**A TASTE OF JUDAISM: GOD
Rabbi Suzanne Singer**

1. What does Judaism say about God? The basic assumptions about God in Judaism are:
* God is invisible
* God is one
* God is not a human being
* God as Creator, Revealer, Redeemer

The central statement of Jewish faith is the Shema: *Shema Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Ehad*: “Hear O Israel, Adonai is God, Adonai is One. “

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: “God is the flame; Religion is the multi-colored lantern. In other words, we see the same flame, but only as it is filtered through the panes of colored glass of the lantern. Our vision is a reflection of where we stand.”

1. Human beings as viewed by the Jewish religion.
* Human beings are made in God’s image
* We have two conflicting forces – called “yetzer” – within us, both a part of us: *Yetzer tov* – the good inclination and *Yetzer Ra* – the bad inclination
* People sin, but we are not sinners. We are not born into original sin.
1. Torah Texts.
2. The Burning Bush. Exodus 3:1-15

The scene: Moses’ first encounter with God. Background: The Israelites are slaves in Egypt. God appears to Moses and tells him that Moses will become his people’s liberator. This episode occurs at the famous burning bush in the desert.

* Why do you think God appears to Moses in the form of the burning bush?

(no place is devoid of God’s presence – Midrash; the bush resembles a heart. It too can burn without being consumed – Midrash)

* Why does God tell Moses to remove his shoes? (lessen one’s ego?)
* Is Moses a passive participant in this encounter? In other words, does he have to do anything for God to reveal Godself to him?
* What does God’s name of “Eyeh-Asher-Eyeh” (I will be what I will be) suggest to you?

(God as the essence of possibility)

* Why do you think it says in verse 6: “the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.”
* What do we learn about the God of Israel from this text?
1. Jacob’s Ladder. Genesis 28:10-19.

This scene takes place right after Jacob has tricked his brother Esau into receiving their father Isaac’s blessing. His brother Esau is understandably furious and wants to kill Jacob. So Jacob escapes and runs for his life. Here we meet him on the road.

* Why do you think Jacob encounters God now?
* What does it mean to realize that God is all around?
* What does it take to bring us to God? How do we become open to God’s presence?
* What do you make of the angels going up and down the stairs?

Words of wisdom:

* Where does God live? Wherever we allow God in (*Tales of the Hasidim*).
* A miracle is often the willingness to see the common in an uncommon way (*Jacob the Baker, Noah benShea*).
1. Godwrestling. Genesis 32:23-33.

Now Jacob is returning home and is about to encounter his brother Esau for the first time in 20 years. He sends his family ahead and remains alone for the night.

* What is the significance of this wrestling match?
* What is the significance of Jacob’s victory? of his wound?
* The meaning of Jacob’s new name Israel is “contending with God.” What does that say about our relationship with God?