



The Ziegler School
of Rabbinic Studies

בית המדרש ע"ש זיגלר

Walking with God

Edited By
Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson
and Deborah Silver

דרכיה דרכי נעם

In Memory of Louise Held

The Held Foundation

Harold Held
Joseph Held
Robert Held
Melissa Bordy



ZIEGLER SCHOOL OF
RABBINIC STUDIES
AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY



Published in partnership with the
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
and the Rabbinical Assembly





RABBI BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON

DEAN AND VICE PRESIDENT

IN THE GLORY DAYS OF THE MIDDLE AGES, TWO TITANS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, Rabbi Moses Maimonides (the Rambam) and Rabbi Moses Nachmanides (the Ramban) sparred. Their argument: was the obligation to believe in God one of the 613 commandments of the Torah, or was it the ground on which all the 613 commandments stood? Neither disputed that Jewish life flows from the fountain of faith, that connecting to God is a life-long journey for the seeking Jew and a pillar of Jewish life and religion.

Not only the Middle Ages, but the modern age affirms that same conviction. Conservative Judaism, in *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*, affirms, “We believe in God. Indeed, Judaism cannot be detached from belief in, or beliefs about God. ... God is the principal figure in the story of the Jews and Judaism.” In the brochure, *Conservative Judaism: Covenant and Commitment*, the Rabbinical Assembly affirms, “God and the Jewish People share a bond of love and sacred responsibility, which expresses itself in our biblical *brit* (covenant).”

It is to aid the contemporary Jew in the duty and privilege of exploring that relationship, of enlisting the rich resources of Judaism’s great sages through the ages, that the **Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University**, in partnership with the **United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism** and the **Rabbinical Assembly**, has compiled and published this adult education course focused on Jewish apprehensions of God. 12 essays and worksheets will open a wide range of insights and conceptualizations of the One who is beyond all words, beyond all conceptualizations, yet – paradoxically – who is as close as the human heart and who permeates all space and time. Typical of Conservative Judaism, these essays integrate traditional and academic insights and approaches, celebrate the pluralism of Jewish diversity throughout history, and insist that open-minded and critical study can energize a faith attained without blinders.

It remains our happy duty to thank the **Held Family Foundation**, and especially **Mr. Harold Held**, dear friend to the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies and the American Jewish University, and a philanthropic visionary, for making the production and dissemination of this remarkable tool possible. I’d also like to thank **Dr. Robert Wexler**, President of the American Jewish University for his steady support and encouragement of this project from its inception, and **Rabbi Jerome Epstein** and the **United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism**, and **Rabbi Joel Meyers** and the **Rabbinical Assembly**, for their partnership in producing the project. Thanks to Rami Wernik, Acting Dean of the Fingerhut School of Education, for his expertise as a pedagogue. And it is also a personal pleasure to thank my student and colleague, **Ms. Deborah Silver**, whose professionalism, insight, patience and diligence have produced a work of real excellence.

May the Holy Blessing One enliven your study, awaken your heart, and open your soul to the wonders of the Divine, and may the essays and worksheets which follow help you to walk the time honored path of Torah and mitzvot in a spirit of wonder, pluralism, openness, intellectual honesty, and strengthened faith.

B’virkat Shalom,

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

Vice President, American Jewish University

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION

This book is the first in the Ziegler Adult Learning series. Our aim is to provide high quality, stimulating and challenging materials to enable adults to expand their understanding of the basic concepts and tenets of Conservative Judaism – and to expose them to the thinkers, texts and ideas which underpin our tradition. The audience we have in mind is the questioning adult congregant who might not be entirely familiar with Jewish sources.

The book will enable you to teach a series of twelve adult education classes on the subject of God. It contains twelve self-contained units, which are arranged chronologically. Eleven of these comprise:

- an essay
- a set of four texts, with questions
- a fifth text for further/creative study
- session suggestions

The final unit has no essay: instead, it provides an opportunity for participants to reflect upon and consolidate their learning.

RESOURCES

For each session you will need:

- the essays (for session 1, essays 1 and 2; for the rest, the essay for the subsequent session to hand out at the end)
- copies of the texts

It will also be useful to have copies of the Tanakh, in Hebrew and in English.

For the first session, you might also wish to provide every participant with a notebook. This will serve as a journal, in which the participant's own thoughts and insights can be recorded. If your budget will not accommodate this, it is nevertheless strongly recommended that participants be encouraged to bring their own resources so that they can journal, and/or for you to bring spare paper to every session. Busy congregants are unlikely to be able to keep these materials in their minds from session to session, and a journal will provide them with tangible evidence of their learning, as well as something to refer to after the course is over. You might also wish to provide a ring binder, or a folder of some kind, in which participants can keep the essays and texts.

SUGGESTED SESSION FORMAT

Below is a basic format, with timings, for a two-hour session. Please feel free to amend it as it suits you – you might wish to allow more time for chavruta and less for group work, for example.

INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

Orientation – recap and consolidate what happened in the last session. Elicit the main points of the essay for today/issues/questions/problems the essay raises (we strongly recommend eliciting rather than 'teaching' – easier on you, and it involves the participants more. It will also be quicker and allow more time for chavruta.)

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

CHAVRUTA (30 MINS)

Study of texts in chavruta

GROUP WORK (35 MINS)

- Presentation from the chavruta groups
- Consolidation of what has been learned from the texts

BREAK (10 MINS)

- (If you use a text for part 2 of the session, you can hand it out here)

GROUP STUDY (40 MINS)

- Various options are provided: see individual session suggestions

CLOSEDOWN/JOURNAL (10 MINS)

- What did we learn?
- How does what we learned today sit in the context of previous sessions?
- Journal entries
- Hand out the essay for next time.

A FEW POINTS TO NOTE:

- We recognize you are busy! The session notes have been designed to enable you to prepare your teaching quickly and easily, so you might want to read them even before you begin to prepare the essay and texts. Basically, if you read the essay & have some answers to the questions on the chavruta texts you will be ready to run the session.
- Four chavruta texts are provided per session, with questions to help guide the study. The idea is that you split your participants into four chavruta groups. Initially, give each group one of the texts. When the time comes to report back, give every group all of the texts so that they can study them as their colleagues report on them, and take them home. This technique enables a lot of learning to be covered in a comparatively short time, and has the added benefit of empowering participants to teach each other. Then again, the sessions are packed and the material is rich, so you might want to be selective.
- You may wish to use only two, or only one, of the texts for chavruta. The session has been designed to work whatever you decide. We only have one plea – please let the participants interact with the actual texts. Even when they are complex – and some of them are – there is a magic in people studying together which invariably means that precious insights arise and are shared. If you wish to change the questions at the bottom of every text to help focus the discussion, please feel free – they are only suggestions.
- It is entirely up to you what you do with the second part of the session. You can use the fifth text, or come up with something of your own – we give some ideas in the session outlines. We have sometimes made the fifth text one with which the participants might already be familiar so they can look at it with new eyes.
- Finally, please do not feel limited by the texts we have provided. There is a huge amount of material outside this book which could be used, and which, for reasons which include copyright and space limitations, we have not been able to include. Popular song lyrics, for example, are a rich resource.

GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

RABBI DAVID LIEBER, DHL

The Hebrew Bible is neither a book of history nor of theology, yet it is central to our understanding of ancient Israel and its faith. Its contents are rich and varied. Some of its writings reached their final form as late as the second century BCE (Before the Common Era), such as the Book of Daniel, alluding as it does to the Maccabean age. Others, such as the Song of Deborah, are a thousand years older, with passages dating from the age of the Judges in the twelfth century BCE. It is not surprising, then, that its pages reflect the religious beliefs and practices of the times and social conditions in which they originated.

The stories of the patriarchs, for example, while reaching their present form in later days, retain memories of the time when the ancestors of Israel were still landless, wandering clans. Each was headed by a patriarch who not only saw to its physical well-being, but to the maintenance of its customs and traditions and the training of the young. He also was charged with the proper maintenance and worship of the family god (“the god of the fathers”) who was considered part of the household and protected it from evil spirits. Hence the biblical notion that the first born were to serve as priests. This may have been the reason behind Jacob’s eagerness to inherit the right of the first born, as the midrash also suggests. Note that the god of each of the patriarchs is referred to by a different name: *elohei Avraham*, *pahad Yitzhak*, *abir Ya’akov*, suggesting that different deities were involved. Alongside of this god, many families had other gods, some (known as “*trafim*”) to ward off demonic forces, others to assure fertility. Family festivals were regularly celebrated at the home shrine, while others, often major agricultural ones, were observed at larger open-air sanctuaries.

Laws in the Covenant Code (Exodus 21-23) and stories of the conquest in the Book of Judges reflect the early stages in the life of the tribes (12th-11th centuries BCE). Many of the clans had settled down in villages and towns, usually of no more than three-hundred members. The clans still maintained their family solidarity, but now they had to negotiate their practices with their neighbors (“*re'im*”). The council of elders served that purpose, with each family retaining a high degree of independence. It controlled its own property, homes as well as slaves and cattle. It continued to worship its household gods and held its own family celebrations. At the same time, all of the families were bound by common moral laws and joined with their neighbors in worshipping at open-air shrines on the occasion of communal celebrations. The gods to whom they brought offerings were generally the ones responsible for the fertility of the land and of the cattle, the *ba'alim* and *asheivot*.

Clans banded together into tribes to defend themselves against marauders and to conquer new territories from the Canaanites. In these battles, they turned to YHWH, the god of war (Exodus 15:3) who appointed charismatic chieftains (“*shoftim*”) to pacify the land. These chieftains were imbued with the spirit of YHWH, but did not give up on their local gods. Thus, Gideon, zealous as he was for YHWH, even refusing the invitation of his people to rule over them since YHWH alone was their ruler (Judges 8:23), did not refrain from erecting an ephod (probably, in this context, an image to be worshiped) which “became a snare to Gideon and his household” (8:27). Elsewhere we are told that under the pressure of the Philistines, the tribe of Dan left its original home, north of Judah, to settle on the northern border, beyond the Kinneret. Here the tribe erected a sanctuary to house the ephod, together with the Levite who ministered to it, both of which had been taken by force from the house of Micah. The sanctuary later occupied a place of honor in the northern kingdom since its priesthood was descended from Moses (18:30).

The onslaught of the Philistines led to the union of the tribes, a move sanctioned by YHWH, who directed Samuel - judge, priest and prophet - to anoint Saul as their first king. The kingdom was now involved in ongoing battles, under the leadership of YHWH and his anointed king. This was especially true of David who was promised an eternal dynasty by him, one that was sealed by a covenant. YHWH was now recognized as the god of the realm, his ark brought to Jerusalem and subsequently installed in an ornate temple erected by Solomon. That this did not affect the way the people continued to worship their own gods is evident from the narratives in Kings and the pronouncements of the classical prophets. Even as late as the closing days of the first temple (586 BCE) we find the prophet Ezekiel denouncing the

GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

people for the worship of alien gods in the temple itself (ch.8) and the ongoing sacrifices at the open-air sanctuaries (so also, eg, Jeremiah 2:30ff, an older contemporary of Ezekiel's).

It is only after the Babylonian exile that we witness a change in mood. This is attested by the Torah which seems to have emerged in Babylonia itself. It was evidently the product of priests and scribes who set themselves to collect and preserve the oral traditions and practices of the past. The need for this was felt by the newly established communities of exiles who, living in their own villages, still longed to return to their own land and sought to keep the connection with the past alive for themselves and their descendants. The earlier materials, which were edited and reconstituted to provide hope and guidance for the future, were taught orally on Sabbaths and holy day, as well as at sessions with young men being trained to take their place in the community.

To maintain their distinctiveness from the surrounding Babylonian groups, the Jewish villages had to have a common god who had been worshiped by them in the past. The discrete household and village gods no longer sufficed. What was needed was a god who was known to all of the ancestors of Israel and only one met that requirement: YHWH, who had been worshiped nationally in the temple in Jerusalem, whose prophets had warned of the coming destruction and urged the people to be faithful to him.

We do not know when the Torah emerged in its present form. Since Ezra is alleged to have brought it back to Jerusalem in the fifth century BCE, it appears to have existed at that time, though possibly not in its final form. Interestingly, a midrash seems to recognize Ezra's role in the composition of the written text, stating that the original copy of the Torah had been destroyed at the time of the exile and that Ezra had rewritten it from memory. Accordingly, if Moses had not given the people the Torah, Ezra would have proved worthy of doing so!

The Torah, then, became the foundational text of Israel and its God the one to be worshiped and revered. As such, He is its central subject and his existence is taken for granted. He is incomprehensible, yet He reveals himself in a variety of ways.

To start with, He is the creator. Behind Genesis 1 lurk older Mesopotamian myths, yet the chapter itself is relatively free of mythical allusions. Nor does it insist on "*creatio ex nihilo*" (creation out of nothing) a reference to which does not appear in any text before the Maccabean age. Rather, written in poetic prose, it refers to God as bringing order out of chaos in an effortless manner. Everything proceeds according to the divine plan, with each day allocated a specific act of creation. The objects created in days four to six are parallel to those in days one to three, except that they are endowed with the power of locomotion. At the summit stands the human being who alone is celebrated as having been created in the divine image, which probably means that he is to be the divine surrogate on earth. On the seventh day, God "rests", indicating that the active process of creation has been completed and that the Creator has provided His creatures with a hallowed day on which they could enjoy the blessedness available to them as His creatures. Difficult though the circumstances might be under which they were living, His people were reassured that He could be trusted to bring order out of the chaos in which they were living, if only they carried out His will for sacred living.

He is the God who enters into covenants. These are of two major kinds. The first is essentially a promise sealed by a sacred oath and accompanied by a sign, as in the case of the covenant with Noah and with Abraham. The second is a mutual agreement in which each of the two parties obligates himself to specific behaviors. Thus marriage may be considered a covenant. Even a close friendship, such as that of David and Jonathan, may be sealed by a covenant. More famous is the covenant between God and David in which the latter is promised that his descendants will always rule over Israel, provided that they live in accord with the divine will. And, of course, the most significant one is that between God and Israel in which He announces that Israel is his to be His treasured people, bound to Him by a life-long

GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

commitment to His commandments, failing which they are to be punished by exile and destruction. The most dramatic example of this is found in Deuteronomy 27 where the vassal treaty of Esarhaddon (672 BCE) serves as a model.

He is the God who commands. From the point of view of Judaism, this is His most prevalent characteristic. His commandments supersede every other claim; they are non-negotiable. The most famous among them is the decalogue, the so-called “Ten Commandments”. Technically, they appear to be the principles of the law, rather than the law itself, setting down the divine claim for obedience to His will, the exclusivity of His worship and the moral foundations for the Israelite society. Father and mother are to be honored as the transmitters of the traditions of their people and the Sabbath observed as the day celebrating the covenant of Israel.

Aside from Genesis which is largely narrative in nature, all of the other books of the Torah contain laws. The earliest collection is *Sefer ha-Brit*, the so-called “Covenant Code”. It contains civil, criminal, religious and moral laws, many of which appear to be quite ancient. The laws in Leviticus largely relate to the priests, though chapter 19, “You shall be holy...” is addressed to the entire people. The laws in Numbers appear like an appendix to Leviticus, while Deuteronomy, as its Hebrew name, *Mishneh Torah*, (“a copy of the Torah”) suggests, is a reprise of earlier laws, some of which are updated. The laws are not systematically organized, but the books do contain information about the courts, their authority and what kind of punishment is to be meted out.

The function of the laws is to make it possible to maintain a well-ordered society and to keep chaos from overwhelming order, whether social or cosmic. This is true not only of the civil and criminal laws but of the ritual ones as well which are intended to keep life-threatening disorders in check. The sacrificial system, too, is designed to maintain proper relationships with the deity to assure His blessings for the entire community.

He is the redeemer. As such, he can transform any chaos into order, any intolerable situation to one of joy. He can overcome bondage and exploitation and see to it that those who are abandoned are cared for. The exodus from Egypt is but a past example of His redemptive power, assuring those in Babylonian exile that their time of redemption is close at hand. As for those who are suffering at the hand of the dark powers behind the mighty empires that control Judea, their hour too has come, as God’s hosts intervene to do battle with the forces of evil to bring the entire world under His reign and assure the victory of the forces of peace and justice.

The God of the Bible is everywhere and “everywhen”. He cannot be manipulated but may always be approached in prayer and worship. The biblical text suggests how that may be done, not only spelling out the words and rites to do so but helping create the spirit into which we may enter when we seek His presence.

GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE – TEXT 1

ישעיהו מ:יב-בו

יב מִי־מָדַד בְּשַׁעֲלוֹ מַיִם וְשָׁמַיִם בְּזֶרֶת תֶּלֶן וְכָל בְּשָׁלֵשׁ עַפְרַיִן הָאָרֶץ וְשָׁקַל בְּפֶלֶם הַרִים וּגְבָעוֹת בְּמֵאָזְנָיִם: יג מִי־תִכַּן אֶת־רוּחַ יְהוָה וְאִישׁ עֲצָתוֹ יוֹדִיעֵנּוּ: יד אֶת־מִי נֹעֵץ וַיְבִינֵהוּ וַיִּלְמְדֵהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִשְׁפָּט וַיִּלְמְדֵהוּ דָעַת וְדָרַדְדָּ תְבוּנֹת יוֹדִיעֵנּוּ: ...יח וְאֵל־מִי תִדְמִיּוּן אֵל וּמַה־דְמוּת תַעֲרֹכוּ לוֹ: יט הַפֶּסֶל נֶסֶד תְּרֵשׁ וְצִרְף בְּזָהָב וְרִקְעָנוּ וּרְתָקוֹת פֶּסֶף צִוְרָף: כ הַמִּסְכָּן תְּרוֹמָה עֵץ לֹא־יִרְקַב וּבָחַר תְּרֵשׁ חֲכָם וּבִקֵּשׁ־לוֹ לְהִבִּין פֶּסֶל לֹא יִמוּט: כא הֲלוֹא תִדְעוּ הֲלוֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ הֲלוֹא הִגִּיד מֶרְאֵשׁ לְכֶם הֲלוֹא הִבִּינְתֶם מוֹסְדוֹת הָאָרֶץ: כב הִישָׁב עַל־חוּג הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁבִּיָהּ בַחֲנֻבָּיִם הַנּוֹמָה כֹּדֵק שָׁמַיִם וַיִּמְתְּתֶם בְּאֶהָל לְשֹׁבֵת: כג הַנּוֹתֵן רוּזִיִּים לְאֵין ...כד וְאֵל־מִי תִדְמִיּוּנִי וְאֶשְׁוֶה יֹאמֵר קָדוֹשׁ: כו שְׂאוּ־מְרוֹם עֵינֵיכֶם וּרְאוּ מִי־בָרָא אֱלֹהֵי הַמּוֹעִיָא בְּמִסְפָּר צְבָאָם לְכֹלֶם בְּשֵׁם יִקְרָא מֶרֶב אֲוִיָּם וְאִמְיָן כִּחַ אִישׁ לֹא נִעְדָר:

FROM ISAIAH 40:13-26

Who has measured the waters with the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a handsbreadth,
contained the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?
Who has directed the spirit of Adonai?
Does any man tell him his advice?
With whom did he consult, so that he would understand,
teaching him the path of judgment, of knowledge,
showing him the way of understanding?...

So – to whom will you compare God? Against what will you evaluate him?
An idol, cast by a craftsman, overlaid with gold by a goldsmith,
chained with silver chains?
The person too poor for an offering chooses wood that will not rot,
He seeks out a skilful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.
But do you not know? Have you not heard? Was it not told to you at the outset?
Do you not understand the foundations of the earth?
It is he who sits above the earth's circle,
so that its inhabitants look like grasshoppers
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain
and spreads them to make a tent to dwell in
who brings princes to nothing
and makes the rulers of the earth mere emptiness...

To whom, then, will you compare me, so that I may resemble him?
says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high, and see – who created these?
He who brings out all their legions by number
calling the name of each one.
By the greatness of his might
and the strength of his power
not a single one is missing.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What aspects of God in this passage mark God as creator?
- Are there any aspects missing?
- What is the place of human beings in this text?
- What relationship can human beings have with this God?

GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE – TEXT 2

תהלים קה

...ד דרשו יהוה ועזו בקשו פניו תמיד: ה זכרו נפלאותיו אשר עשה מפתיו ומשפטי־פיו: ו זרע אברהם עבדו בני יעקב בחיריו: זהו יהוה אלהינו בכל־הארץ משפטיו: ה זכר לעולם בריתו דבר צוה לאלה דור: ט אשר ברת את־אברהם ושבועתו לישחק: י ועמידה ליעקב להק לישראל ברית עולם: יא לאמר לך אתן את־ארץ כנען הכל נחלתכם: יב בהיותם מתי מספר כמעט ונרים בה: יג ויתהלכו מגוי אל־גוי מממלכה אל־עם אחר: יד לא־הניח אדם לעשקם... טז ויקרא רעב על־הארץ כל־מטה־לחם שבר: יז שלח לפניהם איש לעבד נמפר יוסף... יכג ויבא ישראל מצרים ויעקב גר בארץ־חם: כד ויפך את־עמו מאד... לו ויוציאם בכסף וזהב ואין בשבטיו פושל... מב פי־זכר את־דבר קדשו את־אברהם עבדו: מג ויוצא עמו בששון ברנה את־בחיריו: מד ויתן להם ארצות גוים ועמל לאמים ירשו: מה בעבור א ישמרו חקיו ותורתיו ינצרו הללויה:

FROM PSALM 105

Seek Adonai and his strength, seek his presence always,
Remember the wonders he has done,
the signs he performed, and the judgments he spoke,
offspring of Abraham his servant, children of Jacob, the ones he chose.
He is Adonai, our God, his judgments are in all the earth,
He has always remembered his covenant,
the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,
that he made with Abraham, that he swore to Isaac,
that he stood up for Jacob as a statute for Israel,
an everlasting covenant, which stated:
I will give you the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.
When they were few in number, unimportant, sojourning in it,
wandering from nation to nation and one kingdom to another
he allowed nobody to oppress them...

When he called up a famine on the land and broke the staff of bread
he had sent a man before them –
Joseph, who was sold as a slave...

Then Israel came to Egypt, Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham
And Adonai made his people very fruitful...

Then he brought out Israel with silver and gold
and there was none among his tribes who stumbled...

For he remembered his holy promise
and Abraham, his servant,
So he brought his people out with joy
His chosen ones with singing
And he gave them the lands of the nations
And they possessed the products of their labor
so that they could keep his statutes and observe his commandments
Halleluyah!

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What is the nature of God's covenant, according to this text?
- How does God perform God's side of the covenant?
- What is the place of human beings in this text?
- What relationship can human beings have with this God?

GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE – TEXT 3

תהלים יט

א לְמִנְצַחַת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: ב הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֱלֹהִים וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ: ג יוֹם לְיוֹם יִבְיַע אֱמֹר וּלְיִלְחָה לְלַיְלָה
וְהַיְהוֹדֵדֶעַת: ד אֵין אֱמֹר וְאֵין דְּבָרִים בְּלִי נִשְׁמָע קוֹלָם: ה בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ | וְצֵא קוֹם וּבִקְצֵה תִּבְלֵ מַלְיָהֶם לְשִׁמְשׁ שָׁם אֶהֱל בָּהֶם:
ו וְהוּא כִּתְתֵן יֵצֵא מִחֶפְתּוֹ יֵשִׁישׁ כְּגִבּוֹר לְרוּיִן אֶרֶח: ז מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם | מוֹצֵאוֹ וְתִקּוּפֹתוֹ עַל־קְצוֹתָם וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִחֶמְתּוֹ: ח תּוֹרַת
יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ עֲדוֹת יְהוָה נְאֻמָּנָה מִחֻכְמַת פִּתִּי: ט פְּקוּדֵי יְהוָה יִשְׂרָיִם מִשְׁמַחֲחֵלֵב מִצּוֹת יְהוָה כְּרָה מְאִירַת
עֵינַיִם: י יִרְאֵת יְהוָה | מְהוֹרָה עוֹמְדַת לְעַד מִשְׁפָּטֵי־יְהוָה אֶמֶת צְדָקוֹ יַחֲדוּ: יא הִנְחִמְדִים מִזֶּהָב וּמִפָּז רַב וּמִתּוֹקִים מִדְּבַשׁ וְנֹפֶת
צוּפִים: יב גַּם־עֲבָדָךְ נִזְקַר בָּהֶם בְּשִׁמְרָם עֵקֶב רַב: יג שְׁנֵיאוֹת מִי־יִבְיִן מִנְּסֻתָרוֹת נִקְנִי: יד גַּם מִזֵּדִים | הַשֶּׁדַּי עֲבָדָךְ
אֶל־יִמְשְׁלוּ־בִי אֲזֵ אֵיתָם וְנִקִּיתִי מִפֶּשַׁע רַב: טו יְהִי לְרָצוֹן | אֲמַר־כִּי וְהִגִּינוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי:

PSALM 19

For the choirmaster: a psalm of David.

The heavens recount the glory of God
and the firmament tells of the work of his hands.

Day pours out speech to day

Night expresses knowledge to night.

There is no speech, nor any words; their sound is unheard.

Their murmur goes out over all the earth

and their words reach the end of the world.

In them he has built a tent for the sun,
which goes out like a bridegroom from his canopy
rejoicing like a hero about to begin a race.

Its starting point is the furthest reach of the heavens
its finishing line their opposite border
and nothing is hidden from its heat.

The Torah of Adonai is complete, restoring the soul,
The testimony of Adonai is certain, making the simple wise,
The precepts of Adonai are just, gladdening the heart,
The commandment of Adonai is shining, enlightening the eyes,
The awe of Adonai is bright, enduring for ever,
The judgments of Adonai are both true and just.
They are more desirable than gold, heaps of gold,
They are sweeter than honey, the honey flowing from the comb.

Your servant is enlightened by them

and in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can discern errors? Cleanse me from hidden sins
and keep me from deliberate ones, let them not rule me

Then I shall subdue them, and be cleansed of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight

Adonai, my rock and my redeemer.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What is the relationship between the first and second halves of this psalm?
- What does this psalm say about God being the God who commands?
- What is the place of human beings in this text?
- What relationship can human beings have with this God?



GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE – TEXT 4

ישעיהו מג:א-יא

א ועתה כה־אמר יהוה בראך יעקב ויצרך ישראל אל־תירא כי גאלתיך קראתי בשמך ל־אתה: ב כי־תעבר במים אתך־אני ובנהרות לא ישטפוּך כ־תלך כמו־אש לא תפֹה ולהבה לא תבער־ך: ג כי אני יהוה אלהיך קדוש ישראל מושיעך נתתי כפרך מצרים כוש וסבא תחתיך: ד מאשר יקרת בעיני נכבדת ואני אהבתיך ואתן אדם תחתיך ולאמים תחת נפשך: ה אל־תירא כ־אתך־אני ממזרה אביא ורעך ומטערב אקבצך: ו אמר לצפון תני ולתימן אל־תכלאי הביאי בני מרחוק ובנותי מקצה הארץ: ז כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו יצרתיו אף־עשיתיו: ח הוציא עם־ענר ועינים יש וחרשים ואזנים כמו: ט כל־הגוים נקבצו יחדו ויאספו לאמים מי בהם יגיד זאת וראשנות ישמענו ותנו עדיהם ויצדקו וישמעו ויאמרו אמת: י אתם עדי נאם־יהוה ועבדי אשר בחרתי למען תדעו ותאמינו לי ותבינו כ־אני הוא לפני לא־נוצר אל ואחרי לא יהיה:

And now, this is what Adonai says,
the one who created you, Jacob,
the one who formed you, Israel:
Do not fear! for I have redeemed you,
I have called you by name, and you are mine.
When you walk through the waters I am with you,
When you pass through rivers they will not sweep you away,
If you walk even through fire, you shall not be marked,
and no flame shall burn you.
For I am Adonai, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your deliverer -
I have given Egypt as your ransom,
I have exchanged Kush and Sheba for you.
Because you are dear in my eyes,
because you are important, and I love you,
I will give people in return for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
Do not fear! for I am with you,
I shall bring your offspring from the east
and gather you from the west.
I shall say to the north: Give up!
and to the south: Do not withhold!
Bring my sons from far away,
my daughters from the ends of the earth,
every person called by my name
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed, and whom I made.
Bring out the people which is blind, yet has eyes,
which is deaf, yet has ears.
Let all the nations gather together
and all the peoples assemble -
Who among them can declare this
and declare what came before?
Let them bring their witnesses to vindicate them,
and let them hear, and say: It is true.
You are my witnesses, declares Adonai,
my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know, and believe me,
and understand that I am he -
Before me no god was formed,
and after me there shall be no other.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- How does this text portray God as redeemer?
- How is the redemption envisaged as taking place?
- What is the place of human beings in this text?
- What relationship can human beings have with this God?

GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE – TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

ירמיהו לא-לו

ל הנה ימים באים נאם יהוה וכרתי את בית ישראל ואת בית יהודה ברית חדשה: לא לא כברית אשר כרתי את אבותם ביום החזיקי בידם להוציאם מארץ מצרים אשר הטה הפה הפרו את בריתי ואנכי בעלתי גם נאם יהוה: לב כי זאת הברית אשר אכרת את בית ישראל אחרי הימים ההם נאם יהוה נתתי את תורתלי בקרבם ועל לבם אכתבנה והייתי להם לאלהים והמה יהיו לי לעם: לנ ולא ילמדו עוד איש את רעהו ואיש את אחיו לאמר דעו את יהוה כי כולם ידעו אותי למקטנם ועד גדולם נאם יהוה כי אסלח לעונם ולחטאתם לא אזכר עוד: לד כה אומר יהוה נתן שמש לאור יומם חקת ירח וכוכבים לאור לילה רגע הים ויחמו גליו יהוה צבאות שמו: לה אם ימשו החקים האלה מלפני נאם יהוה גם זרע ישראל ישבתו מהיות גוי לפני כל הימים: לו כה אומר יהוה אם ימדו שמים מלמעלה ויחקרו מוסדי ארץ למטה גם אני אמאם בכל זרע ישראל על כל אשר עשו נאם יהוה:

JEREMIAH 31:30 – 36

Behold, days are coming, declares Adonai, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt - for they broke that covenant, even though I was their husband, declares Adonai. Rather, this is the covenant I shall make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Adonai: I shall put my Torah within them; I shall write it upon their hearts; I shall be their God and they shall be my people. No person will need to teach any other, no person will say to another, "Know Adonai!" - for all of them will know me, from the smallest to the greatest, declares Adonai - for I shall forgive their iniquities and not remember their sins any more. Thus says Adonai, who puts the sun to shine by day, who fixed the rule of the moon and stars by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar, Adonai of legions is his name! "If ever these fixed rules change for me", declares Adonai, "then the offspring of Israel will cease to be a nation before me, forever." Thus says Adonai: "If ever the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth plumbed, then I shall reject the whole offspring of Israel for all they have done", declares Adonai.

SESSION SUGGESTIONS – GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

In this session the group will consider four of the ways God is portrayed in the Tanakh. The texts have been chosen from the Tanakh rather than from the Torah – but there is nothing to stop you bringing the texts cited in the essay and working on those instead – or, indeed, working on other Tanakh texts of your choice.

INTRODUCTION

Briefly remind people of the content of the essay. There are four categorizations of God in the essay (creator, covenant maker, commander, and redeemer) – see if you can elicit these. Would people use these words to define their current understanding of the Biblical God?

The early part of the essay might well generate a *Torah min Hashamayim* discussion – we suggest that it might be worth steering people gently back on topic (there will be further opportunity to discuss Torah authority in session 5, on Halakhah).

TEXT STUDY

Split the class into [up to] 4 chavruta groups and hand out the texts. The questions provided should help generate the discussion. It will be useful for some groups to be able to refer to Tanakh, particularly the second group – psalm 105 has had to be cut to fit the format of the book and it is definitely worth reading the whole text. For information, Dr Lieber says that Psalm 19 is a whole unit, though aspects of it may have been adapted from pagan psalms. Ibn Ezra says that both the heavens and Torah attest to God's glory: Kimhi understands the psalm as declaring that both the sun and Torah are vital for human existence.

Allow each group to report back on their understanding of the texts and their answers to the questions, and then draw the discussion together. You should find that there are elements of overlap – the God who creates is also the God who commands; the God who commands is also the God who redeems, and so forth. (In other words – the Biblical God is not so easily categorized.)

It may be worth pointing out that it is these passages, and others like them, which fuel further discussions of God by the rabbis, and that we will be dealing with these in subsequent sessions.

GROUP STUDY

The text is from the later part of the book of Jeremiah and contains elements of all four aspects of God which have been discussed. We suggest you use it as a springboard for discussing the difference between a God of action – all of the various portrayals of God in the Tanakh are active – and a more internal God, a God of the heart. How do participants understand this difference? Given our modern lifestyles, what place does the God portrayed in the Tanakh have for us? How can we best understand the God of Tanakh today?

CONCLUSION

Allow participants time to journal. Hand out the essay for next time and conclude the session.

CONTRIBUTORS

RABBI BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON (<http://www.bradartson.com>) is the Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University, where he is Vice President. He is the author of 6 books, most recently *Gift of Soul, Gift of Wisdom: Spiritual Resources for Leadership and Mentoring*, and is a Doctoral candidate in Contemporary Theology at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion.

RABBI DAVID LIEBER, DHL is president emeritus of the American Jewish University and the Flora and Arnold Skovron Distinguished Service Professor of Literature and Thought. He was educated at the College of the City of New York and ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1948. He has been a leading figure in American Jewish life and learning for many years, being, *inter alia*, the senior editor of the *Etz Chayyim* commentary on the Torah, sponsored jointly by the Rabbinical Assembly and the Jewish Publication Society, past president of the Rabbinical Assembly, a former spiritual leader of Sinai Temple, Los Angeles and dean of students at the American Jewish University until he assumed the presidency in 1963. Dr Lieber has written extensively, with articles published in *Commentary*, *The Christian Century*, *The Reconstructionist*, *The Torch*, and *Jewish Education*. In recognition of his work, Dr. Lieber was awarded the “Doctor of Humane Letters” degree, *honoris causa*, by the Hebrew Union College in 1982 and the “Torch of Learning” Award by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1984.

RABBI GAIL LABOVITZ, PH.D. is assistant professor and chair of the department of Rabbinics at the Ziegler School for Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University. She was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1992 and received her doctorate in Talmud and Rabbinics there in 2002. Prior to her current position, she served as a senior research associate for the Feminist Sexual Ethics Project at Brandeis University and as coordinator of the Jewish Feminist Research Group, a project of the Women’s Studies program at JTS.

RABBI ILANA BERENBAUM GRINBLAT is the rabbi of Temple Beth Shalom of Long Beach California where she has served for the past five years. She also teaches midrash at the American Jewish University’s Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, where she was ordained. In the fall of 2007, she will begin her Ph.D. studies in midrash at UCLA.

RABBI DANIEL S. NEVINS is the Pearl Resnick Dean of the Jewish Theological Seminary Rabbinical School. He was ordained rabbi by JTS in 1994, and received his bachelor’s in history from Harvard University in 1989. From 1994-2007, he served as rabbi of Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills, Michigan. He is a member of the Rabbinical Assembly’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards and writes frequently on topics of contemporary halakhah.

RABBI JOEL REMBAUM, PH.D. is Senior Rabbi of Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles. Formerly Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Associate Professor of Jewish History at the American Jewish University, Rabbi Rembaum, a recognized scholar in the area of Medieval Jewish History, is currently a member of the faculty of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies.

CONTRIBUTORS

RABBI PINCHAS GILLER, PH.D. was ordained at Yeshiva University and received his doctorate at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. Rabbi Giller has written extensively on Judaism and Kabbalah. He has written three books, *The Enlightened Will Shine: Symbolism and Theurgy in the Later Strata of the Zohar* (State University of New York Press, 1993), *Reading the Zohar* (Oxford University Press 2000) and *Shalom Shar'abi and the Kabbalists of Beit El* (Oxford University Press 2008). Rabbi Giller has taught in multiple contexts and is presently Associate Professor of Jewish Thought at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University, Los Angeles.

REB MIMI FEIGELSON (www.zieglerpodcasts.com) is the Mashpiah Ruchanit and Lecturer of Rabbinic Literature at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University, Los Angeles. She is an Israeli - Orthodox Rabbi and an international Hassidism teacher and story teller.

RABBI ELLIOT N. DORFF, PH.D. is Rector and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. He specializes in ethics, with books on Jewish medical, social, and personal ethics, but he has also written on Jewish law and theology. His book on theology is entitled, *Knowing God: Jewish Journeys to the Unknowable*.

RABBI JONATHAN WITTENBERG was born in Glasgow, Scotland. He studied at King's College Cambridge and Leo Baeck College, London, and is presently the rabbi of the New North London Masorti Synagogue. As well as being a full-time congregational rabbi, he is a hospital chaplain, and is involved in a project to create a multi-faith secondary school. His books include *Three Pillars of Judaism: A Search for Faith and Values* and *The Eternal Journey: Meditations on the Jewish Year*.

RABBI ALANA SUSKIN was ordained in 2003 at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University. Her essays, poetry and other writing have appeared in a wide variety of journals, books and anthologies. Her most recent project, "Ethical Smachot" (with Rabbi Joshua Ginsberg and Jews United for Justice), can be found online at http://www.myjewishlearning.com/lifecycle/About_Jewish_Lifecycle/Overview_Themes/ethicalsmahot.htm.

DEBORAH SILVER is entering her third year at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University. She holds a Master's Degree in Hebrew Studies from Cambridge University, England, as well as an MA in the theory and practice of literary translation. She is past holder of the George Webber Prize for Hebrew Translation, and she is the Senior English Editor of the Oxford English-Hebrew Dictionary of Current Usage (Oxford, 1996). Prior to coming to Los Angeles, she practiced as an attorney before becoming an Associate Professor at BPP Law School, London.

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

TALMUD

Jacob Neusner, *The Foundations of the Theology of Judaism, Volume 1: God Northvale*, New Jersey, London: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1991

Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, Macmillan, New York, 1910

Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages – Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1979

MIDRASH

Renee Bloch, “*Midrash*,” in Jacob Neusner, ed. *Origins of Judaism Vol. XI, part I*, New York: Garland Publishers, 1999

Barry Holtz, “*Midrash*,” in *Back to the Sources*, New York: Touchstone Publishers, 1984

David Stern, “*The Rabbinic Parable and the Narrative of Interpretation*,” in Michael Fishbane, ed. *The Midrashic Imagination*, Albany: State University of New York, 1993

HALAKHAH

Eliezer Berkowitz, *Not In Heaven – The Nature and Function of Halakhah*, Ktav, New York, 1983

David Hartman, *A Living Covenant – The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism*, Free Press, New York, 1985

Menachem Elon, *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, JPS, Philadelphia, 1984

MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig*, JPS, Philadelphia, 1964

Hans Lewy, Alexander Altmann, and Isaak Heinemann, *Three Jewish Philosophers: Philo, Saadya Gaon, Jehuda Halevi*, Meridian Books, New York 1960

Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, Behrman House, New York 1992

KABBALAH

Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003

Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002

Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*, San Francisco: Harper 1995

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

HASSIDUT

M Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc. New Jersey 1998

Arthur Green and Barry Holtz, *Your Word is Fire: The Hassidic Maters and Contemplative Prayer*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2003

Louis Newman, *A Hasidic Anthology*, Schocken Books, New York, 1963

MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT

Elliot N. Dorff and Louis Newman (eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999

Daniel H Frank, Oliver Leaman, and Charles H. Manekin, eds., *The Jewish Philosophy Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000

Elliot N. Dorff, *Knowing God: Jewish Journeys to the Unknowable*, Jason Aronson, 1996

GOD AND US

Joshua Haberman (ed.), *The God I Believe In*, Free Press, New York, 1994

Louis Jacobs, *God, Torah, Israel: Traditionalism Without Fundamentalism*, Masorti Publications, London 1999

Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*, San Francisco: Harper 1995

GOD ON THE FRONTIER

Useful websites:

<http://www.jewschool.com/>

<http://www.radicaltorah.org/>

Books:

Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, University of California Press, 1997

Elliot Dorff (ed.), *The Unfolding Tradition: Jewish Law After Sinai*, Aviv Press, 2005.

Danya Ruttenberg (ed.), *Yentl's Revenge*, Seal Press, 2001



Published in partnership with the
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
and the Rabbinical Assembly



ZIEGLER SCHOOL OF
RABBINIC STUDIES
AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

15600 MULHOLLAND DRIVE • BEL AIR, CA 90077