

Thinking About God

As part of my work with your Bar/Bat Mitzvah aged children, I assist them with their speeches by starting off with a suggested list of topics to address. One of these reads: “If somebody were to ask you ‘What is God’ and ‘Where is God’ how would you respond.” Most often, the response is a blank stare and the mumbled “I don’t know.” Pressed a bit, they will respond with platitudes: “God is everywhere, all powerful, my conscience, an old man with a beard, a spirit,” etc. Sometimes, I speak with the kids and their parents together or even with the parents separately. Parents tell me that it’s hard to speak to their children about God. I strongly suspect this is because we ourselves have not spent very much time seriously thinking through our own thoughts about God.

Just as often as the above, I will be asked “What do Jews believe about God?” The truth is that almost every Jew I know has a different view of God. So perhaps the question should be more precisely stated: “What does Judaism teach that we should believe about God?” I’m sorry to say (actually I’m delighted to say) that Judaism has a wide range of teachings about God, many of which are inconsistent with one other. As most of you have heard me say, Judaism is a religion that focuses on what we should do in our lives far more than what we should believe about God, the afterlife, etc.

But God is critical to Judaism and is a subject that we rarely discuss. It is perfectly OK to struggle with the idea of God (in fact the name of our people, *Israel*, means one who struggles with God), it is even OK to be angry with God; it’s just not OK to ignore God. To this end, I’d like to invite you to a discussion series about God.

The series will be held on 4 consecutive Thursdays beginning Thursday, August 14th and ending September 4th. We will meet from 7:00 – 8:30 PM and will use the book *Finding God: Selected Responses*, by Sonsino and Syme as a springboard for discussion. My plan is that this be a discussion group more than a class. There is no “right answer” to these questions, not even a right Jewish answer. There are many ideas and your’s are as important as anyone’s. My goal is that you will leave the discussion having thought and struggled more deeply about God than perhaps you have ever done in your life and just might have come up with a more nuanced view of what God is and isn’t.

The suggested donation for the class will be \$25 for members and \$40 for non-members. The book will cost an additional \$15 per copy. Please do let me know if you are planning to attend so that I can order the books and plan the logistics.

PS: Some of you may question why I wrote “God” and not “G-d.” Very traditional Jews don’t write the complete name of God on any piece of paper that might be thrown away. These individuals would bury or store in a special room called a *geniza* any such documents. My own view of the English word “God” is that it does not require this particular treatment and therefore I have spelled the word in its normal spelling.