

GODshopping: An Exploration in Personal Theology

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from Woodlands Community Temple's Confirmation Curriculum, "God, Torah and Israel ... What's In It For Me?"

Objectives for the participant:

- To understand that Judaism asks of us three acts of faith regarding God: 1) that we believe in God; 2) that we believe God is One; and, 3) that we believe God has something to ask of us about how we live our lives.
- To understand that, while it is difficult to have complete faith, it is possible to develop a personal idea of God that is both reasonable and meaningful.
- To acknowledge that Judaism has many varying ideas about God, and that they are worth considering as we strive to piece together our personal ideas about God.
- To realize that it's okay in Judaism both to question God, to change our ideas about God, and to piece together for our individual self ideas about God that are reasonable to accept.
- To consider that while encouraging individual thought about God, Judaism will challenge us on the components of our God-belief, spurring us on to uncover and accept a God that wants us to better the world.

Materials needed:

- Mp3 recording: Bill Cosby's "Noah."
- Mp3 player.
- "GODshopping: An Exploration in Personal Theology" worksheets.
- "GODshopping Text Study" handouts.
- Paper and pens.
- Pencils with erasers.
- GODshopping posters. Posted around room. Set of 8 posters: one per God-concept, each bearing a picture, its title, each of its statements glued to it. And attached to the bottom, tear-off copies of each individual statement (enough copies so each student could, if they want, take one).
- GODshopping craft materials: scissors, glue, multi-colored construction paper.

Implementation:

[Optional] Distribute paper and pens. Ask participants to complete in writing the phrase, "I'd like there to be a God because ..." Then take some time to share the writings.

Present:

- Okay, we've shared some thoughts about *why* we'd like for there to be a God. Now we have to consider what it is that God might actually *do*.
- Discuss: Can you name any people with a clear "picture" of what God does?
- Here's someone with one. Play recording of Bill Cosby's "Noah".
- Judaism asks of us to commit to three acts of faith regarding God: 1) that we believe in God; 2) that we believe God is One; and, 3) that we believe God has something to ask of us about how we live our lives (a "Commanding Voice"). This isn't about "hearing voices" in our heads, but about reaching an intellectual and spiritual decision that someone/something in the universe wants us to behave in a certain way that benefits everyone/thing else.

- Shopping I
- Let's explore some more pictures of God.
 - Each one of these comes from somewhere out of 4000 years of Jewish life and thinking about God.
 - Each one reflects the three Jewish acts of faith about God: that God exists, that God is One, and God has something to ask us about how we live our lives.
 - Four corners.
 - Listen to the following four descriptions of God, and select the one which comes closest to what you believe.
 - Facilitator uses posters (posted around program space) to explain the first four God-ideas: 1) Watchmaker (*Ya'atof v'Lo Er'eh* ... The Hidden God I Cannot See); 2) Ruler of the Universe (*Melekh haOlam*); 3) Jiminy Cricket (*Kol D'mama Dakah* ... The Still Small Voice); and, 4) The Force (Naturalism, *Yotzer Or/Maariv Aravim* ... Creator of Light/One Who Makes Evening Fall).
 - Students select idea "that may not be perfect for you, but comes closest to something you could accept about God" ... then all move at once to location.
 - Corner discussion: Why did you choose this corner?
 - [Optional] 1 or 2 members of each corner share a summary of their thoughts with the entire group.
- Shopping II
- There are quite a few more ideas out there about God. Let's take a look at four more.
- Station-rotation (or, if only one staff person, a "guided tour").
 - Distribute "God-Shopping Text Sheet."
 - Participants divide into four groups and rotate to different locations (the hoped-for benefit of moving the groups rather than the presenters is to prevent *shpilkes* and to maximize participants' ability to focus on the presentations – you may certainly opt to leave the groups in place and move your presenters instead).
 - Facilitator uses "God-Shopping Text Sheet" to explain this second set of God-ideas: 1) Partner in Creation (*Shotef b'Ma'aseh Vereshit*); 2) Author of Life and Death (Puppetmaster, *M'khayei HaKol* ... The One Who Gives Life to All); 3) Goodness/Love/Dreams/Ideals (*HaTov v'HaM'rakhem* ... The One Who is Good and Compassionate); and, 4) Ayn Sof (The Infinite One).
- Shopping III
- It's important to know that, while Judaism encourages us each to believe in God, there is much latitude as to what we choose to believe.
 - Even concerning the eight concepts we've just presented, we can (if we prefer) pick and choose from within the concepts themselves to begin piecing together an idea about God that seems reasonable and meaningful to us.
 - And that's exactly what we're going to do. We're going GODshopping!

- Distribute the following: “GODshopping: An Exploration in Personal Theology” worksheets, pencils with erasers, scissors, glue, construction paper (many colors).

- Part one.
- Work through the “GODshopping” worksheet (which is an exact repetition of the God-ideas we’ve met in both the Four Corners and Station Rotation exercises) by placing a check next to those ideas which seem “reasonable and meaningful” to you.
- Not only may you mix-and-match from the different categories, you are also invited to change the wording of any statement you *would* like if such a change were made.
- You may even add your own statements to this list.

- Part two.
- Hanging from the bottom of each poster are strips of paper, each containing one statement from within that God-idea.
- Tear off those strips which match those you checked on your worksheet, make any needed changes to the text, and glue your individual set of statements to one side of one piece of construction paper.
- Names on back, please.

Wrap-up

- Once again ... Judaism asks of us three acts of faith regarding God: 1) that we believe in God; 2) that we believe God is One; and, 3) that we believe God has something to ask of us about how we live our lives.
- Hopefully, these God-ideas each of you have developed are all *reasonable and meaningful* for you.
- As time goes on, your ideas about God will likely change; that’s fine.
- For now, the challenge is to find a personal idea of God that is relevant and reasonable, and that might actually help you to “find your place in the world.”
- And ... an idea about God that you can use during *t’fillah* as well. It’s important not to “worship” someone else’s ideas about God. Be sure you bring your own!