
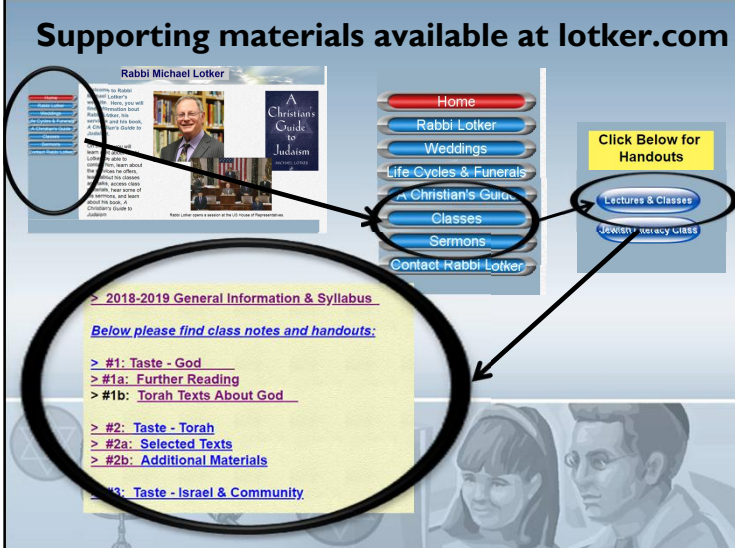


Taste #1: God Jewish Literacy Class

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Supporting materials available at lotker.com



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Introduction

- **Overview of "Taste" course: Corresponds to Judaism's "Trinity"**
 - **God – Spirituality - Tonight**
 - **Torah – Scripture, ethics and rituals – the Jewish way of life**
 - **Israel – The Jewish People and Community**
 - **It's just a taste**
 - **Judaism: infinitely broad and deep**
 - **The class will continue until February (see Jewish Literacy Syllabus)**



Introduction

- **Why religion is important**
 - **W/o God, no objective good and evil**
 - **W/o God, no intrinsic meaning to life**
- **NB: doesn't prove the existence of God!**
- **So why do we need religion? Why can't I just be spiritual**
 - **Jewish spirituality>text>bound into *mitzvot***
 - **Religion is a way to hand ethics from generation to generation**
 - **Can't speak w/o language: can't be religious w/o religion**



Let's Talk About God

- **Two Questions:**
 - **What do you think about God? "God is _____"**
 - **What do you think Judaism (or Christianity) says about God?**
- **Does God work in the world?**
- **When is God?**
- **Can you doubt God and be a good person? A good Jew?**

Why Is the Teapot Boiling?



Why Is the Teapot Boiling?



Answer #1: Because the stove heated the water to its boiling point.....
Aristotle called this "efficient cause" – how the phenomenon takes place.

BUT THERE'S ANOTHER ANSWER!

Why Is the Teapot Boiling?



Answer #2: **BECAUSE MY WIFE WANTED TEA!**
Aristotle called this "final cause," the reason the phenomenon takes place.

Why Is the Teapot Boiling?



Answer #2: ***BECAUSE MY WIFE WANTED TEA!***
Aristotle called this “final cause,” the reason the phenomenon takes place.

Do we have to choose between one correct and the other incorrect answer?

So, Why is There a Universe?



Answer #1: Everything we know about cosmology.

So, Why is There a Universe?



Answer #1: Everything we know about cosmology.
Answer #2: Because God wanted a universe.

So, Why is There a Universe?



Answer #1: Everything we know about cosmology.
Answer #2: Because God wanted a universe.

Do we have to choose between one correct and the other incorrect answer?

But Why Did/Does God Want a Universe?

1. *A Traditional Answer: If God is to be praised then a humanity to praise God is needed.*
2. *An Answer I Prefer: Because God likes stories.*

Dvar Acher (Another Idea): The Talmud records a debate that lasted 2 ½ years as to whether it would have been better if humanity had not been created?

- What's your answer?
- What do you think they voted?

Is Doubt OK?

- Lesson of the generation of the Exodus
- Doubt/uncertainty necessary for free will.

Police Car
Example



I believe that God wants us to have some doubts. The word "Israel" means one who wrestles with God.

How do I approach these matters as a scientist?

- I am not scientifically certain that God exists.
- But – I do believe in God.
- And – I am sure that I am in relationship with God.
 - I pray to God, talk to God, cry with God, and listen for God's response
 - God has changed the entire structure of my life.
- I am committed to doing God's work in the world.
- Therefore God works in the world!

Therefore God works in the world!

- I mean this literally. God gets the credit!
- If I visit someone in the hospital, if you give to tzedakah, when Mother Theresa comforted the sick and hopeless in India,
 - Humans were the vehicle
 - But the good that happened, took place because people were motivated by religious teaching, by our culture so steeped in Judeo-Christian tradition.
- I have also been touched by God working in the world
 - By friends, caregivers, rabbis, teachers and others who have reached out to me and my family
 - When I take the time to remember, I can look up from the mud to see the miracle of God working in my life.
 - I can see God in the faces of the people around me

Therefore God works in the world!

- **As a result, my relationship with God gets stronger.**
 - And I'm inspired to do more for people and to do this in God's name.
 - As a result, God is present in the world
- **Midrash: "You are my witnesses" says Adonai "and I am God" (Isaiah 43:12)**
 - *When you are My witnesses, I am God, but when you are not My witnesses, I am not God." (Sifre Deut. § 346)*
- **fits nicely with the Kabbalistic idea that we are in the image or "like a shadow" of God.**

Bottom Lines on Judaism As Ethical Monotheism

- **Definition:**
 - **One God**
 - **Primary demand – that we be good to one another**
- **God created the world incomplete!**
- **There are problems left for us to solve**
- **Imagine if God had done everything**
 - **Doing everything for your kids**
 - **We would be the moral equivalent of lima beans!**

Bottom Lines on Judaism As Ethical Monotheism

- **Created *B'tzellel Elohim* (in the image of God)!**
 - We have free will
 - We can build gas chambers or hospitals
- **Our job as Jews**
 - Be God's partner in creation – Tikkun olam – complete the task
 - Be a light to the nations – teach the world about God
 - Does not mean convert others
- **Enjoy Life & Be Grateful!**
- **Judaism is not the problem – Living is the problem**
- **Judaism is the one true answer --- for Jews!**

Taste #1: God: Selected Texts

Is God All Knowing?

Genesis 6:5-7 (Just before the Flood and Noah Story)

"The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened."

Taste #1: God: Selected Texts

Can One See God?

Exodus 33:17, 20 (just after God spares Israel after Golden Calf). "And the Lord said to Moses, I will do this thing also that you have spoken; for you have found grace in my sight, and I know you by name. And he said, You can not see my face; for no man shall see me and live."

Exodus 24:9-11 (just after delivery of the 10 Commandments and other laws). "Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet a kind of paved work of a sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And upon the nobles of the people of Israel he laid not his hand; also they saw God, and ate and drank."

Taste #1: God: Selected Texts

Does God Play Fair?

Exodus 7:2-5 (before God sends Moses to Pharaoh)

"You shall repeat all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt and deliver My ranks, My people the Israelites from the land of Egypt with extraordinary chastisements. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand over Egypt and bring out the Israelites from their midst."

Taste #1: God: Selected Texts

Can You Argue With God?

Genesis 18: 16-32 (just after God's covenant with Abraham)

"Now the Lord had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him." Then the Lord said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has come to Me; if not, I will take note."

Taste #1: God: Selected Texts

The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will you then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" And the Lord answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." Abraham spoke up, saying, "Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes: What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will you destroy the whole city for want of the five?"

Taste #1: God: Selected Texts

And He answered, "I will not destroy if I find forty-five there." But he spoke to Him again, and said, "What if forty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty ." And he said, "Let not the Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." And he said, "I venture again to speak to my Lord: What if twenty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty." And he said, "Let not the Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What is ten should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten."

Taste #1: God: Selected Texts

Can You Argue With God and Win?

Exodus 32:11-14 (just after Israel's sin with Golden Calf)

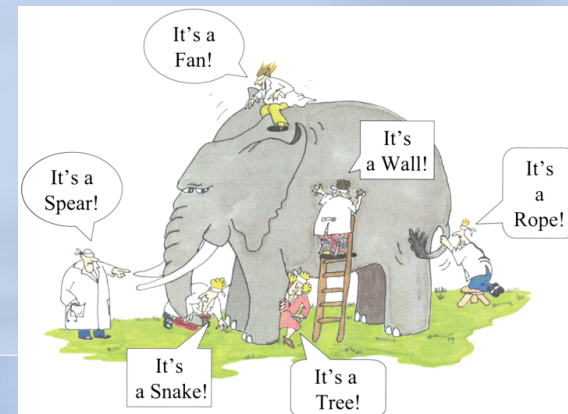
"But Moses implored the Lord his God, saying, "Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.' Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, how You swore to them by Your Self and said to them: I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke, to possess forever. " And the Lord renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people."

Taste #1: God: Selected Texts

Is It OK to Struggle With God?

Genesis 32:23-33 (Jacob is about to be reunited with his brother, Esau) "That same night he arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After taking them across the stream, he sent across all his possessions. Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." ... The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip. That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of hip, since Jacob's hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle."

The Blind & the Elephant



Perhaps we each can see/understand only a portion of God's totality.



Our error is in our certainty that our view is the only truth.

The blind people all hear the creature speak and they all hear the Golden Rule, this rabbi's test for a *Kosher* religion.

Texts for the Jewish Literacy Class

1. Lotker, M. *A Christian's Guide to Judasim*, Paulist Press, 2004
2. Olitzky K., & Isascs, R., *The Complete How To Handbook for Jewish Living*, KTAV Publishing, 2004