

## Elissa

I believe in a God who is more like a spirit than a form. To me God is something that is in or around everything and everyone. I do not actually know if this is true but it is what I believe. The Torah explains God as more of a spiritual force and this is what I was taught all throughout Hebrew school. My text talks about the Passover sacrifice that God asked the Israelites to give. It says, "They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and they shall not leave any of it over until morning. They shall not break a bone of it. They shall offer it in strict accord with the law of the Passover sacrifice" (Numbers 9:12). In the ancient times, the Israelites made sacrifices to God to show their respect. These sacrifices or presents are the same as the prayers or verbal sacrifices we use today. I feel that sacrificing animals is unethical especially since I think that harming animals is cruel. My belief is that killing an animal to honor a God that cannot even be seen is unnecessary. I think that words are a better way to explain how we feel about God rather than a sacrifice which is mainly a symbolic reference. In this text, the Passover sacrifice is eaten but sometimes the sacrifice is not. This makes the animal that was killed useless to the sacrificers' which is a waste of an animal. Praying and using words to express our feelings to God is much more beneficial. Prayers are honorable because they talk about how great God is. We can also pray using our own words. This is a good way to show our appreciation to God because we can say anything we want to. Performing a sacrifice limits the meaning of what your praise to God is. I do not think it is necessary to sacrifice animals now but back then there might have been some reasons why sacrificing was so acceptable. To me the burning of the fire used in sacrificing is significant because I feel that fire relates to something spiritual. I think the reason God wanted the Israelites to sacrifice instead of pray is that sacrificing meant something more to them because it could be felt and seen. The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *Korban*, and the root word means to be close. When something is dead, some people believe that the spirit remains with God. Sacrificing brings the animal's spirit closer to God, which makes the purpose of sacrificing more understandable. This is why the concept of sacrificing back in the ancient times is more appropriate. It helped the Israelites feel closer to God instead of just saying words to express their feelings.

## Lisa Fisher

We have studied many difficult and hard to grasp concepts this year. The concept of Resurrection is the one I struggled with for a while, before I finally recognized what I truly believed.

Principle 13 states "...there will be a resurrection of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, praised be Your name, and exalted be the remembrance of You forever and ever."

In the Siddur, the Amidah includes the words: 'Faithful are you in giving life to the dead. Praised are You, Adonai, Master of life and death.'

The prayer begins with saying "Your lovingkindness sustains the living, Your great mercies give life to the dead," and continues with "You keep your faith with those who sleep in dust."

The idea of "giving life to the dead" is only part of resurrection. The Torah says God can give life to the dead, but resurrection is not the only way to do this. After an important person dies, their ideas and teachings don't die with them.

People carry them on, and continue to teach those ideas. Famous people are not the only dead people that are given life. After a family member dies we keep them with us all the time. A Jewish tradition is to light a Yahrzeit candle on the anniversary of a loved one's death. The lessons your friends and family teach you, and the memories you shared with them stay with you forever. The memory of a person never dies.

Life after death goes hand in hand with resurrection. I was never sure how I felt about life after death, but now I don't really like the idea. I don't think it's over when you die; I am just not sure what happens next.

The soul is another idea that goes along with resurrection. I do not believe in the soul moving on to a different place. Some people believe that your soul exists before you are born, and continues to exist after you die. That idea seems extremely unlikely to me. I believe that the body and soul are connected, and when the body is no longer able to live, your soul dies with it.

There are many ways to interpret resurrection, and after exploring all the possibilities, I have come to the conclusion that resurrection of the body and soul is not very likely. However, the resurrection of someone's mind is a possibility.

## Rachel Hettler

For confirmation I was asked to discuss my belief on divine reward and punishment. In the instance of Miriam and Aaron in today's Parasha, Moses had just married a Cushite or darker skinned woman and Miriam was telling her disapproval to Aaron. Miriam was commenting to Aaron her disapproval of Moses marrying a woman of a different race. Because of her outward disapproval of Moses' marriage, G-d punishes her, strikes her with leprosy, and sentences her to 7 days confinement outside of the group. Moses speaks to G-d on her behalf and says "*ayl na rafanah la*" which means "O G-d heal her," which is said in our synagogue after the mi-sheberach in services.

A section from *Tazria* states that G-d will punish anyone who "incites brothers to quarrel." *Tazria* also states that the spread of rumors, which may cause conflict from brother to brother or from husband to wife, are deserving of the person to be separated from human contact.

The punishment, although harsh, will lead Miriam to most likely not gossip anymore. After Miriam gossips the Torah does not show anywhere where she shows remorse or feels bad for what she has done.

In the current period, getting stricken with leprosy for saying gossip is highly unlikely, because everyone in the room has gossiped at least once in their life, or will. The Rabbi taught me about *moral* leprosy. Moral leprosy can be defined as infection within the mind, or as I interpreted it, guilt. Moral leprosy has become more common in today's world. Instead of someone walking around with leprosy, most people feel guilt. G-d has become less influential over time, but his influence began many generations ago.

Many generations ago G-d used the threat of physical leprosy to instill values within Judaism. Over time, G-d has gone from striking people with leprosy to swaying people's thoughts or conscience. Your conscience has been or should be there to direct you in the ways of right or wrong.

G-d gave the values to people, and they interpreted them and made them broader to fit the certain period. As humans have changed, G-d's role has changed.

## Lauren Hickman

What is my current thinking on Revelation as it relates to ecstatic prophecy?

Ecstatic prophecy was one way for G-d to communicate with the Jewish people. G-d talked through people by making them jump around, scream, and sing. In this way, G-d got a point across. I think that this mode of revelation is strange and if it happened now would be shunned by most liberal Jews in America.

In other cultures, ecstatic prophecy is still accepted. For example, in Christianity some people have a ritual of speaking in tongues, where they just babble on whatever comes into their heads.

Ecstatic prophecy was a way that G-d was revealed. It was one revelation technique. I think it is not a rational or up to date way for G-d to be revealed. This action is not considered acceptable anymore. If, now, someone were found jumping, screaming, and claiming to have a message from G-d, most people would not believe their message. No one would take his or her word for anything and G-d's message would go unheard. This method would no longer work. Although this method is not as relevant anymore, it is understandable for ancient times.

In order for G-d to communicate with humans, a connection had to be made. This form of connection is a possessive trance. Although now most do not believe in possession by greater beings, it might have been the only way to communicate back then.

In the Torah where ecstatic prophecy is mentioned, it is in a story. The story talks about G-d being revealed to a certain group of elders in one area and they were to act as the prophets. Originally, Moses was supposed to do it by himself, but he wanted to share the burden with the people. He chose 70 of the town's wisest men to share it with him. The prophets lost consciousness to relay the word of G-d and they went into a trance. By accident, two younger men in town, Eldad and Medad, somehow received part of G-d's message and spirit. At this point, someone told Moses that two others were acting as the prophet. Moses did not act upon this because he believed that more, rather than less, people, should hear G-d's words. Only Joshua was angry that Moses did not do anything.

This method worked then, and was a main method of revelation, but would no longer work now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Wendy Hirshman

To be completely honest, I was at first, utterly distraught at the prospect of having to write a confirmation essay. At 16 years old, I really do not have any concrete idea of what I believe in. I did not want to stand in front of my community and state beliefs that I did not have. So one night, after arguing with my parents on the matter, I got into bed like I always do and began to reflect on my life as a Jew. An hour or so passed and still I had nothing suitable to write about. Resigned, I closed my eyes and began my personal discussion with God, "God, please say that I will not have any dreams or nightmares, no..." Suddenly it hit me, mid-sentence, that this was what I must discuss -- my own, very personal relationship with God. When I was in fourth grade I had been having terrible dreams and nightmares that were causing me a great deal of anxiety. At 10 years of age, the best plan I could devise for remedying my problem was to ask God every night before bed, to prevent me from having dreams or nightmares.

Over time this prayer of sorts grew and came to include well wishes for my loved ones and other random requests, then concluded with me wishing God a good night's sleep. I am sort of embarrassed because I have never shared this intimate detail of my relationship with God before, but it is important. Everyone has their own personal relationship with God and their religion. Yet sometimes what we believe in is impacted not only by traditional religious values, but also by things we encounter in every day life. Part of being a teenager is being receptive to new and different experiences so that we can form our own new and different beliefs. Enlightenment and renaissance thinkers, poets, artists, teachers, friends, and authors have all influenced me; my opinions and views are constantly changing. I honestly cannot tell you who or what I believe God is, or whether I believe the messiah will come or not. I do not know if there is an afterlife, and I also do not know whether our destiny is predetermined by fate.

I guess I do not have all the answers, but that is okay. I'm only 16, I have plenty of time to sort through a variety of ideas and formulate a flexible belief system. Yet in truth, I hope that I do not reach that point until I am at least 95, because I hope to continue to learn from and be enriched by others for the rest of my life. I know that it may seem somewhat foolish for me to simply stand here and tell you that I do not know what I believe, but that is the only statement that I feel comfortable confirming today. I certainly am religious, and I have strong Jewish values, and while I have had some trouble coming to the realization that I do not know what I believe, it has definitely brought me closer to God. Socrates himself said, "An unexamined life is not worth living," so rather than confirm beliefs that, for me would be half-baked, I will promise to search for more answers, and always be open to new ideas. I love the opportunities for self-exploration that this experience has given me, and I will continue the exploration of my Judaism for the rest of my life.

## Marc Kaplan

In the opening verses of Chapter 10, G-d gave Moses some specific commands. G-d tells Moses to instruct the people of Israel to make two trumpets that will be blown to instruct the people without having to call them all together first. At the end of these verses the trumpets are used to set the tribes of Israel out of their encampment. In Maimonides thirteen principles, he states that he believes that anything G-d teaches will never change. Therefore, according to Maimonides, because this was a teaching of G-d, nothing else could ever take its place. Maimonides believed that people would always use two trumpets to instruct large groups of people. This is where I have to disagree with Maimonides. As we can see from the course of history, trumpets were not always used for this purpose. As new technology evolved, so did the means of communication. Today, we have automated phone calls that go out to many people at one time. There are many other examples of the differences between the times of the Torah and current times. One example, in a more secular sense, deals with clothing. It is easy to see that the styles worn in the Torah are not fashionable anymore.

From all of this I have come to believe that G-d never intended the trumpets to be used in that fashion forever, but rather G-d wanted to only plant an idea in the minds of the people, and let them branch off from there. It is the same way in confirmation class when we look at the 13 principles and passages from the Torah. In class we were asked to look at these writings and base our beliefs off of them. We didn't have to believe exactly what was written. And that is how it came about what I actually believe. I believe that G-d wants us to believe anything we want to believe, as long as it does not contradict human morals on the Ten Commandments.

## Jacob Merlin

In the Haftarah text, Joshua is talking with an angel, not able to comprehend the meaning and significance of items such as “lamps on it are seven in number, and the lamps above it have seven pipes; and by it are two olive trees.” The angel then explains to Joshua these items metaphorically, telling him of the Lord’s words to Zerubbabel.

God is portrayed as an all powerful figure who will turn great mountains into level ground. He is depicted as one who cares about and works for those who obey His commands. He rewards His followers as Zerubbabel “shall produce that excellent stone; it shall be greeted with shouts of “Beautiful! Beautiful!”

In God’s guarantee that whatever great mountain stands in Zerubbabel’s way will be turned to level ground, God states that he will crush whatever problem or oppressor stands in his faithful believer’s way. This guarantee is seen throughout history as God, as an everlasting and all powerful God, has helped Jews persevere, whether it be the founding of a Jewish state in Israel, or the success of Jewish businessmen like, Roman Abramovich, who is one of the world’s richest men and owns British soccer giant, Chelsea.

The phrase of “Not by might, nor by power, but my spirit” stuck into my mind. These words convey the message that God cannot give you the strength or power, but he can lift your spirits and strengthen your mind. I find this applies to my life everyday. Every night before I go to sleep while lying in my bed, I recite the Shema. Afterwards I take a moment to reflect on my day and also the upcoming events for the next day or week. Whether it be my asking for help with an everyday task like a test in school or asking for my mom’s surgery to go well and that she will be okay, my individual communication with God helps me feel more comfortable and confident.

This phrase might most apply to me when it comes to soccer. Most of you might think how do the words “Not by might, nor by power, but my spirit” relate to soccer, but when I read these words; they convey exactly how God helps me in my life. Before every high school soccer game, the starting team is called out and the starters of each team line up with the refs. I started every game this season so the moment that comes next happened all this year. The players get quiet and face the American flag for the playing of the national anthem. In this silent minute or so, I always recite the Shema. Sometimes I ask for God to help our team win, but other times I just focus on Him helping me to play my best and when I’m at the point of mental breakdown due to my physical fatigue, I ask that He helps me dig down inside myself and pull it out.

As a sophomore, I am usually the smallest kid on the field. And after I recite the Shema I feel like the other kids might be stronger and taller, but I have something they don’t -- and that is the mental edge that God is helping to give me. He can’t make me gain weight, get stronger or run faster, those are things that are up to me to improve and work on, but He can help me find that place inside my heart and mind where I will do anything and everything I can to dig out the game and win it, and this is why the phrase “Not by might, nor by power, but my spirit” means so much to me.

## **Matt Mihal**

What is my current thinking on Revelation as it relates to the purification of the Levites?

The definition of the word revelation is: the act of revealing or disclosing; disclosure.” It is a simple explanation, yet heavy in meaning. It makes one think like they’ve never thought before.

But what exactly does Revelation have to do with a simple cleansing of a certain people? This was a confusing question at first. But then, after a little research, it hit me. God might have given orders to famous Jewish figures such as Abraham and even Moses, but up until that point, God had never been so strict about certain religious affairs.

Another thought came to me, as well. I believe that the purification of the Levites represents religious tolerance. God, Moses and Aaron’s main reason for doing this deed was to let the Levites enter the temple. Obviously, they must have believed in something different than Moses and Aaron.

The fact that God allowed them to enter reveals his tolerance and loving for all kinds of people. Also, the Kohans probably wanted to have another group learn how to carry out rituals.

This passage shows a rare negative attribute of God as well, that being selfishness. However, he does have this selfishness for a good reason. No one can stand up to his power!

## Tamara Moore

The Haftarah takes place in Persia before the construction of the second temple, with God announcing he wants the Temple rebuilt and wants everyone to return to Jerusalem. It continues with the High Priest, Joshua, standing before an Angel of God and another called The Accuser. The Angel rebukes the Accuser, telling him off and saying that God has forgiven the people of Israel, and then robes Joshua in priestly garments.

The reason God sent both the Accuser and the Angel is hard to really understand at first, until you look at the roles these two play. The Angel's role is quite easy to understand; to lift the spirits of the people and help them return to the Land of Israel. The Accuser's job, if you will, is the opposite of the Angel's and is very important to the end result.

Though the Accuser doesn't say anything in the Haftarah we know he must have, because of the Angel's words. The Accuser no doubt told the People of Israel their faults, why they should not rebuild the temple, why they are all guilty of sin, and most of all how they all doubt themselves and possibly God as well. Why would the Accuser say those kinds of things? Why would God let him?

Maimonides' Principle Ten says that God can see into our hearts and minds, knows what we will do before we do, and knows our every thought. I agree with Maimonides, and think God sent the Accuser and all his negativity for an important reason, possibly even more important than he sent his other Angel. An Angel is a Messenger and I believe that God had a good reason for sending both of them. God being all knowing, knows that the People doubt themselves and possibly think that God is unaware of how horrible they are, and how they are not worthy.

God sending the Accuser proves to the people they are wrong. God knows their doubts, faults and misconceptions. God sends the Accuser to show the people that God is quite aware of their faults, and to give voice to all of the people's dark thoughts and bring it all out into the open to see. God then has the other Angel rebuke the Accuser, say the people are worthy and that its time to move on and rebuild what was destroyed.

I believe God's sending both angels was one of the most understanding and caring things God could do. The Accuser is sent to show the people their faults and worries, and the Angel is sent to put down the Accuser in front of all and help the people realize they can conquer their faults and worries, and that they are forgiven and accepted no matter what.

I don't believe the Angels that were sent were truly divine beings, but simply human beings following God's will. Angel means Messenger, and I believe that we should take a lesson from the beginning of the Haftarah portion.

We are not perfect, never have been and never will be. We should listen to all of God's messages whether we want to hear them or not, negative or positive, and that as long as we work to conquer our faults everything will be alright.

Thank You. Shabbat Shalom.

## Hillary Porter

This year in Confirmation class, we learned about different theologians and their ideas on revelation from God. In a dictionary, revelation can be defined as “God’s disclosure of Himself and His will to His creatures or an instance of such communication or disclosure.”

One man who taught about the theory of God revealing Godself to others is Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. He wrote a book in 1955 called God in Search of Man. Many people see it the other way around though; man in search of God, but it is all about God revealing Godself to you. God isn’t going to be found unless God wants to be, but God’s not going to do that unless one is also searching. It is a partnership, you take the initiative and God has the option to open communications or not. Heschel believes that one cannot communicate with God through words, rather that God influences you to make certain decisions. You feel the presence of God, but are unable to describe it. There is the possibility that the human brain is not capable of grasping the idea of divine presence. This makes sense to me since I believe there are greater things than humankind, like God.

My views are similar to Heschel’s in that many people, who receive divine revelation, feel the presence of God. In addition to Heschel’s views, I believe that throughout history God does not directly affect humanity quite so much. As humankind evolves God influences us to make certain decisions, rather than talking to us like God did with Moses.

There might be the possibility that as humankind continues to ruin God’s earth, God’s connection with us may lessen. Once humanity realizes that we need a better relationship with God and are unable to attain it by ourselves, the messiah will come.

## Rachel Schneider

This morning we were asked to discuss what we have learned this year and how it relates to what we believe. I was given the topic of the Passover sacrifice. When the Israelites received instructions for making the Passover sacrifice there were many minute details concerning the proper way to do this.

Before even considering the proper way to perform the sacrifice we must consider why the Israelites decided they would make the sacrifice. This is not unlike the situation the Israelites were in when they decided to embark on the journey of the exodus.

This brings me to my question; this is the one question that really determines why I am here. What is it that causes us to go through our lives believing in something without proof, or what is it that makes us make decisions based on something that we do not know?

Many people would say that this thing is blind faith. Many people would say that religion is something we believe in without proof. But I believe that we do have proof for our faith. Look around at the person sitting next to you, they are your proof. And everything all around you is your proof. What more proof do you need other than the fact that you are here today.

When the Israelites performed the sacrifice they didn't have blind faith. They saw the proof around them and they realized that the only explanation for something so good as life was that there was something out there, something in it all. They didn't know that their decision to follow these directions would affect every generation later. They didn't know that they would start a tradition of faith that would continue through today.

In the readings today it is said, "And on your joyous occasion your fixed festivals and new moon days, you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well being. They shall be a reminder of you before your god: I am the lord your god."

This shows us how we have god with us and his creations around us to guide our faith.

**Zack Reilly**

“I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though the Messiah tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.” These are the words of Maimonides, in his 12<sup>th</sup> principle of faith. According to Jewish tradition, the coming of the Messiah will bring in a golden age, an age where everybody is free. It will bring an age where all Jews return to our homeland Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel, as well as an age where the dead shall reawaken in full health and rejoin the living in peace and happiness. But how can the Messiah come? How can this chaotic, war torn planet enter this fabled age?

As we just read in this week’s Haftarah, an angel of G-d says to the high priest Joshua “For those men are a sign that I am going to bring my servant the branch:” where ‘those men’ refers to the assistant priests and ‘the branch’ refers to the messiah. Why a branch? To me, the Messiah and messianic age seems more like a majestic tree, not just a branch.

I believe, with perfect faith, that there is a bit of the Messiah in each of us. Each of us human beings is also a leaf of that amazing tree. But a tree will not survive if all the parts don't work together. Likewise, it is only after we start working together, start forming branches between us so we are all connected, that that amazing tree will emerge, and the messianic age will finally arrive.

## Michael Schreiber

This year in confirmation class, we discussed Revelation, the revealing of God's will by God. In class we talked about the great revelation that happened upon Mount Sinai between Moses and God. Our class addressed the different views on revelation and what we thought happened, concerning God and Moses and just how God communicated God's will to Moses. But after this revelation was all said and done and Moses had the two tablets that were the commandments safe in an ark, he and the Jewish people traveled for many days and nights. It is this journey, or rather, what Moses did on this journey that relates to revelation and to what I believe really happened on the Mountain.

Every week in synagogue, we, the congregants, stand while the ark is opened and say "Kuma Adonai Vyafutsu Oyvecha". We say this today just like Moses said this phrase everyday, thousands of years ago, before he set out on his journey with the Holy Ark.

The translation of this passage that the Etz Hayim gives us is: "Advance, O Lord! May your enemies be scattered, And may Your foes flee before you." Moses believed that if he said this little prayer before he started his walk for the day that God would get rid of God's foes, who would complicate Moses' trip. He believed that if he said this, God would protect him and all of his people. Do we believe this? We say the same words every week that Moses said, but do we really believe that God did protect Moses, or that God watches over us today?

I believe with perfect faith that God did protect Moses and his people during his travel and that God does continue to protect and watch over all who ask for it. Because that's all that Moses was doing, asking God to protect and watch over the people so that no harm would fall upon them. Even though today I am not wandering in a desert with a very heavy ark and several hundred thousand Jews following me, I still ask God to watch over me in my life.

I believe that God was also revealing God's will to Moses and the people during the duration of this journey. I believe that God was, in addition to protecting Moses, acting as a guide and showing Moses the way to go, through the Holy Ark. The Torah says that the ark traveled in front of them. I believe that the ark served as a guiding force, telling Moses where to go. This would be a revelation, like that which happened atop Mount Sinai. But this is not exactly what I believe happened. The ark served as a guiding force, not literally telling Moses what to do and where to go, but rather Moses was divinely inspired by God with a specific message. I believe with perfect faith, again, that atop Mount Sinai, God spoke to Moses, and told Moses what God's will was.

At the end of the Torah, after Moses dies, it says that Moses was the greatest of all prophets, who spoke to God face to face, and I believe that is what happened.

## Morgan

I believe that G-d communicates through symbols, including the well known menorah. The menorah can symbolize many things, including light. Light can guide its followers through the good and the bad. Its warmth is something we need to survive. The menorah can represent Jews, needing G-d for life or our mere existence on earth. The menorah has the honor of being placed on the seal of the State of Israel. The symbol of the menorah shows, how it was and is an implement to make G-d present in the world. During the holiday of Chanukah, the flickering lights in the windows are able to unite all Jews.

With perfect faith I believe that on Mount Sinai, Moses received the thought of the Ten Commandments in his mind instead of literally hearing them through the spoken words of G-d. My belief is similar to the story of the menorah, where Moses receives a vision containing all the necessary details to build and hammer a menorah out of one piece of gold metal. The menorah had seven golden branches instead of the evolved nine branched menorah that is used today to help commemorate the holiday of Chanukah. This hard working man tried as hard as he could to etch an intricate candelabrum. I do not believe that the menorah was a vision from G-d. Imagine making this candelabrum out of one piece of metal, and have it be ready the next day to be lit?

The menorah has always been a very sacred symbol of Judaism. Some people say that the menorah comes from the Burning Bush, as well as the Tree of Life. The temple's menorah had straight diagonal branches instead of the traditional curved limbs.

I believe the menorah can also symbolize people taking different paths while reaching the same destination. This is one of many tasks that were given to Moses, from G-d, to test if he was true, true to his beliefs, true to his word. These words are confirming both his and my beliefs.