

Always I've wondered about God. To tell the truth, I became a rabbi not because I had all the answers about God, but in part because questions about faith and meaning in life pressed me with special force.

**TAKE THE
GOD
SURVEY**

Rabbi Mark Shapiro and *Reform Judaism* magazine invite you to participate in a Movement-wide conversation about God that will help us in understanding the scope of Reform Jewish belief today. We plan to report on our findings in a forthcoming edition. Your responses will be anonymous.

Be counted in *The God Survey*. Visit reformjudaismmag.org/Godsurvey.

My dad was a physician. In high school I considered medicine for my life's work and took all the chemistry, biology, and physics courses expected of me for a pre-med college track. But toward the end of my senior year, I realized I was less interested in *how* an atom worked than *why* there was an atom to begin with. Questions about why we are here and the purpose of life tilted me away from science toward religion and inquiries about faith.

Such questions have remained with me, and I think they are shared by many adult Jews who ponder whether there is a God and what that God does or does not do.

Last Yom Kippur I set out to explore these questions with my congregation, Sinai Temple in Springfield, Massachusetts. Before the singing of Kol Nidre, I spoke about the challenges of faith and then asked my congregants if they would help me complete my sermon. "Up until now," I explained, "this conversation has been one-sided. You have heard me speak

about my ideas of God, but I haven't heard from you, and you haven't heard from each other. Let's remedy that on Sunday morning, when I hope you will talk to me via a survey on God and belief. Read your

New York Times or whatever Sunday paper you wish, but take 10 minutes as well to complete this survey."

On the day after Yom Kippur every temple member received a computer questionnaire I had designed with the help of several congregants. Over the course of the next few weeks, 338 congregants—40% of the congregation—completed the God survey.

Their responses revealed a great deal.

The Existence of God

When given the statement, "There is no God," 60% of the Sinai respondents disagreed. In other words, most people were not comfortable with no God. When asked if the universe reveals evidence that God exists, 45% agreed.

Interestingly, the women in the congregation are more likely than the men to believe in God. Many more men (33%) than women (8%) agreed with the statement, "There is no God," and 44% of men agreed that "Science can explain everything," as compared to 23% of women.

Age also matters in relation to God beliefs. Fifty-one percent of respondents in their 20s agreed with the statement, "Science can explain everything, making God an unnecessary hypothesis," whereas only 17% in their 50s did so. When it came to the statement "There is no God," 25% of those in their 20s agreed, whereas only 7% in their 50s agreed.

Connecting to God

What about experiencing God? In what settings have Sinai congregants felt connected to God?

More than half (53%) report having felt close to God at Shabbat services and funerals. Smaller numbers have felt close to God at lifecycle events such as bar/bat mitzvah, a wedding, or a baby naming. Some have felt close to God while experiencing great art, literature, or film. Above all else, 64% of congregants have felt close to God outdoors, when encountering what the survey called "nature's wonders." It appears that during liminal moments—times when a human being comes to the edge of regular experience and senses the boundaries of life—God's presence is most often felt. ➤

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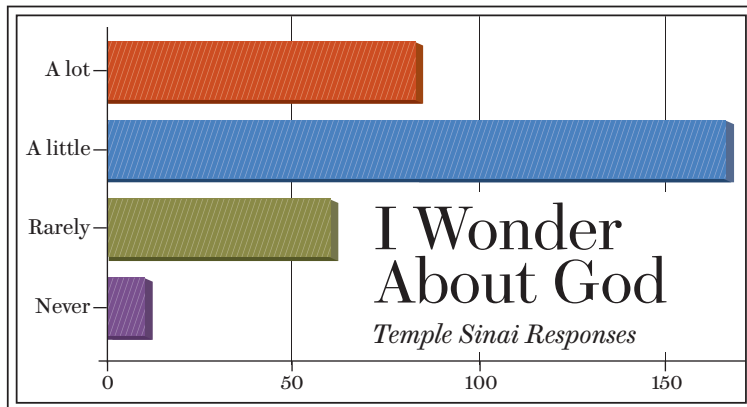


Chart results courtesy of Rabbi Mark Dov Shapiro

Previous page: NASA, JPL-Caltech, Kate Su (Steward Obs, U. Arizona) et al.