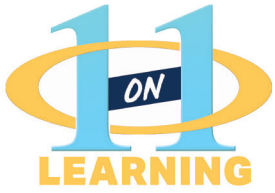


JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



IS GOD A "FELT PRESENCE" IN YOUR LIFE?

SOURCE-BASED DISCUSSION

PROJECT
INSPIRE.
A PROGRAM OF aish HaTorah

Those of us who want more spirituality in our lives are looking for pathways to connect to God. Perhaps, by looking at how faith was born, we can gain and understanding about how to connect.

A. HOW DID EMUNAH (BELIEF) COME INTO EXISTENCE?

The Midrash describes the birth of belief in God with an iconic story about Abraham, the first Jew and progenitor of monotheism.

SOURCE 1: *Midrash Rabbah. (39:1) on Genesis (12:2) Avraham discovers God.*

And G-d said to Avraham: 'Go from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house...' (Genesis 12:2)
Midrash: To what may this be compared? To a man who was traveling from place to place when he saw a palace in flames. He wondered: "Is it possible that the palace has no owner?" The owner of the palace looked out and said, "I am the owner of the palace." So too, Avraham our father said, "Is it possible that the world lacks a ruler?" God looked out and said to him, "I am the Ruler, the Sovereign of the universe."

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וְגו'
(בראשית יב, א), רַבִּי יִצְחָק פָּתַח (תהלים
מה, יא): שָׁמַעִי בַת וִרְאִי וְהִטִּי אָזְנוֹךָ וְשִׁכְחִי
עִמָּךְ וּבֵית אָבִיךָ, אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק מְשַׁל לְאַחַד
שְׁהִיָּה עוֹבֵר מִמְקוֹם לְמִקוֹם, וְרָאָה בִּירָה אַחַת
דוֹלְקֵת, אָמַר תֹּאמַר שְׁהִבִּירָה הַזֹּאת בְּלֹא מְנַהִיג,
הַצִּיץ עָלָיו בַּעַל הַבִּירָה, אָמַר לוֹ אֲנִי הוּא בַּעַל
הַבִּירָה. כֵּן לִפִּי שְׁהִיָּה אָבִינוּ אַבְרָהָם אוֹמֵר
תֹּאמַר שְׁהַעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּלֹא מְנַהִיג, הַצִּיץ עָלָיו
הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְאָמַר לוֹ אֲנִי הוּא בַּעַל
הָעוֹלָם.

Avraham looked at the marvel of the universe, so perfectly suited for man's existence, so beautiful, bountiful and seamlessly interwoven in all its splendor and glory. The world is indeed a palace which must have an owner. This inquiry led him to God. As we say in Psalms, Olam Chesed Yiboneh...He built a world of kindness (89:3) The first "Hospitality Inn"!

Q: Avraham found God by seeing Him in the beauty, order and magnificence of our world. Where do you find God in life?

Q: How do you keep this belief alive and growing?

Q: Are you able to share it with others or is it left inside your heart? How could you share it?

B. MAKING IT PERSONAL

Consider the following source from the Passover Haggadah:

SOURCE 2: *Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, Ch. 61, p. 273:*

Every generation and every individual must see himself as having personally left Egypt.

The Pesach Haggadah states, "In each and every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he personally left Egypt."

In other words, every person must see himself as having left Egypt ... This is hinted to by the verse, "And you must tell your child on that day, saying 'It is because of **what God did for me when I left Egypt**'" (Shemot 13:8). The verse does not say, "**what G-d did for us,**" but rather "**for me,**" as if you, too, left Egypt.

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו [כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים], פי" שכל אדם חייב שיראה עצמו כאלו יצא ממצרים ... ולכך מייתי קרא "ונהגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר] בעבור זה עשה לי [בצאתי ממצרים]" [שמות יג:ח] ולא כתיב "לנו" כאלו הוא היה היוצא

At Sinai we were introduced to God, not as the Creator of Heaven and Earth but as the One **"Who brought You out of Egypt" – a personal God, who wants a relationship with each and every one of us.**

Q: Many of us are deeply connected to people, whom we might describe as being a "felt presence in our lives"? We carry them around in our heads and in our hearts and they impact our decision-making even while not around? Do you have people like this in your life? Who are they? What brought them to this "special status" for you?

Q: Is God a felt presence in your life?

Q: Would you want Him to be a felt presence in your life? If you have ambivalence, what is at the heart of this feeling?

Q: Imagine an amazing father or mother, who loves you more than anyone, and is wise and capable of taking care of you and getting you through any situation? Would you want to walk through life with them in your heart?

C. GRATITUDE IS AN ATTITUDE!

Perhaps we can learn how to keep the relationship with God growing, by reflecting on a tragic mistake made by our ancestors. The source in the Torah gives a reason why our forefathers were exiled from Israel:

SOURCE 3: *Torah Devarim (28:47) Serving God with Happiness*

Because you did not serve God Your Lord with happiness and a good heart, when you had an abundance of everything.

תחת אשר לא־עבדת את ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה
וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרֹב כָּל:

Q: This verse implies that the Jews were exiled not because they “didn’t serve God,” but rather that they did serve, but weren’t happy about it. Why was this such a terrible sin?

Q: What does it say about our service of God? Is it the only goal or is there something else at play?

Q: Also notice their mistake was when they had tremendous abundance. Don’t we all think that if we had everything we want, we would certainly be happy? What do you think happened, and how can we prevent it from happening to us?

The key to deepening our relationship to God is to become aware of all the blessings that He bestows upon us, from the most grandiose to the smallest and most personal. By connecting to His love for us in this way, we develop a deep emotional relationship with Him. Gratitude is an attitude!

LEARN TO LIVE GRATEFULLY - CHANGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD IN ONE MONTH

This is a four-week workshop on Happiness and Connecting to God: There are four phases to this workshop. Each phase is for a week, but the sequence can be repeated again after the conclusion of all four phases.

Phase 1.

Each day write for a minimum of 5 minutes about a pleasure that you enjoy (e.g. hot showers, your favorite fruit). Review what you wrote the day before and write about something else the next day.

Phase 2.

Write about the pleasure of something that sometimes makes you happy and sometimes doesn’t (e.g. work, your siblings or parents, school, your children).

Phase 3.

Write about things in nature that for the most part we take for granted. (e.g. warmth of the sun, blue sky, symmetry of trees, puffy white clouds).

Phase 4.

Write about challenges in your life, and how they too may offer the possibility of happiness and a chance to connect to God.

The thought process is that by starting with all the things that give us pleasure without any resistance, we can work up to the things in life which seem to be “mixed blessings” to extract the pleasure in them as well. This exercise helps develop “gratitude taste buds” connecting us to God. Just remember to attribute these pleasures to God as a personal gift. Many people actually acknowledge various pleasures as blessings, but since they don’t attribute them to God they don’t feel close to Him as a result. The key is not only to be grateful for the pleasure but to direct that feeling towards building your relationship to God.