

Jeremy Rosen - Must We Believe in God?

- All right, I'm going to hand over to you and whenever you are ready, please start and thank you for joining us.

- Okay, so ladies and gentlemen, nice to be on air with you again. And this is going to be a controversial and explorational session because the idea of God is such a complex, fundamental, complex, misunderstood concept. So Here we are less than a month before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when we imagine that we are going to be judged, we imagine we're going to stand before this awesome presence of God and there He will be sitting like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel with his white hair, this paternal figure surrounded by angels and little busy bodies around. And He will take out from underneath his throne this huge big book which He will slap down on his lap, the Book of Life.

And He will take out a goose quill and He'll start writing in Jeremy Rosen for good behaviour, one year's remission or some such statement. This is the image that many of us have and it's encouraged by tradition in the same way that we are encouraged to play act coming out of Egypt. So we are expected to play up standing before God who knows everything you've done and is judging you or rather you are judging yourself. But then what do we mean by God? Of course, if you look at "The Bible" written 3,000 years ago, God seems to be this invisible force that somehow interacts with human beings, that guides them, directs them, sometimes punishes them, but has given a kind of a code that we believe will make us better people. And part of being a better person is having this concept of something beyond and above.

Now in order to explain that to somebody who's never had it before, how is any text going to try to explain this idea of God? Everybody thought at that time, that all the planets and every element within the physical world that influenced us was a God. All influences coming from outside of us are what we call God-like influences. And these influences have to be appeased or have to be accepted. And in the ancient world, the king was the representative of God on earth and the king was going to protect us and going to look after us until of course He didn't. The innovation of "The Bible" is to say that this God is not like a human king. It's not like anything you can see, it's not like anything you can touch, it's totally intangible.

But then in a sense, it contradicts itself by using what we call anthropomorphisms, that use these things that talk about God speaking. Well, how does God speak? Does God have vocal chords? Talks about the finger of God, does God cut his fingernails? Talks about the arm of God. It talks about God being angry. Does God's blood pressure rise? All these anthropomorphism cannot be taken literally. That wouldn't make sense, although most people have for a very long time. And all these terms like father and king are human terms that we use to try to get some concept, our fingers around this idea of God.

Now although "The Bible" starts off with God creates the world, God creates human beings and interacts with them, "The Bible" also keeps on reiterating the fact that we cannot know God.

Even when Moses wants to interact with God, God says, "Sorry Moses, you can't see me". And therefore the question is bound to arise, well then how do we relate to God? To make things more difficult, the "Torah" never says anywhere, you must believe in God. This idea of belief in the sense of the way we use it today came into human thought essentially with Greek philosophy, with the idea that everything can be explained, everything can be proven, everything can be tested and God is something that can be proven and tested if you are interested in encountering the idea of God. The first of the 10 Commandments doesn't say, you must believe I am the Lord your God, the first of the 10 Commandments simply says, "I am".

There is this thing, this energy that is intangible that we like to call God. And the implication is that you as an individual have to find a way of relating to God. Now given that human beings are very different, some of us are cerebral, some of us are intellectual, some of us are not, they are bound to be different ways of relating to this idea of God. Some people will relate to it intellectually, some people in some other area, which is why we have this notion that God is something to be encountered. And the word that's used for this encounter is a word in Hebrew, emunah. Emunah which we now call is belief. In the "Torah", it doesn't mean that.

In the "Torah" from the same word, amen, I agree, essentially means something I am committed to in some way, whether it's an idea, a concept, whatever it is, emunah means I am committed. And this idea of commitment lays itself open to so many different interpretations. There are those who will follow the line we call off simple faith. Yes, I believe, glory, hallelujah. This is it. I don't want to think too much about it. You'll have those who try to think in terms of how can I make sense of this idea? "The Bible" doesn't really help us because everything in "The Bible" is in the form of a metaphor. When God shall we say appears through a burning bush, you see a burning bush. When God appears to Moses on Mount Sinai, all you happen to see is lightning and pyrotechnics. And indeed the children of Israel gathering around the mountain said, "we are too scared to interact with this, Moses, you do it for us". So "The Bible" other than laying down the fundamental principle that there is a God, a creator, and this is something that we have to find a way of relating to because God is going to provide us with guidelines for living our lives, this is all the "Torah" tells us. So at this moment, what do we know about God?

Essentially that this is an idea that emerged some 3,5000 years ago to explain how the world works in order to reduce dependency on the sun and the moon and nature in that abstract way and try to get people to focus on the idea of some sort of guide. Some sort of guide to Help us cope with life without being terrified of forces around us over which we have no control. So this is an idea that emerges as I say, some 3,000 years ago without any clear definition, without any clear prescription, and with a lot of metaphors and anthropomorphism that in fact get in the way of how we can understand God. So one classic example would be the fact that when God tells Abraham that He intends to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham turns round to God and says, "Dear God, surely you are not going to do something as terrible as that." Do we understand from this that God can be persuaded not to do things? Or do we understand from this that God can change his mind and that it is our job to interact and get God to change his mind? Or is this just a metaphor? A metaphor in which the "Torah" is trying to tell us what

God likes is justice and if things go wrong, then they have to be dealt with.

So this very early simplistic way of looking at God in "The Bible" is clearly something that now most of us know we don't take literally. We take it figuratively and we take it as a direction for our thoughts. But then somewhere 2,500 years before our time, Greek philosophy comes forward and says, you know, to understand the world, we must experiment. We must find facts to support how we look at the world. It's interesting that at that same time, they still believed in the crazy gods and in the Vestal virgins, the Romans that came later, but in all the apollonic and all these priests that were intermediated between God and human beings, but they seem to have separated the religious world entirely from the scientific world. And the scientific world became something that you try to prove and show. And this became the fundamental element of human civilization 2,000 years ago. You should be able to prove things. And so when people suggested the idea of a God, then this was something you had to find a way of justifying. And so you had to wait to find a way of proving, does God exist? What kind of God are we talking about? Is this a God that can do everything? In which case, can He do certain things that He can't do? Or if God is good and just as we seem to say He is, how come bad things happen to good people? If God is just, He can't allow this to happen and yet we see all the time that bad things happen to good people.

So where is God in all this? The rationalists, the philosophers try to find ways of dealing with these things. And when, for example, they were challenged by another point of view, you have another point of view which we will call the mystical point of view. And the mystical point of view says God is not something to be reasoned about, God is not something to be argued about, God is something to be experienced. And experience is incredibly subjective. We all experience things in different ways. We taste things in different ways, we see things in different ways. And because of this, it is not something that you can fit neatly into a mathematical theorem. Therefore it is what we would call nowadays in modern philosophical terms, existential. It's something to do with R, the way we see and the way we feel the world. Most of the problems that people have with the idea of God have come from this challenge between the rational, the scientific, and on the other hand what we would call the mystic. Into this came the proofs that early Christian philosophers and early Muslim philosophers and early Jewish philosophers had to come up with in order to justify their belief in God.

The most famous one, the one we all know and probably the most popular one to today is the one that says, well look, this great universe, somebody or something must have started it. They come up with this famous line, every event has a cause. We've never seen anything that hasn't been caused by something else. And therefore what we call the prime mover or the first cause is what God is, which very nice idea. It's an idea that's very appealing. The more we look at the world, the more it seems so complex and yet so magnificent, so magical, so unlike anything that rationality can get your hold about, your mind around and at the same time, for all the fact that we took about big bangs and the great original explosion of the universe, how does that tell us what God is? It might tell us how things came about, it might tell us that there is a superior intelligence, that there is something out there beyond us, but it doesn't tell us what it is and how

are we get going to get to come to terms with it. Which is why the idea of the mystic was to stay, stop trying to theorise about this.

If you try to theorise about it, that will not give you the feeling, the experience of God. So that we have this strict division between those people who say that God is something to be experienced and those people who say God is something to be proven. Now I believe despite the fact that for thousands of years, great Jewish and non-Jewish philosophers thought that they could prove the existence of God. And indeed there are some religions believe today that there still is, if you like, an article of faith, you have to believe this. But at the same time, same time as saying that you have to believe it, the arguments do not stand.

Let me give you another example. Another example would be to say that we are imperfect. So where did we get the idea of perfection from? It can't come from us 'cause we're so imperfect. It must have come from some other source. But the trouble again is that still doesn't tell us what this other source is. So we go round in circles with all these interesting questions that crop up, like if God can do everything, can God create a stone which God can't lift? If He can create a stone which He can't lift, then something He can't do. And if He can't create a stone that He can't lift, there's also something He can't do. So God can't be what we think God should be, but that's only because we are using human language to try to describe something which is in no way human. It doesn't make sense even to try and yet people keep on trying.

And one of the reasons why people keep on trying is because there is so much in our universe that we still don't know. There's one third angle that I've not discussed and this is the angle that originates in some people, say within Buddhism and in pantheism in the idea that Spinoza is famous for, that really when we talk about God, we talk about the totality of the universe, that everything's in this universe, except of course there are dimensions in this universe we still don't know about. We're used to how many dimensions? Two, four? Now people talk about 12, there might be even more. We know that our human brains don't grasp a tremendous amount of what there is in this universe which we're part of. And therefore it seems to me that if we bring these theories together, these theories together seem to be saying the concept of God is a concept of the totality of the world, the universe we live in and everything that we haven't yet encountered, it's beyond us.

But if we say that and that makes some sense, and there are many people who have come to the conclusion that I can't make any sense of this universe other than to think that it's come from somewhere, that there is some sort of grand design that still doesn't tell us what this grand design is. And this is why I, despite my philosophical training, believe that philosophy is never going to help us come to terms with God in such a way that will satisfy all minds. Even though it is true, it is an article of faith since the days of Maimonides that a Jew has to believe that there is the God, the creator, the designer of everything. The question is what happens if I can't believe it? What happens if I've tried and I don't get there? And interestingly enough, there is no statement anywhere, anywhere in the "Talmud" or in "The Bible" that says, if I don't understand something, what happens to me? Am I a bad boy? Am I thrown out of my religion? Am I rejected

by God? I just don't know. This is one of the challenges. I think what the rabbis of the "Talmud" were really concerned with was the person who said, "I know everything there is to know and there is no room for God in the way I look at this universe" because that is showing a certain arrogance that prevents you being open to other possibilities. It's rather like Sanuk says, "I do not believe in love". There's no such thing as love and if somebody takes that view in a sense, they're closing their minds to the possibility of love, even if there is no guarantee that they will find it. So when I look at how the "Talmud" deals with this issue, it's clear to me that what the "Talmud" is saying is it's important for us humans to have an idea that there is something more than us and this something more than us can be treated as a very important and positive influence in our lives.

It gives us a sense that we are not in control of everything, it gives us a sense that there is knowledge beyond us and it keeps our mind open for other kinds of experiences. And just as any good teacher will say, the role of a good teacher is to open the mind of children to possibilities, all kinds of possibilities. So the role of religion is to open the mind of people to the possibility of a spiritual dimension. Now what that spiritual dimension is, how you or I are going to relate to that spiritual dimension is going to very much depend on who we are, what tools we use, what capacities we use in order to try to discover this experience. Some of us will, some of us will not, some of us will do it in a total way, some of us will do it in a partial way. But this is why in modern terminology, the famous American thinker, Stephen Pinker has said, "We really should be talking not about God, but about the idea of God". By that I think he means that every one of us has a different idea of what God is. You ask three people what their idea of God is and you'll get three very different answers. They will share certain things in common, they will share the idea of a certain transcendentalism, a certain if you like, spirituality, something beyond our immediate material world, but they won't be very specific about what it is. So that when you turn to somebody and says, do you believe in God? And they say, sure, I believe in God and then you get them to try and describe what this is, you're going to have a great deal of difficulty and probably get nowhere.

And yet there are large numbers of people in this universe of ours who feel this God feeling in some deep way. And although it is true in our world, formal religion is going out of favour and trying to impose religion is definitely going out of favour and yet at the same time, there is this yearning for something spiritual for this dimension. The problem with all this is everything I've said so far is very, very vague. It's almost happy clappy, it's intangible, it's almost the equivalent of a dance that sends you into a trance or music that sends you into a different world. And it is something that has all these because the human being and the human mind seems to have this need for something more than just what we call the physical.

Although the truth of the matter is appreciating music or art is a physical phenomenon even though it's unlike having a meal if you like or being hurt. And so this variety of concept about God is the world in which we live at this moment. So for example, a 20th century philosopher like Martin Buber says, "You must think of God as something you need to have a relationship with", a relationship of I thou as opposed to a relationship between I and it. God is an object, it's

an idea, it's a kind of a Superman. Is that what you think it is? No, it isn't like that. It's something like feeling that you can relate and relate to something that is personal. But then how do you do that? Do you do it intellectually through philosophy or do you do it through what at his time we called and call now phenomenology or existentialism?

Through the fact that we human beings are complex organisms and they're the place within our organism for the spiritual dimension and it's up to us to cultivate it. And interestingly enough, this is what Maimonides said 1,000 years ago, even though He is a great philosopher, he said very clearly, "The soul is that capacity a human being has to appreciate the divine". And this soul is something that you can suppress and destroy. It's something that you can develop and something that you can cultivate. And the more you cultivate it, the more spiritual you become and the less cultivated, the less spiritual you come. And the function of religion is to help you create a lifestyle in which you are constantly being reminded both of your ethical obligations as well as your spiritual experiences. If you never however much you say you love music, never go to a concert, if you never play music, if you are not involved with it, then what does it mean to say I love music? It's something very vague, but it's not very tangible.

And therefore the role of religion is to try to get you to include within your lifestyle something that repetitively gets you to emphasise this spiritual dimension. Now there's a different side to this whole issue because almost all religions, almost all religions have this concept that God rewards you or punishes you, rewards you for good behaviour, punishes you for bad behaviour, and yet none of them have a satisfactory answer. If you look in the "Talmud", the "The Talmud: Tractate Berakhot" says, "Moses asked God, 'God, could you please explain why good people suffer and why bad people benefit and thrive in life?'" And they come up with one answer after another, after another and not one of them satisfies. There is no answer, there is no explanation that we have. All we can say is the "Talmud" can say that this world functions according to its rules, its regulations.

These regulations include all kinds of physical phenomena, whether it's the Earth's crust moving, whether there are earthquakes, whether there are storms, tsunamis or avalanches, these are not bad things in themselves, they are bad when they affect us, when we are affected by them. Humans aren't necessarily bad, but humans can damage other human beings as we know full well. And they answered this question by arguing that there was such a thing as free will, but we don't know for certain what that means and what is freedom and how much freedom do we have? And so they try to answer these issues by saying, well there's this world is a physical world. In a physical world, these things don't matter that much.

What really matters is a spiritual world beyond it and you must wait until you die before you experience it. Not one of these arguments if you like withstands critical analysis. Not one of these arguments actually provides a proof that is irrefutable. There are indications, there are indications that's more to this world, but there are not proofs. Proofs are things that are confined in fact to the realms of science and mathematics. And even in the realms of science and mathematics as we know, there are proofs that can be overturned and changed and modified all

the time. And so I believe that we need to take out of religion, the issue of proof. Proof is not of any help. I'm not certain it has convinced anybody.

By the same token, experience is so intangible. experience leads people to imagine they're Hearing the voices of God, to think they're seeing God, to come up with the most weird explanations of things that go on that don't withstand any kind of analysis of a scientific or psychological or psychiatric point of view. So moving to the other side and saying it's all experience is not satisfactory either. There has in my view to be what I would call a holistic approach. Just as in medicine, you've got what the doctor can do, what the psychiatrist can do, You've got what your own desire to live and to fight a sickness can do and your own desire to give up can do. There are lots of different elements Here that go into how we as human beings function. And somebody who says it's only scientific I think is missing a great deal just as the person who says it's only religious is making a big mistake because the world is complex and we need to integrate everything in a holistic approach.

Which is why I think rationalism is very good in analysing thoughts and telling you this idea does not withstand criticism. That doesn't mean to say it's wrong, it just means to say you can't grasp it rationally. And on the other hand, the idea of saying you must experience it, you must feel it. If you haven't had the experience of love, you don't know what it is. If you haven't tasted certain food, you only know what it tastes like when you taste it. So experience is important, but neither of these alone answers or gets us towards answering this issue of God. God therefore is incredibly subjective. It is a totally subjective phenomenon as far as we are concerned. That doesn't mean to say there isn't something beyond or something above or out there that we have no idea of. It just means that at that moment, you cannot describe something in such a way that it will make it clear to somebody else what you are talking about. Which is why the great philosopher Wittgenstein, Ludwig Wittgenstein said brilliantly, "That about which we cannot talk, we must remain silent." That is to say if we don't know in advance that we're talking about the same thing, if we don't know when we talk about God, we mean the same thing, then how can we possibly have a conversation?

There are people who believe that God intervenes in this world, but on the other hand they can't tell you how God intervenes or when God intervenes or why God did not intervene in Auschwitz. And there are those who say we can't know what intervention looks like. There is such a thing as history. History unfolds over thousands, over millions of years. You might argue that the survival of the Jews after so many thousands of years, despite the fact that virtually every civilization has tried to destroy us or undermine us or get rid of us in some form or another might show that there is a divine energy at work in this world that is enabling the Jews to survive. But on the other hand you will say no, it's only when we fight to survive, that we survive. It depends on us struggling to survive. And besides, we can't explain how and why it works, which is also why for example, the word truth, *emet*, is used in "The Bible" overwhelmingly to mean one of two things. Either empirically, in practise, did this thing actually happen?

We have it in the reading of the "Torah" this week, is it actually true that somebody misbehaved

or not? It's also used in the Buddhist way to say, doing the right thing. But the right thing doesn't mean it's the only thing, it means it's one of the right things to do. And besides, in "The Bible" itself, doing the right thing varies from person to person. What is right for a priest isn't right for a Levite. What's right for a Levite isn't right for an Israelite. What is right for a thief to do to compensate or repair is not right for somebody else to do. So there are, if you like, so many truths and variables. We have those that work for us and those that work for other people. In the end, each one of us is responsible for our own lives and how we lead our own lives. And part of that is our ethical behaviour and part of that is what we would call our spiritual behaviour.

So that we have choices, which ones to take. Which is why some people choose to remain identified with the Jewish people and some people choose to abandon the Jewish people and some people choose to join the Jewish people. You see that people have these choices to stay or to go. We know what is more likely to keep somebody within the faith, but we don't know that it always works. It doesn't always work. We've come across plenty of people who had a very religious upbringing and turned away from it and plenty of people who had a totally secular upbringing and turned to it. This is the challenge of life. And I think, this to me, is what I mean by God. God represents the challenge for us to try to understand the universe we've been plonked in. We don't know why we were created, we don't know why we're here. All we know is we know we are here and we have to make the best of it. How do we make the best of it?

Well some people say make the best of it by grabbing as much as you can and to Hell with anybody else, the survival of the fittest. Others will say no, you can make the best of it by following certain ethical rules, by caring about other people, by contributing to other people. You can lead a considered life, a thoughtful life that is more worthwhile than an unconsidered life. And so God keeps on reminding us there is a good way and a less good way. There is a way that involves you rationally and there's a way that involves you mystically. And so when I encounter God, it is in a non-physical way. I don't imagine grandpa in the sky, I don't imagine Superman, I don't imagine some good daddy taking care of me. I imagine that I have to face reality. And so when on Yom Kippur, I face reality, I imagine judging myself metaphorically speaking for all the things I didn't do well this past year and I could have done better. And in a sense, the idea that somebody is, if you like, jotting it down is a helpful metaphor.

But in the end it's a subjective personal feeling that I have, that I am both encountering the universe and I'm encountering everything behind it, above it, below and beyond. When I meditate and my mind wanders, it wanders into this intangible eternal phenomenon which works for me because I've made it work for me. We make these things work for us. Some people are prepared to accept a life that provides every single way of living according to a predetermined plan. Some people like to have a regulated life. Some people like to live in communities where there is control and support and discipline and feel secure in it. Some people like to live independently and constantly challenge and question. We are all different. And I believe that "Torah" is intentionally a model for this difference, a model that invites us to enter into it.

The universe was created out of Tohu Va-Vohu, out of what we call chaos, intangible, of things



that are unpredictable, fuzzy maths, quantum mechanics, the uncertainty principles. This is the world we live in. It's a wonderful world and our challenge is to try to come to terms with it. And if somebody cannot come to terms with it, it's still valuable to live an ethical life, it's still valuable if you don't believe in God, if you don't want to live a regulated life, to feel part of a national tradition, to feel part of a culture, to feel part of a nation, to feel part of something beyond you. Some people like clubs, all kinds of little clubs and some people like to feel part of something that has a message, that has a history, that has a tradition. So in answer to all this, I'm saying that belief in God doesn't have to be belief, it has to be opening one's mind to the possibility. This is something we should all try to find our way towards. But if we can't, at least we can be good human beings and better human beings. And as Jews, we must do what we can to keep our tradition alive because we feel it has benefits. It's a beneficial tradition. It doesn't mean to say there aren't other beneficial traditions, but we were born into one.

We have a choice either to Help keep it going or to walk away. That's a choice we have to make. And that's a choice we make as we get to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. So doubt persists, nothing wrong with doubt. We can all doubt, I have no problem with doubt at all. My problem is with somebody who says, I certainly know not because I don't see how anybody can say certainly, I don't know or certainly I know not, the negative. That is something destructive. But the person who says, I don't know, I've never had an experience, I've never come across the idea of God, I'm open to it. That person can, I believe, still be a very good Jew and incorporate those of us who have our doubts and go on having our doubts because our minds, if we are thinking people, never stay still, they're always open to new ideas and experiences. So that's my presentation. I hope I haven't upset too many people and I'm looking forward to questions.

- Jeremy?

- Yes?

- I'd like to say thank you for that excellence and thought provoking presentation. Are you sure that you're up to questions?

- I'll go along, I'm a little bit hoarse, but I'm happy to go on for as long as people want to go on.

- Well don't push yourself too much. I know that you're not feeling great.

Q&A & Comments:

- Thank you. So let's start. Sarah Meron Melbourne, strict relect on her engagement party story this morning with upset friend who lives there. I think this is somebody else.

Q: "If you don't believe in God, why do you have to believe in the 'Torah'? Can you believe in God and not the 'Torah'?"

A: Yes, of course you can believe in anything you want to. I happen to believe in "Torah" because I consider "Torah" to be a magnificent document, a document through which everything I believe God should be speaks to me. It speaks to me through a history, a process of evolution. It speaks to me about how the world has bad and good and it provides for me a way of living which I actually enjoy. I enjoy it, I find that a utilitarian benefit, it gives something, it adds something to me. And if it didn't, I wouldn't. And so therefore I think that you can. And you think you should see the "Torah" as a path and a way of getting to God even though there may be other ways. Many people have got to God without the "Torah".

Marcia, "You keep referring to God as he and him. This perpetuates the myth that men are in charge".

Yes, I agree it does and it's very bad and I think God is he, she or it. But I was talking about God through history and I think it's ridiculous to talk about God as He, as a he any more than a she, any more than an it. These are human terms we use like Lord or Mister or what. I think we are having too much of a problem at the moment in trying to de-sexsize any identification between one form or another. So I don't know, whatever it is you can use to describe God other than metaphor, other than symbol. And if you can come up with a better symbol than he, she or it or including he, she or it together, which is, you know, a way of doing it but it's rather loquacious and it would add the amount of paper that we have to use up writing it all that way. So I don't believe that God has one sex or another sex, prefers one sex or another sex. I think any preferences have come from human beings and it's been our mistakes that we have made. But I wouldn't blame God. But you know, if you are talking about a document was written 3,000 years ago and if you realise that until the 1950s, a married woman in England couldn't open a bank account by herself or that the Swiss didn't give votes until 1977, we've come a long way since then, not far enough by any means. But you can't criticise a document thousands of years old for speaking in a language that was relevant to the people at the time. You have to say, okay, times have changed.

Q: What message can I deduce from it?

A: Some of the messages you can deduce are still applicable. The law don't steal still applies today as much as it did then. The need to have a day of rest applies as much as it did then. That all these issues can still be understood as being relevant even if they are ancient issues and were originally given in a language that we see problems with today. But you know, if you're going to start jettisoning Shakespeare because He was a sexist, we're going to lose the benefit of Shakespeare. And we see the same about classical music and this current crazy world we're in, in which the woke has tried and is trying to totally destroy an earlier civilization instead of adding an additional new layer to it, which was always done in the past. Every culture has been built on an earlier one. It hasn't eradicated it completely, it's built and modified it just as Rome built on Greece. And that's why I think it's not worthwhile bothering about these in words or changing them. If people want to, then by all means, let them do it.

Q: "We are supposed to be the chosen race. Who chose us? Some believe it's God."

A: Well first I've given a lecture on the chosen race before. I don't believe it means what people say it means. I don't believe it makes any of us better than anybody else. I think it merely means there was a moment in time where we were given a particular culture and told. guys, it's up to you. You want to keep it, keep it. This is a way that we are contributing to world civilization and your part in it. But if anything, it's a burden and it's certainly no way is it something that makes us any way better.

"Stephen Pinker was Canadian by birth and education", thank you for correcting me on that. Awinlow.

Q: "How did the Jewish people manage to come up with the idea of a covenant relationship based on a misconception of reality and eventually led millions of them to the horrors of the Holocaust?"

A: I don't see what one thing's got to do with the other. The Jewish people believe they had a relationship with God. This relationship with God was no guarantee that He would or she or it would intervene any moment something went wrong. He created or the world was created with human beings with choice. We have the choice to murder or the choice to benefit. If we choose to ruin this world, if we choose to destroy this world, it's a human decision. There's no point in blaming God. God set a motion, if you like, he set the universe in motion. It is how it works with catching colds, with catching diseases, with all kinds of viruses, with all kinds of bacteria, some of which are good because they produce alcohol and some of which are bad because they destroy our bodies. That's the world that was created, that evolved if you like. And this process of evolution is an evolution of the human race which has a disastrous catastrophic Talibanesque element to it and which also has wonderful Healing positive qualities and it's up to us to choose one over the other.

Q: Do I believe all major conjecture form of religions are equally moral worth or do remain steadfastly committed to Jewish morality?

A: I'm committed to the fact that Jewish morality is right for me. If I were to come across one which I thought was better, I would seriously consider it. It doesn't mean to say there aren't other ones, it just means I personally have not encountered any other ones.

Q: "Accepting the spiritual concept of God, how does it fit with a physical concept of reward and punishment is outlined in the 'Torah'?"

A: The trouble is there is no one answer in the "Torah" and the rabbis. If you look whether it's the ethic of fathers, whether you look at the "Talmud", some people think the reward is in the next world, some people think the reward is in this world, some people think there is no reward. You do something 'cause it's the right thing to do. Some people say the reward for a good deed

is the good deed. And some people say, I got no explanation, I can't tell you. So there is no one answer. If you believe in the idea of God rewards you, I would take it myself as the pleasure of Shabbat is its own reward. The pleasure I get from meditating and interacting with God is its own reward. I don't need any other reward and I don't want any other reward. I'm not doing because I want to win the lottery. That doesn't matter to me and I don't think it should matter to anybody else. You do things 'cause they are the right things for you to do that make you a better person. And I would add a spiritual person.

"The 'Torah' doesn't command us to believe in God but are a number of incidents 'Torah' belief in God is expressed as the people of Israel spitting the Red Sea."

Yes that's true, but notice they use the same word. They shall we say, put their faith in God and Moses, they didn't mean to say that Moses is a God. The word emunah, to believe, literally comes from the word to be convinced of something, to be satisfied. The same word emunah means to be strong. Moses' hands were up against the battle of Amalek and they held strong until the battle was won. A nurse who caress for people is omened. So the word like amein, emunah means I'm convinced of something. I'm not necessarily convinced rationally, but I have a feeling that this is right and it works for me and that's how it is used in "The Bible". Thank you very much, Jennifer. I really appreciate that.

Ilan, "Time of great peril. God Helped me get out of this situation. I believe the need superior being time help."

We've been looking to God to intervene for a very long time. We've been waiting for the Messiah for a very long time and I think it's wonderful to have hope and to be positive and not to give up, but, so what?

Q: "Was Christianity's appeal that it provided human image for human to relate to?"

A: Well that certainly was in my view, its secret of its early success. That it's easier to have an image of something to relate to than it is to have no image at all. And I'm sure that's what made it so important. And that's why iconography, icons are so much part of the Christian tradition, whereas in Islam, they play no part at all. Islam is closer to Judaism in this respect. So yes, I believe Christianity's appeal is both that it offers a human image and that it offers a less restrictive, a less concentrated form of religious experience to everybody and focused initially on the priests and the nuns doing it. Whereas for us, we were all expected to be on exactly the same level and not have anybody intermediary. Except nowadays, that's become quite popular even within Judaism. And there are people who look to rabbis and others to do, linked to God on their behalf. But yes, I believe that's so. We read the . Again, I don't think this is what, how we understand God instructing to do. I think this is a way of saying in the Middle East with all these tribal groups around you, if you want to survive, you are not going to survive by sitting down and say, please be nice. I'm getting into the area of politics in the Middle East now.

Q: You really think we're going to solve the problem in the politics with Taliban and with the Shian, with everybody else by saying yes, let's be nice?

A: Certain people thought that way, but it doesn't work that way. The world's a tough place. And basically this is saying, guys, if you want to have a land of your own, you're going to have to fight for it. So that is how things work. That is what all empires have done, it's what Islam has done, it's what Christianity did and killed far more people than we did. And not only that, but if you look at "The Bible", you see we went on coexisting with the Canaanites and the Procites and the Jebucites for hundreds and hundreds of years. So clearly we didn't take it literally. We were taking it to the statement, guys, to survive, you're going to have to fight for it.

"Please discuss the relationship soul and God and life of soul in Heaven after death."

That's such a big subject. That's a subject I would have to devote a whole long lecture to and I don't have time for that. But what we mean by soul, again depends on how you understand. Some people see soul as a bit of God planted in us that enables God to relate to God. Some people see soul as something planted in us that makes us a better person. Some people saw, for example, soul is the same thing as the brain, the intellect. It was the intellect that gets you to understand God, that's what the philosophers thought. So that's a different way of looking at soul. Maimonides said that soul is something that you can destroy, you can rub it out. The mystics say no, you can never rub out a soul. It's always there within you. There are so many different opinions about souls that rather like God, you choose the one that works for you. There are five different words in "The Bible" for soul. Which one is the right one? They're all there, they're different dimensions. It's multiplicity.

Q: Porur, "How to explain we are made in God's image?"

A: Well what does an image mean? Obviously it can't mean physically an image because if God's got no image, how can we be created in image if something has no image? So the different Hebrew words for form and for image. But "The Bible" itself says what makes it imitating God is knowing the difference between good and bad. That's to say the quality that God demands of us, that we should be able to distinguish between good and bad, whether it's in the Garden of Eden or everywhere else. So when "The Bible" talks about the image of God, it means in the abstract concept of differentiating between good and bad. Very interesting, thank you very much Carla. Dawn, thank you, Dawn. Thank you, Robert. Thank you, Sonya.

Mavis, "Personal spiritual experiences." I think they're very important. I think we should all have them. I think we are missing if we don't. The question is how do you get it? And I believe in mystical meditation and contemplation, I believe in the power of all the dimensions that a human being has to utilise in pursuit of this spiritual goal. You'll have to come back to me some other time or read something else. I've written somewhere about this idea of how do you get to this personal experience.

Q: What about a concept of God within?

A: Yes, I think it's a nice idea. There is a God in a sense within us. I know people like to say we invented the idea of God, but theoretically, I suppose it's possible. Theoretically you could say we invented the idea of loving our parents. There's no logical reason why we should, we didn't ask to be born and they could have drop us like an animal and leave us to make on with ourselves. And maybe we only talk about parental love because we need it. It's possible, I can't tell you it isn't possible. I can just tell you that I think there is more to God than just something within us. There is something beyond and I think that's worthwhile trying to pursue. Rhonda, thank you very much, thank you. Judith, thank you too.

Q: George, "Is God just a convenient peg to hang everything we don't understand?"

A: Well some people will, I just don't think God answers these questions. I think I've been positing today all these questions that don't have answers and we must go on looking for answers for and some people think that God answers it. Some people think science answers it. People think they have answers. Everybody has defined what answer works for them. Thank you so much, Jennifer, and for your good wishes. Thank you, Dawn. Thank you, John.

Q: "Who decides what an ethical life is?"

A: Well, I decide. I decide by choosing to be a loyal Jew. This is my ethical life. You choose to follow Christianity following your ethical values. That's your choice.

Q: Michael Rolnick, "who might be a true atheist and be considered Jewish?"

A: Look, I certainly think you can be considered Jewish if you are an atheist, you are. I think that it is, I'd rather use the word, instead agnostic. I think agnostic is a much better word. I think agnostic means, look, I have no experience of God. I dunno anything about it. I'm not saying you might not. I'm suspicious of people who tell me what I don't know. When I don't do what I or that I believe is wrong, how the Hell do they know I'm wrong? So you know, I find the word atheist too dramatic. I'd rather use the word and I think it's the truer word that incorporates atheism is agnosticism. I don't know, I've not come across it. Let me have an open mind but don't bug me. So yes, the straight answer is yes, being Jewish is many things to many people and I want to incorporate as many of them as I possibly can.

Q: Mavis continue, "Are there valid for oneself unable to prove?"

A: Yes of course there are things. I can't prove I love my wife. How am I going to prove I love my wife? And we're going to say, you know, jump off a cliff to prove I love you? I can't and sometimes she probably wonders if I do or if I do not. So you know you, there are many things you can't prove. For example, imagine you are meeting your mother at the airport and the mother comes to you and says, you've got to believe I'm your mother. She would only say that if

somebody had suggested to you that she was not your mother. Otherwise she'd simply say, hi, it's me mum.

Q: So, "What's your feeling of evolution associated with religion?"

A: Yes, I think religion's evolved too. I think that's the greatness of Judaism, that Judaism has been able to evolve. It started with a Constitution, it then added on the amendments of the Constitution, it then added on the supreme court decisions and so forth. We're evolving all the time. There's a hardcore, in a sense that remains homo sapiens, but yes, everything evolves. Everything in this world evolves including religion.

Q: "I've asked you this before. Could you please elaborate on this again? If God doesn't provide justice in this world to have control over the natural elements, why do we need to believe in God?"

A: You don't need anything. You don't need to if you don't want to. I do because I feel it provides me with the best explanation, with experiences that reinforce my sense of a world beyond me, that enrich my life, make me a better person, and that's why I think it's good to have a God. How you believe in God is up to you.

"The Swiss didn't give the vote til '72, not '77." I apologise, thank you very much Daniela. I will correct that next time I write about it. Elaine McKee, I actually, I think I got that from from "Encyclopaedia Britannica". I must go back and check it.

Q: Okay, Elaine, "Expression such as divine ineffable, avoid assigning gender pronoun, not have a problem with..."

A: Yes they do and and and that's why for example, the time the "Talmud", the best name for God was Maqom. Maqom means every place, no place, it's neutral, gender neutral. And that is my favourite name for God, Maqom. It doesn't have any gender whatsoever and I like it. I also like the word, El. El, means beyond. So there are words we can use that avoid the masculine and the feminine and wherever we can, I think we should. I just don't believe in trying to scrub out texts from a long time ago because there are words there that offend me. Keep the text but add on if you like, a different version of the text if you want.

Q: "What do you say about divine revelation?" Yeah, divine revelation is something the "Torah" talks about. And I don't know if revelation means inspiration. I don't know the techniques or the technology of how it happened. It talks about God speaking mouth to mouth. Does God have a mouth? God's speaking, does God speak with a vocal chord? We don't know this mechanism. I do know that a document came about called "Torah" through which I engage with God and God engages with me. That's all I can tell you. So am I saying anything goes nearly whatever that happens to work for? No, I'm not saying anything goes. I'm saying there are qualitatively more interesting, more valuable decisions to make than others. What I am saying is you can't force

people to believe. You can encourage them to try to discover and I believe God is something we need to try to discover and engage with even though we might not be able to prove, even though we might be misled, unconfused. Romaine, thank you.

Q: Ralph, "Is a fundamental universal idea links all religions?"

A: Yes, essentially there are three fundamental ideas that link all religion. One of them is that there is a God, there is something beyond. The other is that there are certain ethical standards, good and bad. Let's call it love your neighbour as yourself, so to speak, something like that. And we should strive to achieve that and bring peace. And the third one is there are benefits to adhering to a religion. Some people call it reward and punishment, I'd rather call it just the benefit. So these are the three that Judaism, Islam, most religions, possibly not Buddhism in the sense that it's idea of God is an arguable one. But even then I think the Buddhist idea of God is pretty close to the idea that I have of God. I just believe there is more to the universe than God. But then that's a matter of interpretation of what you mean by the universe and what you mean by more of the universe.

Michael Bloch, "I believe that through miracles, HaShem shows his presence. Miracle being Jewish people."

Yes, these are all wonderful things, but as Maimonides says, "Miracles of the least important basis of faith." 'Cause look how often there were miracles performed in the desert in 40 years and the moment the miracle's over, they've forgotten about it and they're complaining. And not only that, but the "Torah" talks about people performing miracles and saying, don't listen to the miracles. What matters is the message. If these miracles try to get you to give up something, you shouldn't give up if it's betraying your tradition. The tradition matters more than miracles. I think what you talk about are miraculous as near as one could get to a miracle. But does that mean to say that it's divine intervention? I don't know, there are people who suggest it is.

Q: "Do you believe we have a tradition to pray and engage with God?"

A: Yes, we have a point to engage with God. The question is, what do you do when you engage with God? Are you saying, please God, give me this, God you are like a fruit machine in a casino. If I put in the coin, I say the right thing and I pull the lever, I'm going to get an answer. I don't believe it works that way. I believe prayer essentially is expressing what you feel, expressing what you would like, expressing your identity. It's more expressing yourself to, we'll call it if you like for want of a better word, an analyst in space. It's like saying there's something beyond there I can communicate, express my doubts, my fears, my anxiety to which is what prayer enables me to do. It gives me a way of letting me express. And that's why the word, to pray and hitpalel means to express yourself. You express yourself. You hope God's going to answer you. We hope all the time. I hope God's going to answer me, but I know when I give my kids a blessing, it's up to them either to make the most of this world or not. There's nothing much I can do. And so caring, giving a blessing, praying is expressing what you hope. What will



happen? It's not up to you, not all the time.

Q: "Did the creation of consciousness give birth to good and evil?"

A: Look, I think the biblical version as opposed to the Christian version, Christian version is there is such a thing as original sin, the Jewish version is we are not born evil. We are born with choices. We are born with egos, that either we can suppress or we can give into. And if we give into them, then it's our decision. Mina, thank you.

Q: Austin, hi Austin. "Why do fervent religionists have little tolerance of other religions?"

A: That's a good point. I don't know why. It's not just religion. Marxist's have no tolerance. Look at the left in America, they have absolutely no tolerance of any other point of view. All ideology, spawn fanatics, all fanatics are dangerous. As Isaiah Berlin said, "If you ever come across anybody who believes he's the sole possessor of truth, run away as fast as you can." All you can say is, this works for me. But yes, I don't like fanatics, I don't care what religion they're in. I don't like fanaticism. Sue, thank you, Sue, thank you.

Q: Freda Gonard, "You believe God is omnipresent? A leaf doesn't fall?"

A: I dunno what that means, my dear. I, I wish I knew what omnipresent means and I wish I knew if a leaf doesn't fall without God willing it what that means. In other words, everything that happens in this world happens according to a system. Leaves drop off trees because it's autumn time and because of the rate of food to the leaf either dies down or it can't survive. People drown or they get a cold when things happen in part of the natural world. So if you are saying everything in this universe works one way or another and sometimes these works affect us badly and sometimes these things affect us well, the answer is yes, I believe that.

Q: "Can I live with 'Tanakh'? Why should I bear the rules of the rabbi since the 'Torah'?"

A: Well basically because if you live by the rules of the "Tanakh", you are stuck 3,000 years ago. you won't have any light in your home on a Shabbat. If you have, God forbid, a period, you have to be shut out of town as though you are a leper. There are are a whole lot of things that developed to meet new circumstances that happened afterwards. We'd still be worshipping in the temple if you still followed the "Tanakh". So the "Tanakh" gives certain, the "Torah" gives the Constitution, which has developed since then and included in it, is a principle that whenever there's a new idea, you must consult and find a resolution. So the "Torah" itself says you've got to go evolving. And at the same time, the prophets of the "Tanakh" are concerned with ethical values which are just as valuable now as they were then, which are over and above the way of life. But I think there is such a thing as a Jewish way of life and to live a Jewish way of life, you have to accept that there are things that the "Tanakh" didn't know about, like jet planes, like electricity. And instead of saying, oh, well, give up on them, we can say, let's see how we could use them creatively in a religious way.

Shockenbook61, I dunno what was Shockeybook61, but whatever was Shockenbook61, you are probably right.

Q: "How do events cause someone to lose their faith?"

A: Well all kinds of things happen. I'm not certain I would've lost my faith if I'd been in the Holocaust. You never know, I'm amazed that some people survived with their faith intact from the holocaust. Horrible things happen and I know families in which one person is religious, has faith, and the other person doesn't and they were brought up in the same house. So go figure.

Barb, thanks very much. "Infantalize and blame."

Yes, I think we do. Faith is no exception. Or where do we blame? I don't think we blame, I think people blame. I don't think the religion blames. Religion basically says if you do the wrong thing, expect consequences.

Q: "Has God any idea of man?"

A: That's a very good question. I'm afraid I have to ask God that next time I meet him.

"The Messiah first century originated after life, after death. And unfortunately a contradiction appeared to come in off the "Torah", certain rules, we choose what we want."

I don't think the messiah had any to do with life after death. The idea of Messiah long predates Jesus. For example, life after death has got nothing to do with it. Nothing to do with the idea of the Messiah. So I don't take that very seriously unless you want to give me more information. If that's all you are saying, that you think Messiah was dependent on life after death in the first century, then what about the Messiahs before that? King David was a messiah, King Sol was a messiah. Plenty of them.

Q: "What can I say to my granddaughter who doesn't want to become Bat Mitzvahed if she doesn't believe in God?"

A: You should say to her, look, keep a Bat Mitzvah because it's part of a tradition you were born into. Yeah, the idea of God is something that takes a lifetime to get used to. And if you haven't got it at the moment, it doesn't matter. But identify with a tradition, be part of it. It will only add richness to life. It can't harm you, it won't harm you to add a Jewish dimension. So even if there isn't a God in it, God might come, but don't give up on it. Thank you, Yolan. Thank you Clara. Jocelyn Martin, Julie Pass.

Q: Julie, "Do you believe the past loved ones can send us messages to the physical world? Thanks so much."

A: No, I don't. I believe that when we die, our bodies in a sense are recycled, our spiritual bodies are recycled, our physical bodies are recycled and I don't believe that we continue with or revive with a specific physical resurrection.

Q: "Can the words of a prophet be verified?"

A: Well the "Torah" says, "What makes a prophet is his message." If the message of the prophet is to be a better person and if the message of the prophet is to stick with the tradition that God gave you or that we have as a Jew, then that is the verification. Otherwise no such thing. Thanks for another evening, Carol, Margaret Myberg, thank you Margaret.

Robert Sachs, I thought Hebrew reflects it. You said, to express...", to express oneself. Le'hitapalel, to express oneself. That's how I understand it.

Harriet, "Geneticists claims of isolated the God gene."

No, well I think what a God gene means is some of us have this capacity to feel for something beyond us and to feel for something more. And some of us, when we meditate, there are parts or pray, parts of our brains light up. I wouldn't call it a God gene, I'd call it a spiritual gene, but it still doesn't tell me what God is. So there we are everybody. I think that comes to the end. Thank you very much and we'll meet again. Don't know where, don't know when.

- Jeremy, thank you for that outstanding presentation. I must say I love the questions as well.

- Yeah, they're very good. And you know, and you see who's a Christian worrying about my comments I make that Christian doesn't like and who is a secular Jew and so forth. I find it challenging and I love it.

- Yeah, it's a very much an integrated audience. And today there were a lot of people. I think there were over 1,400 devices tuned in.

- Wow.

- So it was great. Thank you, thank you for that outstanding presentation. So before you all sign off, I just wanted to remind you that we have an additional presentation this Thursday at 02:30. Ambassador Dennis Ross will join us to assess the unfolding situation in Afghanistan and reflect on the wider issues facing the Middle East, which are very, very challenging and worrying at this moment in time. So we just see what's going on in Iran with Iran and with Afghanistan, Israel.

- Everything, so frightening.

- Alright, well on that note, I'll say thanks to everybody for joining us, Jeremy, always a pleasure.

I will see you in the big apple. Feel better and thanks million for joining us today.

- Okay.

- Take care, thanks everyone, bye-Bye.