

November 1, 1988

TO: PARENTS of children participating in the "God Search" Class
at the Torah Institute

From: Deane (Davide Moshe) Shapiro

Re: an INVITATION. Please respond on page three.

I have the opportunity of teaching your child in the "God Search" class at Temple Eilat and Temple Beth El's Torah Institute on Tuesday night.

Below are a list of the some of the topics and questions we have discussed during the first four weeks. I would like to invite you to look these issues over and to discuss your views on these topics with your child.

The topics are issues upon which I am sure you have some memories, feelings, or thoughts. Your taking the time to share with your child on these issues will help reinforce the work we are doing in class, and, I believe, may also be an interesting exercise for you in wrestling with some quite provocative, difficult, and important questions.

TOPIC ONE: "WHY ARE YOU HERE AT TORAH INSTITUTE."

We began with a discussion of why we were at the Torah Institute. Nearly 90% of the answers were "Because my parents made me;" "Because I have to be"; "because the Rabbi gave me a guilt trip."

When I suggested they talk to their parents about why their parents wanted them to come, many said "Because my parents are afraid they will look bad if we don't come."

I don't know how many of your children actually took the initiative to talk to you about your views, but this seems like a wonderful opportunity to share with your children your views on WHY DO YOU WANT YOUR CHILDREN TO BE AT THE TORAH INSTITUTE.

Some children said they were there because "I want to go on with my Hebrew studies"; "it looked neat"; "because my friends are here"; "because I want to continue my Jewish education"; "I want to be confirmed."

They then asked me WHY AM I HERE. I told them that Judaism has touched my heart. That I feel it can be a wonderful way of looking at the world--everything from a path to experiencing God, a way of trying to repair the world; a way of understanding the good and "evil" inclinations within us. And I hoped this could would be an opportunity to share that with them.

At that point we passed out a section from the Torah portion

Bereshit (In the beginning), in which Adam, in response to God's question of did you eat from the forbidden tree, said "The woman gave me of the tree, and I ate. And the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done!' The woman replied: "The serpent duped me and I ate."

We discussed the issue of CHOICE AND RESPONSIBILITY, both topics dealing with the question of why they are here.

TOPIC TWO: EARLY MEMORIES OF GOD.

We spent a considerable portion of one class talking about their early memories of God. I would invite you to ask them to discuss their early memories of God with you. These memories are quite vivid and quite powerful for them. Please think back on your own early memories of God. How were they formed. Who were important influences for you? When did God first come into your consciousness? What were questions you had about God that confused you.

TOPIC THREE: WHEN I SAY THE WORD GOD, I MEAN....

In the Avot part of the Amidah, the word God is repeated before each of the patriarchs--God of Abraham, God of Issac, God of Jacob. One reason offered by the Rabbis for this is that each person has to evolve his or her own relationship with God. We spent a good deal of one class talking about their views--God as transcendent, God as within us; God as all powerful; God as providing us with free choice; God as ruler; God as imperfect if he allows evil; God as the still small voice within us; a harsh judge; a compassionate merciful force, etc.

This was a chance for them to share their views of God in an open ended way, as those views are evolving right now. What are your views of God. I would invite you to spend some time sharing with your child about their, and your views of God. How have they changed from the early memories?

TOPIC FOUR: THE SABBATH

We spent part of a session talking about what Sabbath means to them, and how the family experiences it. Discussion ranged from the purpose of different rituals practiced in some homes (candlelighting; blessing over bread and wine; blessing over children); the purpose of the Sabbath; etc.

One exercise we did in the group is attached, the Blessing over different family members, which, in our family, we have found to be a wonderful gift on Sabbath. A copy of this is attached. The way we do it (and the way we tried it in class) is to have the entire family (group) focus on one person, and to focus on what that person needs most right now. Then to focus our attention and caring on that person, and to send our compassion and wishes for that person to receive what they truly need.

If you are willing, I would like to invite you to practice this exercise at your home on a Sabbath evening with your family.

If it is a new exercise for you, you may find, at first, as with any new experience, it might not "feel" quite comfortable. But allow your heart to really want to share love and compassion (which, after all, is the exercise's intent) and to receive that love and caring.

One other "ritual" at the start of Sabbath might also be helpful--place a "box" with paper and pencil near your dining room table, and ask each person to write down (or at least symbolically place) the cares of the week that they want to leave behind as they enter the Sabbath. Then place those cares in the box, leave them behind, and enjoy beginning to enter the mood of the Sabbath.

I truly hope you are willing to participate on some of the above with your children. To enhance communication and dialogue between us, I would be very appreciative if you would be willing to share with me either in person, or in writing in the space below, any reactions or comments you might have had to the exercises/ discussion.

THANKING YOU IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. Shalom.

PLEASE CLIP AND RETURN:

To: Deane (Davide Moshe) Shapiro

From:-----

Comments on my discussion with my child regarding the topics.

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WHY ARE WE AT TORAH INSTITUTE

MY EARLY MEMORY OF GOD

WHEN I SAY THE WORD GOD I MEAN....

THE SABBATH BLESSING OVER FAMILY MEMBERS:

We give thanks, O God, for family and home. May it be warm with love and companionship. Here may we always find rest from the day's work; and refuge from cares; may our joys be deepened and our griefs softened by the love we give and receive.

The parents bless the children

May God bless you and guide you. Be strong for the truth, charitable in your words, just and loving in your deeds. A noble heritage has been entrusted to you; guard it well.

Numbers 6:24-26 KJV

May The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD's face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you....and give you peace.

Comments on my discussion with my child regarding the topics.

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WHY ARE WE AT TORAH INSTITUTE

MY EARLY MEMORY OF GOD

WHEN I SAY THE WORD GOD I MEAN....

THE SABBATH BLESSING OVER FAMILY MEMBERS:

* We had a very interesting discussion covering all the subjects. I thought that it was very beneficial and gave us a very interesting topic to cover.

Thanks

Mother and daughter filled out together

WHY ARE WE AT TORAH INSTITUTE

She enjoys being with friends &
especially likes this class.

A LOT ~~XXXXXX~~ (SERIOUSLY)

MY EARLY MEMORY OF GOD

When I needed a biopsy, Angie
prayed to God and the results were OK
so she felt she reached God.

WHEN I SAY THE WORD GOD I MEAN....

? She doesn't know!
(I)

THE SABBATH BLESSING OVER FAMILY MEMBERS:

She has no interest
we don't do it ~~XXXXXX~~
~~XXXXXX~~

