

Perspectives on G-d

Written by: Jacob Rabin

NFTY CWR Spring Conclave April 4th-6th, 2014

“Each one prays to G-d in their own light”

-Mahatma Ghandi

Goals:

- Participants will find a deeper understanding of G-d.
- Participants will challenge their own beliefs on G-d.

Objectives:

- Participants will explore different Reform Jewish viewpoints on G-d
- Participants will explore various views of G-d throughout life.
- Participants will create their own G-d poem.
- Participants will see what others think about G-d.

Materials:

- Quotes printed out on regular pieces of paper (one quote per page)
- Masking tape
- Envelopes
- glue sticks (½ of the PPs)
- pens (½ of the PPs)
- Slips of paper with each quote on them (# of PPs per quote)
- tealights (1 per PP)
- 8 ½' X 11' lightly colored construction paper (needs to be written on with pens)

People:

- All Nftyites
IN TWO UNIVERSES
- GLs (CRUSTY board and Regbo)
 - Universe 1
 - Group 1/Station 1
 - Lee Silverglate
 - Mandy Bach
 - Alea Chedekel
 - Marisa Robinow
 - Group 2/Station 2
 - Danny Zur
 - Danielle Polson
 - Jessy Rudnick

Universe 2

- Group 3/Station 1
Sarah McCaffrey
Gabe Robinow
Erin Barney
Sara Warner
 - Group 4/Station 2
Sandy Karp
Sam Klaplow
- PL

Space needed:

- Lower Plaza
- 2 upstairs classrooms
- 1 upstairs hallway
- 2 downstairs classrooms
- 1 downstairs hallway
- Field

Time Table:

00:00-00:05 Introduction
00:05-00:30 Station 1
00:30-00:55 Station 2
00:55-01:00 Conclusion

Detailed Procedure:

Introduction, 00:00-00:05:

Hello everyone! Before we dive into this program, I want you to take a moment to think about what makes you Jewish. (When PPs are ready, ask them to raise their hands and say a couple things).

One thing that we did not mention (or if someone did, good for them) is the unifying idea of G-d. As Jewish teens, we tend to shy away from the topic of G-d. Most of us are much more comfortable talking about Jewish morals, ethics, and how to be an effective leader. But tonight, I challenge you to keep an open mind, to explore your own thoughts, and think about your spiritual relationship with G-d. Now, we are going to come around and split you up into four groups. You will follow the corresponding Regional Board member to your stations.

Station 1: G-d: Past, present, future, 00:05-00:30: GLs will gather everyone in the room and tell the PPs to sit down and close their eyes. After everyone is quiet, GLs should say “Tonight

we are going to take you through the developmental stages of life. Starting in your early childhood, moving to high school, then continuing into the far future. As you listen to us speak, you'll experience how Jewish concepts of G-d grow with age."

The GLs will each stand near a different wall and alternate saying the lines (App. A). GL1 will say line one, GL2 will say line two, etc. This will continue until all the lines are said. The last line brings us back to the present.

The PPs will then open their eyes and have a discussion about their thoughts and feelings (App B). Depending on the group size and room design, it may be beneficial to split into two groups for discussion. I would highly recommend this, but stay in one group if necessary.

Station 2: G-d shopping, 00:30-00:55: PPs will enter the room and GLs will gather them in a circle. They will briefly tell them that in Reform Judaism, there is no "right" way of thinking about G-d and that we have the ability to think about G-d in any way that we want. GL should explain that there are quotes or ideas from the Torah, Talmud, and modern day rabbis taped onto the walls. (App C) Under each quote or idea, there will be an envelope containing slips of paper that say the same quote or idea. The PPs should read all the excerpts and if any speak to them (whether they agree or think are interesting), the PPs should take a slip of paper.

Once the PPs collect their slips, they should organize them to make a poem. PPs can add transition words like "and", "but", or "therefore" if they wish. They should glue the slips onto a piece of colored construction paper but leave some room at the bottom. The PPs will then write the last line (or couple lines) of their G-d poem to make it more personal and to reflect their beliefs on G-d. PPs will then gather in groups of 2 or 3 to share their G-d poems (group subject to change, but I want everyone to be able to share their poems). After this, the GLs should walk around, handing out pieces of masking tape, so the PPs can tape their poems on a wall. These will form a collage of G-d poems and will be up for the entirety of the event for everyone to see.

Conclusion 00:55-01:00:

PPs will either gather inside or outside (depending...) Each PP will get an electronic tea light and gather in a circle quietly. GL will then explain that we're doing a cross the line activity, but instead of moving across the line, we will be turning on and off our tea lights. App. D After the appendix D. ask PPs to place their tealights on the floor in front of them. And say, "If your light is off, please turn it on as we unite as a Jewish people and set your tealight on the ground in front of you.

The Jewish ideas of who G-d is, has changed over time. We were taught that G-d created the earth and the sky and the waters and people. But, as we grow older, our image of G-d alters. Sometimes, we might not think of G-d as an omnipotent man in the sky, but as a friend. And sometimes, we feel like G-d is missing from our lives, as if we were overlooked. Sometimes G-d becomes obscure in our lives and sometimes G-d is all we can think about.

I'm sure in past years, you've all been asked the question: "Do you believe in G-d?". But that is the wrong question. It is not a matter of black and white/yes or no. It is impossible to know for sure.

A better question is "When do you feel close to G-d?" or "Have you felt a spiritual connection

with G-d?" Even though we are all Jews who pray to one G-d everyone experiences G-d differently. So, tonight, as we transition into the Hashkiveinu, think about the holy connections you have made with G-d and who G-d is to you."

Appendices:

App A: Monologues about G-d:

1. Early Childhood- "Mommy, today in Sunday School, the teacher said that G-d is everywhere, and G-d made the whole world, and all the animals, and all the people."
2. 11-12 years old- "If G-d can control everything, and G-d is good, then how come grandma's cancer won't go away?"
3. Teen-"I don't really know what to think about G-d, Mom. A lot of my friends say they don't believe in G-d..what do you think?"
4. Newlywed-"Today is the happiest day of my life. Surely, G-d was in this place, celebrating my wedding."
6. Childbirth-"Today is the most incredible day of our lives, It's a miracle, a true gift from G-d...A baby boy! I can't believe this is real.Thank you G-d."
7. Death of a friend-"It's not fair. No, this isn't happening. There just can't be a G-d, how could there be? If there is a G-d, then why was such a wonderful person taken away so early?"
8. Middle aged-There is good and bad in the world. Is G-d directly responsible for any of it.
9. Old Age- "I have a lot of time to think now that I've retired. I believe there is a G-d, but I still don't understand G-d's power and reasoning. I guess I'll never know."
10. PRESENT DAY-"My life has been pretty easy I suppose, given all the problems and misfortunes which could have happened to me. I am just very confused. I have always believed in the simple idea that G-d is omnipresent or omnipotent...I never question G-d, my rabbi, or my parents when it came to religious matters. I always figures, 'hey, they know best'. But now it seems all my friends are becoming atheists and agnostics. It sounds so interesting and so intriguing. It seems a lot easier too. Also, it helps to explain a lot to me, like why innocent people are accused or hurt. I don't know all of the answers anymore and everything isn't as I thought. What do you think?"

(allow a break after these quotes. It should be a moment for contemplation)

App B: Questions

(Note: encourage PPs to listen and respect others' opinions. But feel free to participate in thoughtful discussion.. NOT DEBATE)

How do you think your concept of G-d has changed from your youth to right now?

Have you had a discussion about G-d with anyone in your family?

(if everyone says no, why not?)

(if everyone says yes, expand)

Does your concept of G-d differ from your family members?

Does our view on G-d change throughout our lives? If so, how or why?

What influences our views on G-d?

Do you think the temple has influence? (if they do not mention it)

Family? Friends? Internet? Social media?

How does your concept of G-d affect the decisions that you make?

How do you think your concept of G-d has changed from your youth to right now?

App C: Different Viewpoints on G-d:

There is only one G-d.

There is no need to think of G-d as a super-natural power in order to think about G-d

The incredible harmony and balance found in nature are inconceivable without the existence of a Power that set all of Creation in motion.

G-d is a watchmaker, who creates his handiwork, winds it up, and leaves it alone to operate on its own.

The continuing renewal of nature and the continued work of creation speak of G-d's presence and involvement in the world.

Before uttering a word of formulating an idea about G-d we should be awestruck, overwhelmed at the glory of being .

G-d's overwhelming goodness to us is the only proper assumption for our understanding of Judaism.

Modern life has so robbed us of our natural awe that we are blind to G-d's reality.

Jewish people are G-d's chosen people.

Listen Israel, Adonai is our G-d. Adonai is one.

If I follow G-d's laws and listen to G-d's commandments, I will receive many blessings.

If I do not listen to G-d, I will be punished.

The work of the Mighty One is perfect because all G-d's ways are just. a G-d of Faith without wrongdoing. G-d is righteous and moral.

G-d has separated us from all other nations.

G-d brought us out of Egypt to be our G-d. Therefore, since G-d is holy, we must be holy too.

Israelites are G-d's slaves because G-d brought us out of Egypt.

G-d is present and active within the world.

Blessed are You, LORD our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine..., varieties of spices...,and the lights of the fire.

Believing and praying to G-d is not as important as following Halaka or Jewish law.

G-d does not have a body or gender.

G-d is not only a noun but a verb — not only a presence, but a process.

We can emulate G-d's behavior, and in this way bring G-d into our lives.

G-d created man to test us.

I don't believe that G-d is moved by prayer, but I have come to see that some people are.

I do not believe in a personal G-d, one who hears and answers my prayers. I pray in order to give voice to my deepest yearnings, to hear the inclinations of my heart.

Appendix D

I have experienced G-d's presence
I have felt G-d in a temple
I have felt close to G-d at a funeral
I felt close to G-d at my Bar/bat mitzvah
I have struggled with the idea of G-d
When I feel alone, I pray to G-d
I feel G-d everywhere
G-d is alive
G-d is omnipotent
G-d is active in our modern world
G-d is watching me
G-d is watching over all of us

G-d has saved lives

G-d has taken lives away

G-d is great

G-d is one