

## **NA'ALEH, WES ADULT BAR/BAT MITZVAH PROGRAM**

**JEWISH VIEWS OF GOD: Tuesday, 18 December 2012/6 Tevet 5773**

*(Texts below adapted from MyJewishLearning.com)*

### **BIBLICAL CONCEPTIONS OF GOD**

**(Nicholas Lange, An Introduction to Judaism, Cambridge University Press)**

There is very little that can be called philosophical discourse, in the Greek sense, in the Bible. The biblical God may be superhuman, but he is definitely a person ... often described in language that is so personal that it has proved an embarrassment to thinkers schooled in Greek thought. He is called a judge, a king, a shepherd, a man of war. He has emotions which are all too human: he is said to be jealous and angry, and he sometimes changes his mind and feels regret. Nor does biblical language hesitate to speak of God's activity as though he had a human body.... No doubt this language can be explained as metaphorical or as poetic license, but it is so common in the text that it inevitably colors the personality of God.

And yet at the same time the Bible is insistent that God is not visible. It is true that occasionally people see God (e.g., Exodus 24:9, Isaiah 6:1), but such passages are rare, and the general idea seems to be that normal, living people cannot see God. Even Moses was not allowed to see God, "for no man can see me while living" (Exodus 33:20)....

Worship of such images is acceptable for the other nations, but God's own people are forbidden to follow suit. The polemic against worshipping God in a visible form is closely connected to the polemic against worshipping a multiplicity of gods. If there is any theological principle that is asserted repeatedly and consistently in the Bible, it is the unity of God... This unity is not only numerical, meaning that **God is singular** and not, as some falsely claim, dual or plural. It also means that **God is unique**: because he is the one true God he is different in kind from all other gods men worship.

Another frequently stressed attribute of God is his **eternity**. He has always existed, and he always will exist, he is the First and the Last (Isaiah 44:6, cf. Psalm 90:2, 146:10). As we might say, he is outside time. He is also outside space. He is beyond the world and yet he is everywhere within it.

### **RABBINIC CONCEPTIONS OF GOD**

**(Jeffrey Spitzer, Chair of Dept. of Talmud and Rabbinics, Gann Academy, Waltham MA)**

[T]he literature known as midrash ... is replete with a wide range of images of God. In particular, the rabbinic parable presents God in many striking and complex ways.

#### **God as King**

Without question, the dominant image of God, especially in the later rabbinic parables, is God as King. Many of the king parables distinguish the Eternal King from mortal kings or create an unexpected perspective on the relationship to the king. As if to create a justification for their own use of human images for God, this early *mashal* (parable) sets the underlying theology of associating God with a human character in God's own mouth.

#### **God as the Knowing Creator**

God is a knowing Creator, who has a deep understanding of creation."It is written, 'Woe unto them that seek deep [places], to hide their counsel from the Lord' (Isaiah 29:15). R. Levi said: This is like [the story of] a city planner who built a city with [secret] chambers, canals, and caves. Later he became a tax-collector, and the inhabitants of the country hid from him in those chambers and caves. Said he to them, 'It is I who

built all these chambers and caves; to what purpose then is your hiding?' Similarly, 'Woe unto them that seek deep [places], to hide their counsel from the Lord'..." (Genesis Rabbah 24:1).

### **God as Parent**

Rather than maintaining simple, stereotypical images, like many in the liturgy, the mashal recognizes the complexity of the human relationship with God, transcending the stereotypical depiction by creating complex characters who reflect a complex relationship. God is described as a parent who cares for the children and also punishes them.

### **MEDIEVAL JEWISH CONCEPTIONS OF GOD**

The Jewish philosophers and mystics of the Middle Ages developed systematic conceptions of God, speculating specifically on God's existence and unity.

In all their thinking, the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages were greatly influenced by the Arabic thinkers of their time, who themselves were influenced by Greek systems of thought, particularly Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. These Arabic thinkers proposed proofs for the existence of God, and the medieval Jewish philosophers proposed similar proofs.

**Saadiah Gaon (882-942)** and **Bachya ibn Pakudah (1040-1080)** both presented versions of the teleological proof. This proof highlights the complex order of the world and stresses how unlikely it would be for such a perfect world to have appeared by accident. From this, thinkers like Saadiah and Bahya deduce the existence of a creator.

The cosmological proof for God's existence was also espoused by Jewish thinkers, including **Maimonides (1135-1204)**, the greatest of the medieval Jewish philosophers. Maimonides focuses on the motion inherent in nature and posits that while every motion requires a mover, it is incomprehensible to keep regressing back in time from motion to motion for eternity. **Maimonides suggests that there must be a first mover who is, Himself, unmoved. This unmoved mover is God.**

Medieval Jewish thinkers stressed the unity of God, often rejecting compartmentalized descriptions of the deity. Biblical descriptions of God, which characterize God in numerous roles (e.g., creator, liberator, legislator) and with numerous attributes (e.g., "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" [Exodus 34:6]) were considered philosophically problematic. When we list attributes of God, we divide the deity into a plurality, implying that, for example, God's attribute of truth is distinct from God's attribute of compassion.

**Maimonides' philosophy of negative attributes** is the classic solution to this problem. He **suggests that we cannot say anything positive about God.** Anytime we say something positive like, "God is good," all we can really mean is "God is not evil." However, there were Jewish thinkers, including Hasdai **Crescas (1370-1430)** and **Gersonides (1288-1344)**, who supported the articulation of positive attributes.

The belief in God's unity implies a parallel belief in God's incorporeality, God's lack of body, because by definition, bodies are made up of many parts. However, the Bible is replete with descriptions of God that suggest that the deity has some form. Most medieval Jewish thinkers responded to this challenge by interpreting these biblical passages metaphorically and stressing that the Bible speaks in the language of humans.

The attempt to create Jewish dogma or official doctrine, is a conspicuous feature of medieval Jewish thought. **Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith** is the most prominent list of dogmas. Seven of these doctrines relate to God: God exists, God is one and unique, God is incorporeal, God is eternal, prayer is to be directed to God alone, God knows the thoughts and deeds of humans, and God rewards good and punishes evil.

The **kabbalists** ... suggested that there are two aspects of God, God in Himself and God revealed. God in Himself, known as the *Ein Sof* or the Infinite, is completely hidden from humankind. The *Ein Sof* has no attributes (and is thus a complete unity), and we cannot describe or comprehend it. However, we can speak about God in terms of His revealed attributes, the ten *sefirot*. These attributes are fragmented and dynamic. There is disharmony among the *sefirot*, and the purpose of human existence is to heal this disharmony, thereby perfecting the world, and indeed God Himself. The doctrine of the *sefirot* received its fullest treatment in the *Zohar*, the most important work of Jewish mysticism.

The kabbalistic doctrine of God received further elucidation in the teachings of **Isaac Luria**, the influential 16th-century mystic. Luria's greatest theological innovation was his explanation of creation, in which he describes how the infinite God contracted into Himself to create space for the world to exist. Luria called this contraction *tzimtzum*.

### **MODERN JEWISH CONCEPTIONS OF GOD**

Post-Enlightenment Jewish thinkers presented modified conceptions of God that attempted to reconcile modern philosophical trends with Jewish tradition. These figures tended to stress human liberty and the ethical aspects of God. ... **Leo Baeck (1873-1956)** presented Judaism as, essentially, ethical monotheism, suggesting that the belief in one God--Judaism's fundamental innovation--is equivalent to the belief in a single source of moral law.

**Hermann Cohen (1842-1918)** was also, originally, concerned with the ethical implications of God. In his early rationalistic thought, he **presented God as the "idea" that guarantees morality**. Cohen's later work, however, was more traditional from a Jewish point of view, and he became more concerned with the reality of God and less concerned with the "idea" of God. Cohen's students, **Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1919)** and **Martin Buber (1878-1965)**, eschewed Cohen's reliance on reason and rooted their philosophies in the experiential.

**According to Rosenzweig**, God cannot be known through rational inquiry. Rather, **God is encountered existentially**. These encounters amount to personal revelations. Whereas Rosenzweig believed that these direct revelations are the source of one's knowledge of God, **Buber believed that one comes to know God through one's relationships with other people**. Buber's classic work *I and Thou* describes the two types of relationships one could have. The I-It relationship is characterized by, among other things, utility. When one uses something or someone for practical purposes, one is engaged in an I-It relationship; this is also true when one describes, categorizes, or refers to a thing or person through third-person language. The I-Thou relationship, however, is relating for its own sake. It is characterized by equality, openness, and genuine encounter. God is the ultimate "Thou," and we relate to God whenever we engage in an I-Thou relationship.

## EXPERIENCE AND NEARNESS OF GOD AS SEEN IN BUBER AND HESCHEL

(Rabbi Rachel S. Beit-Halachmi)

While rationalism and its abstract concepts held the attention of most early modern Jewish thinkers, several twentieth-century thinkers were more concerned with the religious and spiritual experience of the individual. The thinking of two such theologians, Martin Buber (1878-1965) and Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), serves as the basis for much of the current work in liberal theology.

Martin Buber is best known for his religious philosophy of dialogue. In *I and Thou*, Buber describes two kinds of relationships, the "I-It", and the "I-Thou". The I-It relationship is one based on detachment from others and involves a utilitarian approach, in which one uses another as an object.

In contrast, in an I-Thou relationship, each person fully and equally turns toward the other with openness and ethical engagement. This kind of relationship is characterized by dialogue and by "total presentness." In an I-Thou relationship, each participant is concerned for the other person. The honor of the other--and not just her usefulness--is of paramount importance.

The ethical response of the I-Thou relationship is central to Buber's understanding of God. For Buber, God is the "Eternal Thou." God is the only Thou which can never become an It. In other words, while relationships with other people will inevitably have utilitarian elements, in a genuine relationship with God, God cannot be used as a means towards an end.

In addition, **our relationship with God serves as the foundation for our I-Thou relationships with all others, and every I-Thou relationship--be it with a person or thing--involves a meeting with God. God, in a sense, is the unifying context, the meeting place, for all meaningful human experience.**

When one encounters the world in this way, revelation occurs. "God speaks to man in the things and beings he sends him in life. Man answers through his dealings with these things and beings." The Bible itself contains models of this human experience of God. Moses perceives natural events as indications of God's power and God's presence in the human realm. Similarly, the power and show of natural forces at Sinai led the Israelites to accept the revelation of God's Torah.

Buber's understanding of the religious experience of the biblical writers also applied to his understanding of the works of the Hasidic masters. In many of the teachings Buber collected in *Tales of the Hasidim*, God is portrayed as immanent--an immediate and felt presence. God can be found in every encounter, in each experience, and in every aspect of the world. Because of his focus on experiential existence, Buber is considered an existentialist thinker.

### ***Multiple Paths to God***

Abraham Joshua Heschel, a descendant of famous Hasidic masters such as Dov Baer of Mezhrich and Levi Isaac of Berdichev, also relied heavily on Hasidic sources for examples of the ultimate religious experience. Like Buber, **Heschel emphasized the presence of God in nature and in the human encounter.** In Heschel's writing on Jewish theology, he describes the experience of deep awareness and wonder at the "sublime mystery" of nature and other beautiful aspects of the world as a source of "radical amazement." This kind of awe and amazement is an essential element of faith.

In his well-known book *God In Search of Man* (1956), **Heschel describes multiple paths to religious truth: through nature, through revelation, and through *mitzvot*, or commandments.** In a religious life, all three aspects work together and produce the foundation of a relationship with God. God, for Heschel, is the basis

of any being, of anything. God is the premise of our existence, not something that we search for outside of ourselves and possibly find with enough inquiry.

**Heschel's philosophy of faith includes three basic elements: 1) a sense of indebtedness, 2) a desire to praise, and 3) the performance of *mitzvot*.** Praise is a central element in the human relationship with God, as it is a response to the experience of God. If one is moved to praise God because of the power of one's experiences in life, one is likely, Heschel thought, to have a deeper faith in God and a greater desire to serve God. Human beings serve God by responding to God's call to add to the holiness of the world. This is achieved through prayer, study, and ethical deeds.

In his writings, Heschel emphasized the God of the Bible. Though many biblical characters try to avoid, reject, and rebel against God, God does not abandon Israel. Heschel understands the God of the Bible as one who is known from the experience of self, and of the world. This is a God who, "comes to people to command and console, to judge and forgive, to direct and give hope."

Heschel's God is anthropopathic, that is, God has human-like feelings, and is concerned with goodness. In his early work, *The Prophets*, Heschel focuses on understanding the God described in the books of the prophets. By examining the lives of the prophets Amos and Jeremiah, in particular, Heschel demonstrates that **God is not insensitive, distant, or unconcerned about the human experience, but rather God is a God of pathos, of emotions, sensitive to the suffering of human beings.**

While the biblical message gives ethics a prominent place, Heschel, unlike other modern thinkers, did not believe that ethics is the primary substance of revelation. Heschel is essentially a traditionalist, or a neo-traditionalist, and argued for a return to traditional observances. Unlike other liberal thinkers he does not argue that human beings can (even partially) determine the specific kinds of acts that religion should demand, but rather that God's revelation determines the content of religious practice.

Heschel believed that through religious practice, one encounters God. Because the *mitzvot* have God's authority behind them, by performing them we can sense God's nearness. In the sacred act itself is the meeting place of the human being with God. Consequently, Heschel spoke not of the necessity of a "leap of faith" but rather of a "leap of action."

### **RADICAL THEOLOGY: Confronting the Crises of Modernity** **(Rabbi Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi)**

In the second half of the twentieth century, some Jewish thinkers took radical approaches to God and religion. Influenced by the realities of modern science and the experience of the Holocaust, thinkers such as **Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983)** and **Richard Rubenstein (b. 1924)** redefined God and created theologies that differed greatly from classical Jewish thought.

#### ***Kaplan: Rejecting Supernaturalism***

Kaplan rejected many traditional principles of Jewish law and faith and sought to redefine them in ways that would be intellectually, spiritually, and ethically compelling for American Jewry. He embraced modern science and its natural explanations, which--according to Kaplan--necessitated the rejection of belief in supernatural forces, including a supernatural God. Instead of seeing God as supernatural, **Kaplan saw God as a force within nature that allows for order and goodness: the power that makes salvation possible.**

**"God is the sum of all the animating organizing forces and relationships which are forever making a cosmos out of chaos. ... To believe in God is to reckon with life's creative forces, tendencies and potentialities as forming an organic unity, and as giving meaning to life by virtue of that unity."**

Kaplan argued that statements about God that conflict with a modern person's experience and intellect must be removed in favor of statements about God that are self-consistent and "consistent with whatever else we hold to be true."

Kaplan altered traditional approaches to Jewish life to make them cohere with this theology. For example, rather than teaching that one should pray to God for things like sustenance or rain, Kaplan suggested that one should pray with a yearning for the abilities of mind and body and for the attitude and character which will allow a person to engage with the most worthwhile aspects of life, which, "in their totality, spell God." Similarly, Kaplan saw a place for praising God, and for engaging in ritual, which are part of an effort to articulate a sense of life's worthwhileness and is thus a means of realizing the presence of the divine in daily life.

### ***Rubenstein: The Death of God***

Kaplan's major works predate the Holocaust, but for other modern Jewish thinkers the Holocaust is the starting point for radical theology. Richard Rubenstein--also an ordained Conservative rabbi--also argues that one cannot sustain a belief in a supernatural God, not because of the truths of modernity, but because of the events of the Nazi era.

Rubenstein recognized that traditional Judaism asserts that Jewish suffering is the result of Jewish sin. Thus the Holocaust should be explained as an event initiated by God in order to punish the Jews. Rubenstein, however, could not believe in such a God. In his *After Auschwitz* (1966), Rubenstein wrote: "To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, anti-human explosion of all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept."

The reality of Auschwitz created a void where once the Jewish people had experienced God's presence. There is no aspect of post-Holocaust life that is untouched by that reality, neither for the victims nor for those who lived in safety. However this shift in the experience of the world is something that most prefer not to articulate. Even though most Jews continue to go to synagogue for a variety of reasons, "once inside, we are struck dumb by words we can no longer honestly utter. **All that we can offer is our reverent and attentive silence before the Divine.**"

His position, he argues, is not that of the atheist, but rather that of one who lives after the Holocaust, in a world where we know of the death of God. The "thread uniting God and man, Heaven and earth, has been broken." Our current reality is one without any superhuman power, without any Divine pathos, and one in which we have nothing to say about God.

Eventually, however, Rubenstein developed a conception of God that he felt more comfortable with. In place of the traditional conceptions of God, **Rubenstein suggested that we turn to a concept of God as Holy Nothingness. This God--not far off from certain mystical conceptions of God--is entirely without definition, yet is the source of all creation. This God can be found in nature. In fact, God is the order found in nature, which no power can transcend.**

## **THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF GOD LANGUAGE**

**(Dr. Neil Gillman, The Way into Encountering God in Judaism, Jewish Lights Publishing)**

Many contemporary Jewish feminists have been sharply critical of the dominant masculine, hierarchical images of God in traditional Jewish texts. This attack has taken two complementary tracks: first, an aggressive program for replacing masculine pronouns for God with gender-neutral or even explicitly feminine forms. God is now referred to as "She," as "She/He," as S/he," by alternating "He" and "She" in different paragraphs, or by simply avoiding the use of any personal pronoun for God. Hebrew second-person pronouns for God, which differ depending on whether one is addressing a male or a female (atah for a man, at for a woman), are also changed.

The second, more radical strategy is to **search for metaphors for God that are perceived to be more explicitly feminine**. One of the more popular is Mekor HaChayim, God is "the fountain of life" or "the source of life." Implicit in this image is the notion of God birthing the world. More radical metaphors reflect the sense of God as Goddess. Judith Plaskow captures the thrust of these new metaphors. They manifest "a sense of fluidity, movement, and multiplicity, [a] daring interweaving of women's experiences with Jewish, Native American, and Goddess imagery that leaves the reader/hearer with an expanded sense of what is possible in speaking of/to God." (Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*, pp. 141-142)

Plaskow acknowledges that God is neither male nor female, but insists that symbols of this kind must be taken seriously, though not literally. She defends the radical feminization of God metaphors.

"The Goddess is, of course, God/She, but in a clearer and more powerful way. Not simply a feminine reworking of the masculine deity but an ancient power in her own right, she gathers to her all the qualities and prerogatives of the goddesses of many names. She is Asherah, Ishtar, Isis, Afrekete, Oyo, Ezuli, Mary, and Shekhina. She is lover, creator, warrior, grantor of fertility, lawgiver, maiden, mother, and crone." (Plaskow, p. 146)

Not surprisingly, more traditionalist readers have labeled all of these proposals simple paganism. The core of the feminist critique is the conviction that the issue is not simply one of language. The language we use reflects and in turn shapes the way we construct our experience of the world. Plaskow acknowledges that all of these images of God are humanly crafted metaphors, but **our metaphors emerge out of specific cultural and political contexts. When these contexts change, the old metaphors must change with them.**

Metaphors for God that might once have been compelling despite, or because of, their political resonance not only have lost their immediacy and power, but have become morally suspect and disturbing. Especially those images of God drawn from political and family life have changed in their associations and meanings with changes in and new perspectives on the family and political order. **Once images become socially, politically, or morally inadequate, however, they are also religiously inadequate.** Instead of pointing to and evoking the reality of God, they block the possibility of religious experience. (Plaskow, pp. 135-136)

Plaskow's conclusion bears on the broad assumptions of the entire study of the Jewish God. All our metaphors for God are designed to facilitate our experience of God, to reveal God, to open our eyes. They work like a pair of spectacles. A student once suggested the analogy of The Wizard of Oz, where Dorothy has to don a pair of spectacles in order to see the city of Oz. Sometimes, however, after a change in cultural conditions, instead of revealing, the metaphors blind. That can apply across the board. Some have suggested, for example, that the metaphor of God as King or Sovereign that pervades the High Holiday liturgy no longer works for people who don't live under a monarchy.

That's precisely the complaint of Jewish feminists. They reject both metaphors, the king metaphor because of its hierarchical associations, and the paternal metaphor because it excludes their distinctive female experience. The world has changed, and so must our divine images. The entire issue is still very much a work in progress. Prayer books from the more liberal wings of the religious community have incorporated the less radical process of substituting gender-neutral God language. More radically feminist prayer books have replaced the male metaphors with feminine ones.

### **GOD AS THE "SELF OF THE UNIVERSE":**

**Rabbi Arthur Green, Restoring the Aleph: Judaism for the Contemporary Seeker:**

I am not one who believes that we can or should get rid of all the vertical metaphors in our religious tradition. We would be terribly impoverished, and for no good reason. But it is important to see through this language and thus to be freed of its total hold on us. We can do so most easily by **turning to the other great metaphor of religious tradition, that of inwardness**. Rather than seeing all humanity climbing up the great mountain, let us imagine ourselves as journeying down into the depths, seeking to draw water from our innermost well. Instead of ascending rung after trying rung, we are peeling off level after level of externals, reaching toward a more inward, deeper vision of the universe. Of course, this, too, is a metaphor, but the presence of a second way of seeing our journey helps to release us from the singular hold of the first.

Most basically, it would seem that the God within is not other than ourselves in the same clear way as the God above. The vertical metaphor allowed for distance: "if you do not do good I will turn far away, rising to the seventh heaven, far beyond your ability to reach Me." **But the hidden God buried deep within the self feels more like one who ever longs to be discovered, and the process of finding God is not to be clearly distinguished from the deepest levels of self discovery. What we are likely to find is the truth of the mystics: The individual self and the cosmic Self are one.** The Judaism that will emerge from a turn inward will then be something like a version of what Aldous Huxley and others have called the *philosophia perennis*, a single truth that underlies all religions, though expressed and taught in the specific symbolic language of the Jewish tradition.

**From Rabbi Arthur Green, Radical Judaism:**

#### ***Moments of Presence***

In the midst of life -- perhaps in a great moment of confrontation with birth or death, in seeing great beauties of nature, in love and sharing with another, or in profound aloneness -- sometimes without any provocation at all -- a moment of holy and awesome presence comes upon us. It may come as a deep inner stillness, quieting all the sounds that usually fill our inner chambers, or as a rush and excitement that fills us to overflowing. It may seem to come from within or without -- or perhaps from both at once. We open our eyes, as it were, after such a moment, and that which we see or hear or know may be just a bit more intense and more "real" than it was before. Life has become more animated; it seems that an extra measure of energy has flowed into the scene before us. The world is the same world, but we see it with renewed vision. The vision moves us to pray: "Blessed are You, Holy One our God, eternal hidden ruler, who opens the eyes of the blind." Thanks to the One who has opened our eyes once again; thanks to the One who has allowed us to see.

The sacred refers to an inward, mysterious sense of awesome presence, a reality deeper than the kind we ordinarily experience. Life bears within it the possibility of inner transcendence; the moments when we glimpse it are so rare and powerful that they call upon us to transform the rest of our lives in their wake.



These moments can come without warning, though they may be evoked by great beauty, by joy, by terror, or by anything else that causes us to stop and interrupt our ordinary all-encompassing and yet essentially superficial perception of reality. When that *mask of ordinariness* falls away, our consciousness is left with a moment of nakedness, a confrontation with a reality that we do not know how to put into language.

Radical Judaism, p. 4.

**Activity:** Recall a moment in your life when you experienced a sense of “presence,” or experienced a sense of being connected to something beyond or deeper than your individual self. Sit with that memory for a period of time. Let your mind recreate the scene. Allow your body to re-experience the sensations and emotions you felt at that time. Take a few minutes to sketch or draw the scene of that experience.

In sharing your sketch and describing the scene, try to recall, as best you are able:

- Where were you?
- What, if anything, were you were doing leading up to that moment?
- Who, if anyone, was with you?
- What emotions, if any, did you experience in the moment?

## 2. Personal God as “Symbolic Bridge”

For me, **God is not an intellectual proposition but rather the ground of life itself. It is the name I give to the reality I encounter in [this] kind of moment, one that feels more authentic and deeply perceptive of truth than any other.** ... [T]hese moments place us in contact with the elusive inner essence of being that I call “God.” It is out of such moments that religion is born, our human response to the dizzying depths of an encounter we cannot – and yet so need to – name. ... [T]radition offers a way to respond, to channel the love and awe that rise up within us at such times, and to give a name to the holy mystery by which our lives are bounded (p. 73)

**A God who underlies all being, who is and dwells within (rather than “who controls” or “oversees”) the evolutionary process is the One about which – or about “Whom” – we tell the great sacred tale,** the story of existence (p. 17) ... This One – the only One that truly is – lies within and behind all the diverse forms of being that have existed since the beginning of time; it is the single Being (as the Hebrew name Y-H-V-H indicates) clothed in each individual being and encompassing them all (p. 21)

The **personal God is a symbolic bridge between transcendent mystery (that which my definition the mind cannot grasp) and a humanity that constantly reaches out towards it.** Because that “reaching” needs to be undertaken by the whole of the human self, including emotion and body as well as mind, the “bridge” needs to be one to which we most wholly respond, a projection of our own form. (Radical Judaism p. 73)

1. How do you respond to Rabbi Green’s non-theistic description of God as that which “underlies all being, who is and dwells within the evolutionary process?”
2. Do you utilize the word “God” to describe your own “moments of presence?” Why or why not? To the extent you experience uneasiness with “God language,” can you identify the source(s) of your discomfort?
3. Do you refer to God in personal terms in your life? Why or why not? To the extent you experience uneasiness with such language, can you identify the source(s) of your discomfort?