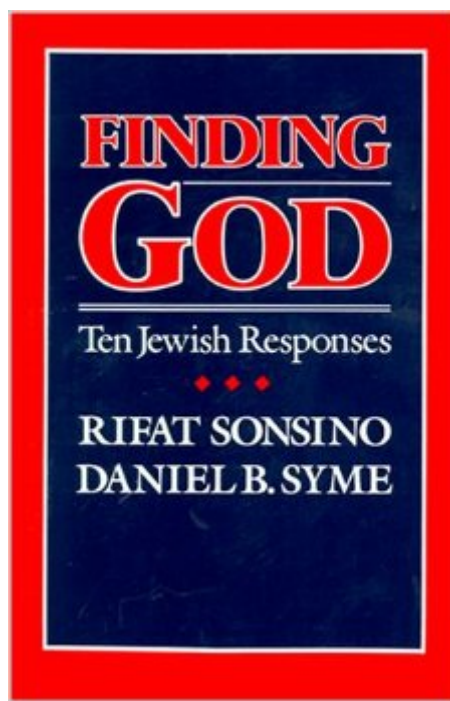


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Finding God: Ten Jewish Responses



Synopsis

This is a book about God, specifically about the different ways Jews have spoken of God throughout history. In its examination of 4,000 years of Jewish thought, it presents the broad spectrum of theological opinions that have been explored and affirmed by great Jewish thinkers, ancient and modern. Many Jews today avoid speaking about God. Unable to accept the traditional notions presented to them as authoritative, they often turn to other faiths or cults that offer the possibility of spiritual expression more in keeping with their personal God concept. Unaware of the variety within Judaism, they abandon their religious community in the mistaken impression that their longing for God cannot be satisfied within the faith of their ancestors. In this book, the authors skillfully present ten distinct Jewish theological perspectives, each of which has something to say to us today about our lives as individuals and as Jews. Each grapples with the following crucial questions: What is God? Is there more than one God? What is God's name? How can we know God? What is God's relationship to the world? Does God have a special relationship with the Jewish people? What does God "want" from us? How does God relate to me? Why is there evil in the world? "If we make it possible for one Jew to reclaim his or her Jewish spiritual identity, " the authors write, "if we help others to begin to talk about God without ambivalence or embarrassment, if we serve as a catalyst for further study of these and other Jewish thinkers, we will consider our work worthwhile." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

Today the vast majority of American Jews are not Orthodox. Judaism does not have a fixed creed

which tells us exactly how we must understand the nature of God and what we should expect of Him. There is a Rabbinic vision of the nature of God, but Jews who are not Orthodox and many who are nominally Conservative are not always comfortable with the Rabbinic vision and, indeed, the Torah says that the form and nature of God cannot be known or understood by man. This book describes ten ways, including the Rabbinic, in which Jews have and still do see God...Some of these infuriate traditional Orthodox Jews, who may equate any concepts other than the Rabbinical as either heresy or atheism, but their condemnation does not invalidate the thought of some of our greatest and best known scholars as described in this book. It is an invaluable reference for the Jew who is seeking a reconciliation between Judaism and his existence in the modern world.

Sonsino and Syme are to be congratulated for having the idea to write this book. In a religious community where atheism has come to be seen as a sign of education, open-mindedness and even intelligence, Sonsino and Syme wish to call this trend to a halt. Theirs is but a simple message: never again should we feel compelled to define "God" narrowly in the most traditional theistic terms. Amen to that! Spiritual Jews throughout the centuries have searched their souls for their own concepts about the existence and nature of God, and have come up with very different answers. It is presumptuous for an Orthodox Jew, for example, to tell followers of Baruch Spinoza or Mordecai Kaplan, "You might THINK you believe in God, but you're really just an atheist. Only MY God is the true God." That attitude is rubbish, as Sonsino and Syme aptly demonstrate. Ah, but while the idea of this book was wonderful, the execution was less than divine. Sonsino and Syme purport to be describing ten different concepts of God that Jews have adopted over the years. But the depictions are dry, uninspired and ultimately unconvincing -- or at least that was my reaction. What the authors should have done is identified ten brilliant writers, or at least gifted minds, who actually believe in these ten Gods and have them explain why they've adopted those views. As it is, too many readers will come away from this book wondering why anyone believes in ANY of these Gods, which I can't imagine was the authors' intent, given that they are both rabbis.

Most people's notions of God, if they even have any, are stunted at the level of children: that of the big man in the sky. Of course, with this idea, there is a limit to spiritual or religious growth. This form of God, in my opinion, leads people away from religion and what they consider its puerile notions of God and the divine. *Finding God: Ten Jewish Responses* by Rifat Sonsion and Daniel B. Syme lays out many different concepts of God throughout the length of Jewish history. There is the God of the Bible, Rabbinical literature, Philo of Alexandria, Maimonides, Isaac Luria, Spinoza, Martin Buber,

Steinberg, Kaplan, and Fromm. This is not a long book, 132 pages of text, so it is commendable that the authors have distilled so complex an array of thinkers in so short a space. This is difficult to do, yet they accomplished it smoothly. For readers looking to expand their notions of God without getting too technical or diving into primary literature, this book is an excellent resource.

Plenty of extremely reform Jews who thought they were atheists will be surprised to find out they really believe in G-d after all. Of course they don't believe any such thing. But a few of them might be confused by this volume's inclusion of, say, Erich Fromm, a nontheistic humanist who regarded "G-d" as a symbol of a human ideal. If Fromm's atheism were being presented as an option for today's Jews, that might be one thing, although even that would be misleading and confusing. But to present it as a form of _theism_ is just silly. Fromm's version of "finding G-d" is what most people would call "not believing in G-d." Fuhgeddabowdit. People who don't believe in G-d should just not believe in G-d. They don't need this book to tell them they're closet theists after all.

An excellent introduction to the theologies found both in the biblical text and through the history of Judaism. The writer provides an excellent brief biography to some of the greatest Jewish thinkers and theologians, from orthodox to "heretics." Sonsino shares samples of their work, comment on the material quoted and concludes with a summary that in simple terms presents the essence of their thoughts.

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