

studying what great minds have said about belief in God that I find myself today without a clear God concept. I do not believe in a personal God. For this reason, I have great difficulty with much of the prayer book. While its language is beautiful and the thoughts uplifting, I find myself mouthing the words but not truly believing what I am saying. I know that being part of the Jewish people is not predicated on belief in God. Still, I hope that, despite my doubts, I will be able to find my own comfortable place within the God tradition.

Steve Arnold: I have always believed in God in some form. As a child my God image was of a Divine overseer recording sins and good deeds in a giant ledger. Over time that childish view has been replaced with a belief in a spark of divinity within each of us—a spark we have to struggle to keep alive. I look forward to the day when my own spark of divinity is always in the forefront of my mind.

Jennifer Warriner: In the past I considered myself an atheist. Today I would say I believe in God, but not the personal God/father figure of our *siddurim* who exacts rewards and punishments. In my mind, God is more like an invisible string of energy connecting all souls.

John Planer: I envision God as a good, loving, compassionate parent—one who laughs, weeps, and despairs at human folly and cruelty. My God

charges us to live virtuously, compassionately, and altruistically. She expects us to battle against ourselves in order to become better human beings and to try to leave the world a better place because we lived. She gives us tasks to accomplish—but what they are we do not know for certain. I recognize my leap of faith; hence I respect leaps of faith which others take—often in different directions.

I base my belief in a loving, omnipotent God upon experiences like these:

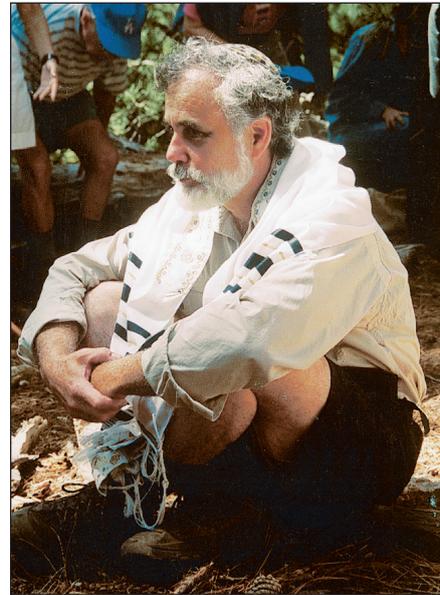
- I feel intense gratitude for the life granted me. I cannot comprehend how I can feel such strong gratitude without the existence of a Being to Whom I am grateful.
- I feel intense responsibility to use my gifts and time wisely. I cannot explain how I can feel such duty without being responsible to Someone.
- Many events in my life and in the lives of those around me seem to work for the good in unforeseen ways—ways that suggest some underlying plan which I cannot comprehend.
- In intensely personal moments when I envision myself communicating with God, I imagine God responding to my questions—and God’s answers do not sound like me at all.

• At age 16 I asked God for a *lev chacham*—a heart of wisdom. I sense strongly that God has granted my request.

• At rare times, often involving music, I feel a shiver that suggests to me that Someone has touched me, Someone far beyond the ken of empirical science—that I have experienced a Reality beyond human reason and explanation.

Granted, none of these experiences

constitute externally verifiable proof. I doubt and question. I passionately seek Truth. I hope and I believe. But most of all I hope.



A moment of reflection for Gary Tenen, who joined other members of Temple Emanu-El, Tucson, Arizona for a Shabbat hike and service on Mount Lemmon, August 2002.

RJ: Do you believe God hears our prayers?

Ellen Morrow: For me, praying to God runs the gamut from feeling very supported to feeling little at all. I will never forget one time in my life that I thought I’d never get through without falling apart completely. I prayed with great urgency, and it’s hard to describe, but it

almost felt like being held or cradled. This experience helped give me the strength to come through that period not only unscathed but thriving. Since then, whenever I am distressed, even if I don’t experience the same sensation, I am confident of being strengthened and supported. I also derive a great deal of comfort when I look at the prayers in the *siddur* through the lens of what I need—so, for example, pleas for peace become a plea for inner peace.

There are other times, though, when I enjoy praying but feel no particular spiritual connection. Still other times I pray without getting anything much out of it, except the knowledge that I’m helping to provide prayer for those who need it or can feel that connection at that moment.

Dick Israel: As human beings we have been endowed by our Creator with the power to imagine a world in which we live in harmony with other humans, all of life, and the environment which supports life on Earth. In my prayers I recognize, accept, and express gratitude for the opportunity I have every day of

TO LEARN MORE...

about connecting with God, read *Finding God: Selected Responses (Revised Edition)* by Rabbis Rifat Sonsino and Daniel B. Syme. This series of essays by significant Jewish thinkers (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Rabbi Emil Fackenheim, Rabbi Harold Schulweis, Dr. Judith Plaskow, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, and others) explores “how can we know God?” and “what does God ‘want’ from us?": www.urjbooksandmusic.com.

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