young boy longed to pray with the others. There was so much for which to thank God. There were joys and fears he wanted to share. There was love and gratitude he wanted to express. He knew that all these feelings were expressed in the prayers. If only he could pray with the others.

At last, the young boy could contain himself no longer. He began to pray silently to himself—not in the words of the prayerbook, but in his own words. "O God," he prayed, "I would like to thank you for the beauty of this world I live in. I would like to tell you of my fears and joys. I would like to share my hopes and dreams. But I do not know the prayers. I only know the letters of the alefbet. But you know the prayers. God, please listen as I recite the alphabet, and please, won't you put the letters together into the proper words and prayers?"

And the boy began to recite silently, "Alef, bet, gimmel, dalet, hay, vav . . ."

—Chasidic Story