

Age Differences	20's Agree	50's Agree
Universe reveals God exists	43%	60%
Science explains all	51%	17%
Evil exists for a purpose	54%	36%
God comforts	55%	73%
Purpose & design in the world	60%	71%
God is hope	65%	78%
There is no God	25%	7%

Gender Differences	Males Agree	Female Agree
Universe reveals God exists	41%	54%
Science explains all	44%	23%
God is hope	64%	81%
There is no God	33%	8%

Source: Temple Sinai

I am particularly struck by the finding that the largest percentage of congregants—74.6%—identified God as “hope,” followed by “Healing the sick is Godly” (73%), “Feeding the hungry is Godly” (71.5%), and “God is love” (71.3%). This is not theology as usual—not the traditional God of our prayerbook, who is usually described as *Melech/Ruler* of the Universe and spoken to as *Atta/You* in every blessing. Most of my congregants do not construe God as a celestial figure who acts in this world. For them, God is a presence or power. For them, God is not so much “above” us in heaven as God is “beside” us or “within” us. Most believe that God “acts” when we act with God’s attributes, such as love, kindness, and justice.

I find it significant that this metaphor of God as hope or love is largely absent from Reform liturgy. No wonder that some people feel disenfranchised coming to services where the prevailing God metaphor is *Mel-ech* or *Ruler*. Broadening the vocabulary of worship to include new God language for the majority of my congregants may be my next step as a rabbi.

On a personal note, when the results began to arrive last fall, I asked myself how I would define success for the survey. From my rabbinic perspective, it would have been gratifying to learn that most respondents “believed.” But what if only 50% or 25% believed, or if very few even cared about matters of faith? Would that constitute failure?

I realized then that, for me, the statistics on faith

## God and the Individual: 6 Jewish Perspectives

### In the Bible

God is a personal God, who hears and answers prayer. God is compared to a parent who cares and watches lovingly over us.

### In Rabbinic Literature

God is a personal God, who hears and answers prayer. God has the capacity for compassion and anger, but “prefers” mercy.

### Moses Maimonides (1135-1204)

We can pray directly to God and draw nearer to God as our intellectual level increases.

### Isaac Luria (1534-1572)

Meditation, prayer, and contemplation give us knowledge about God’s relationship to our world. People represent the Divine Presence on earth. We can commune with God.

### Martin Buber (1878-1965)

Whenever we have an “I-Thou” relationship with another person, we also encounter God, the “Eternal Thou.”

### Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972)

We humans can know God’s “feelings.” God loves humankind.

*Adapted from Finding God: Selected Responses by Rifat Sonsino and Daniel B. Syme, 2nd edition, © 2002, URJ Press.*

would tell only part of the story. Beyond the numbers, if the survey led people to think about what God did or didn’t mean for them and to talk about their struggles with faith, that alone would be a benefit to the congregation.

Jews are meant to “wrestle” with God. That is how Jacob, our patriarch, receives his second name in Genesis. After a night of dreaming, he is renamed Yisrael, meaning “one who struggles with God.”

As long as Jews are doing that, I am satisfied. If we are learning, growing, and questioning, we are on the right track. □

## Bringing the God Conversation to Home and Temple

In addition to participating in the God Survey online (see page 36), we encourage you to discuss your beliefs, ideas, and questions about God in your congregation and home:

- › Plan a congregational conversation around the survey in the fall—perhaps on Yom Kippur afternoon.
- › Invite members to keep a journal of sacred experiences to share as a group.
- › Discuss thoughts about God at the family’s Shabbat table.