



**DO YOU
BELIEVE?**

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This is an introduction discussion about belief; we are just trying to understand what we believe, how or why we believe, and how does Judaism understand the concept of belief or in Hebrew: Emunah.

A FEW QUESTIONS:

- **What is belief?**
- **Do you believe in God?**
- **Is there a benefit to belief in God? What benefit?**
- **Does belief require trust?**

How do you know? On what do you base your beliefs? Is seeing really believing? Perhaps, but certainly there are many things you believe in that you have never seen. Have you ever checked your father's DNA just to make sure you are related? Have you actually seen the money that is supposed to be in your bank account?

There are many factors that go into our belief system: trust, logic, historical evidence, faith and, not the least, our own predilections for what we want to be true. So that just as it is intellectually dishonest to say, "I believe even if I don't know," it may be dishonest to say, "I only believe in what I do know."

There are things that we want to believe and there are things that we do not want to believe. Aldus Huxley, in his *Confessions of a Professional Atheist*, writes: "I didn't want the world to have a meaning so I proved that it has no meaning. For myself as well as for most people in my generation the philosophy of meaninglessness was a tool to attain freedom from any moral framework. We were against a moral code because it disturbed our freedom."

He did not want to believe so he "proved" that it wasn't so, for as the great Rabbi Elijah of Vilna put it, Truth obligates.

On the other hand, there were men and women in our history who couldn't tell an aleph from a beit, yet were so firm in their beliefs that they were ready to give up their lives for them. It is an historical fact that during the Spanish Inquisition, the simple men and women withstood the test of dying for the sanctification of G-d's name more than the greatest Jewish philosophers.

This issue of Pardes is an exercise in honesty, an introspection of our souls to locate the source of our beliefs and disbeliefs. There is an old saying that faith begins where knowledge ends. Perhaps we ultimately have to admit that we all have faith, the only question is in what. If faith is something we choose, then we would be better off examining our desires and not our beliefs. And if faith is a function of the soul, rather than the intellect, then it is not in our laboratories that we need to search, but rather in the deepest recesses of our heart.

Rabbi Yaacov Haber

- ❖ WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE BUT CANNOT PROVE?
- ❖ HOW DO YOU FORM YOUR BELIEFS?

LOOKING FOR PERMISSION



PERMISSION TO BELIEVE

Four
Rational
Approaches
to God's
Existence

LAWRENCE KELEMEN

Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen wrote a book with four essays detailing "rational approaches to God's existence". He explains why he didn't title his book "proof" but "permission"...

"Many people would believe in God tomorrow if only their intellects would allow them. These people intuitively suspect the existence of an Almighty. Yet the admirably high value our society places on reason, combined with the unfortunately widespread misconception that belief in God is necessarily irrational, squelches their potential spirituality. These individuals should be permitted to examine the case for God. They should be granted permission to believe."

- ❖ DOES RABBI KELEMEN'S APPROACH SPEAK TO YOU? DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU SEARCH FOR PERMISSION?
- ❖ IS BELIEF A CHOICE OR AN OBLIGATION?

PATHWAYS TOWARD BELIEF

- ❖ *Split the group into 3*
- ❖ *Give one source to each group*
- ❖ *Ask each group to argue that their source is the best method to access belief in God.*



NATURE

RAMBAM YESODEI HATORAH (2:2)

What is the way to love and fear God? Whenever one contemplates the great wonders of God's works and creations, and one sees that they are a product of a wisdom that has no bounds or limits, one will immediately love, laud and glorify [God] with an immense passion to know the Great Name.

TRADITION

RABBI YEHUDA HALEVI - KUZARI (2:26)

The highest faith is that derived through tradition alone, in which case metaphysical proof should only be used as a last resort to preclude disbelief (God revealed himself at Mount Sinai before millions of people. A simple trust in the family unit, that one's parents received this truth from their parents, who in turn received the same truth from their parents (and so on), is another way to discover God).

INTELLECT

RAMBAM MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:51)

"Our faith begins with the traditions that have been transmitted to us by our ancestors and in our sacred literature. This is alluded to in the verse, 'Hear O Israel, God is our Lord, God is one.' However, the highest level of faith comes from philosophical proof, and those who have the ability are required to prove the foundations of our faith.

**THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT OPINIONS ON HOW TO
SEEK CLOSENESS WITH GOD.**

- ❖ WHICH OPINION SPEAKS TO YOU THE MOST?
 - ❖ HOW CAN YOU APPLY THIS METHOD IN YOUR LIFE?
 - ❖ WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHERS TO
BETTER APPRECIATE YOUR APPROACH?
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WHAT IF I AM JUST NOT SURE?



RABBI ARYEH BEN DAVID, *THE GODFILE*

Many of us walk into synagogue with the expectation that a spiritual experience will descend upon us, regardless of how much or little we have [prepared for the experience]....in truth neither the synagogue nor the prayer book can create a spiritual connection...Only you can. (page 9)

HAVE A LITTLE FAITH

The following is a famous poem entitled Footprints in the Sand:

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with God. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him and the other to God.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life.



This really bothered him and he questioned God about it. “God, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.”

God replied, “My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you! During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you”.

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- ❖ WHY DO YOU THINK THIS MANS INITIAL REACTION WAS DISBELIEF? WOULD YOU REACT THE SAME WAY?
 - ❖ IF GOD PROMISED YOU SOMETHING WHY WOULDN'T YOU BELIEVE HIM? IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO BE WORKED ON OR IS IT A GIVEN?
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WRAP UP

“Faith is not the absence of reason, it is a skill in its own right which, when cultivated, allows us to experience the ultimate.”

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch (“The Rebbe”)

After examining the concept of belief, and considering our own beliefs, we can consider how to develop belief. We have another chabura session that discusses just that.