Reflections: God, Judaism and Morality

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Dedication
This book is dedicated to my wife, Linda, and to our five-year-old granddaughter Emily, who unknowingly contributed to Chapter 5.

LIST OF CHAPTERS

Introduction
Chapter 1: Theists and Atheists: Futile Conflicts
Chapter 2: Debating God's Existence
Chapter 3: Spinoza's God
Chapter 4: More about Spinoza's God
Chapter 5: "Bless you," she said
Chapter 6: Dear God
Chapter 7: Metaphors and Hebrew Words
Chapter 8: Right and Wrong Rules
Chapter 9: Divine Moral Compass
Chapter 10: Mysticism and Religion
Chapter 11: Gentiles Believing in Judaism
Chapter 12: Jews in the Soviet Union
Chapter 13: Communist Morality

References

**Introduction**

In a recent New York Times article "Religion without God" [1], T.M. Luhrmann wrote "God-neutral faith is growing rapidly. ..." More than 870 comments, posted on that day by readers, indicate that a lot of people are interested in God-related topics. In this diary-like mini book I share what I know and think about theology. It is a set of fictitious lecture notes based on my current reading and on articles I have published online. How can a retired teacher miss an opportunity to be professionally active again. Writing, by the way, often helps us to organize thinking.

The first eleven chapters of this essay (see below) contain everything I wanted to write originally. But after reading them again I decided to address topics which are only loosely connected to the title of this diary-like minibook. Chapter 12 is about Jews in the Soviet Union; Chapter 13 is about Communist Morality. Why did I add these chapters? Because I think that this made the book more interesting, at least to some people.

As a university student in Poland from 1949 to 1957, I was an aggressive atheist and subsequently became a member of the communist party. I am now an 85-year-old retired nuclear scientist, interested in theology, a theist attending a synagogue. Missing an earlier introduction to God, I am very different from other theists. My ideological evolution is described in my autobiography [2]. Writing it was a moral obligation, to my parents, and to millions of other victims of Stalinism. The victims are dead but I was definitely with them when I was writing. What can be a better confirmation that many of us live in two different environments, material and spiritual?"

**Chapter 1: Theists and Atheists: Futile Conflicts**

My first God-related article, "Futile Confrontations between Theists and Atheists," was published in the American Atheist journal [3]. Preoccupied with such dangerous confrontations, I described a theory called NOMA, formulated by an American scientist, S.J. Gould. Here is what I wrote:

"The first step toward mutual respect between theists and atheists should be the recognition that most people on earth are surrounded by material structure and
by spiritual superstructure. People investigating these aspects of our environment are scientists and theologians. Methods of validation of claims made by theologians are very different from those used by scientists. God is not a material entity, and attempts to refute God's existence by performing scientific experiments are not appropriate. The same is true for attempts to refute scientific claims, such as the age of the earth, on the basis of disagreements with holy books.

Theology, by the way, is like mathematics, not science. Mathematicians start with axioms (initially accepted truths) and use logical derivation to justify consecutive claims, called theorems. Once proven, a theorem cannot be rejected, unless a logical error is found in the derivation. Science is very different. Here, claims are justified, in the final analysis, by experimental observations, not by pure logic. A scientific claim becomes valid after it is confirmed in reproducible experiments. Furthermore, scientific validations are always tentative; scientists know that future experiments might result in rejection, or partial rejection, of what has already been accepted. Scientific truth is not claimed to be eternal." That is my interpretation of Gould's ideas.

Chapter 2: Debating God's Existence

In my own online essay [4] I wrote that according to traditional theologians God is responsible for everything that happens. An atheist, on the other hand, would say that human motivations and feelings must be explained scientifically, because God does not exist. The purpose of this essay is to speculate about this and related theological topics. The famous aggressive atheist Richard Dawkins wrote that a miracle-free religion would not be recognized by practicing theists. What is the use of God who does no miracles and answers no prayers?" This is a good question. But one can believe, as the philosopher Spinoza did, in God without believing in miracles. The idea of almighty God was formulated by humans. It evolved, and is still evolving, naturally. Referring to human history Dawkins names three kinds of religions: primitive, polytheistic and monotheistic. Why doesn't he recognize existence of the fourth category a -"miracle-free" religion? Because he probably thinks that an ideology without miracles is not a religion.

In studying religion I am focusing mostly on Judaism, the religion of my ancestors, and on Christianity. I read books, visit various websites and participate in weekly Bible study meetings in our Reform synagogue.... I suspect that Judaism is not the only theology in which there are several interpretations of God, ranging from traditional to modern. Some Orthodox Jews probably think that Reform and Conservative Jews are atheists. They believe that the Bible was
written by God, rather than by ancient sages.

Most disagreements about God's existence result from the absence of a common definition of God. Suppose that X and Y have different definitions of God; X believes in his own God but not in the God of Y; and vice versa. Then they accuse each other of atheism. A feud about existence or nonexistence of God is impossible unless we agree on God's attributes. Debates between atheists and theists are usually frustrating because one side often refers to literal interpretations of the Biblical God while another side sticks to metaphorical and allegorical interpretations.

“Judaism for Dummies,” [5], which prompted me to write this mini book, is well written, neither too trivial nor too difficult for my limited theological background. In the second chapter the authors write that "most people are surprised to find out that there are some practicing Jews who are agnostic, insisting that you simply can't know whether or not there is God. Some Jews are atheists, not believing in God at all. ... Judaism not only allows for all kinds of interpretation of God, but encourages people to wrestle with this issue." In fact, my rabbi wrote a short book [6] on this subject. He claims that even "God loves good debate," defined as an "argument for the sake of heaven."

**Chapter 3: Spinoza's God**

An interesting article about Spinoza appeared in The New York Times, written by a professor of philosophy, Steven Nadler [7]. It also generated many interesting online comments. A reader, RMC, wrote: "I know many Christians and Jews who practice their religious traditions although their own beliefs are secular. They make no secret of their sentiments. Spinoza was excommunicated during a time of religious orthodoxy and in that respect his experience is much like Galileo's. When the Catholic Church repudiated its treatment of Galileo, it was not merely saying that the earth revolves around the sun. It was saying that punishing the members of its congregation for thinking for themselves, including about church dogma, was parochial and destructive."

Referring to theology, Albert Einstein wrote: "My views are near those of Spinoza: admiration for the beauty of and belief in the logical simplicity of the order which we can grasp humbly and only imperfectly. ..." In another reference [8], he wrote: "I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals, or would directly sit in judgment on creatures of his own creation. ... My religiosity consists in a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little that we, with our weak and transitory understanding, can comprehend of reality. Morality is of the highest importance--
but for us, not for God."[9]

Spinoza's excommunication by his Jewish community in Amsterdam took place at approximately the same time as Galileo was forbidden to conduct scientific research by Vatican theologians. Referring to persecution of Galileo, in 1979, Pope John Paul II said: "The collaboration between religion and modern science is to the advantage of both, without violating their respective autonomy in any way. Just as religion demands religious freedom, so science rightly claims freedom of research" [10]. As far as I know, there has been no such rehabilitation of Spinoza by Jewish authorities.

Like Spinoza, I believe that our world evolved progressively over an infinitely long time. It was not created by an external entity (traditional God), during a well-defined period, such as six days, or six billion years. Laws of Nature, which Spinoza identified with God, control evolution of the world. Do you agree that such a scientific position should be acceptable to a significant portion of today's scientists and theologians? If not, then why not? Theologians who excommunicated Spinoza claimed that he denied almost every major tenet of Jewish belief, including that God created and controls the world. How would Spinoza have defended himself against such an accusation? He would probably have turned to his own definition of God. The statement 'God created the world,' he would say, does not have to be rejected if God is identified with Nature (with the entire world). Such a philosophical approach--God is Nature--is often called pantheism.

Who is the author of God's commandments? Some answer God; others say that human beings wrote them. Are these two approaches mutually exclusive? Spinoza would probably say the two answers are not exclusive, because God and people are parts of nature. Does it mean that everything people do is actually done by God? This question is often discussed in the context of mass murders, such as those orchestrated by Hitler, Stalin and Mao. The topic of reality of evil has been addressed by many theologians, for example, in the article "How Could God Have Allowed the Holocaust?" written by Rabbi Alan Lurie [11]. Humans are responsible, say theologians (and social scientists), because "Mother Nature" provided them with free will.

Why was the authorship of commandments attributed to God, by humans who wrote them? Because authors of commandments, who can be called ancient social scientists, knew that morality based on the fear of the Biblical God would be more effective than morality imposed by human leaders. People do need an authority standing behind the "what-is-good-and-what-is-bad" rules. Are modern societies ready to replace the idea of traditional God, or gods, by the idea of God of Einstein and Spinoza?
Chapter 4: More about Spinoza's God

Authors of Chapter 2, in [5], referring to Spinoza, wrote that he "announced that God was not a separate being, but rather the forces of nature, ... Skip ahead 300 years and you find the twentieth-century theologian Mordechai Kaplan (from Jewish Theological Seminary) discovering the same 'truth.' The result? A group of Orthodox rabbis excommunicated him and burned the prayer book he had published. Today, no one remembers the names of these rabbis, but every philosophy student in the world reads Spinoza. ..."

Many theological contradictions would disappear if Spinoza's definition of God were universally accepted. But those who accept his definition will encounter many new difficulties. Transitions from one definition of God to another would not be easy; traditional almighty and all-knowing God, in whose image we are said to be created, is intuitively more acceptable than Spinoza's God, especially to children. This became obvious to me recently, when I was reading the following prayer in our prayer book: "You are the Rock of our lives, and the Shield of our salvation in every generation. Let us thank You and praise You--for our lives which are in Your hand, for our souls which are in Your care, for your miracles that we experience every day and for your wondrous deeds and favors at every time of day, morning and noon. O Good One, whose mercies never end, O Compassionate One whose kindness never fails, we forever put our hope in You."

In reciting such prayers collectively, during weekly services, we are not addressing Spinoza's God; we are addressing the personal almighty God of our ancestors. It would be very difficult to modify this prayer, for those who believe in Spinoza's God. Can this be accomplished via some kind of metaphorical terminology? Most of us know that words "Shield" and "Rock", in this context," are used as metaphors [12]. But terms: "Your hand," "our souls," "miracles," "mercy," "Compassionate One," and "kindness" suggest literal interpretations. They suggest that God is a human-like entity.

Suppose God is defined as two aspects of one entity. The first would be named "Mother Nature," the second would be named "Father Nature." In fact, the term "Mother Nature" is often used as a symbol of material reality (studied by scientists). The term "Father Nature," on the other hand," would be defined as a symbol of spiritual reality (studied by theologians). The term "symbol" would be emphasized; it would help us to avoid debatable adjectives, such as omnipotent and omniscient. All prayers would be directed to "Our Father our King." I suspect that Spinoza would object to the idea of two kinds of reality; his God-is-Nature definition probably referred to both material and spiritual aspects of human
existence.

Here is another quotation, often recited in our temple: "Pray as if everything depended on God. Act as if everything depended on you. Prayer invites God's Presence to suffuse our spirits, God's Will to prevail in our lives." This prayer seems to confirm two realities, one to which we pray and another on which we act.

Can the conflict between Spinoza and the Amsterdam Rabbis (see page 67 in [6]) be called good? I do not think so. Spinoza was not given a chance to debate his theology.

Chapter 5: "Bless you," she said

Hearing a sneeze, a four-year responded, "bless you." Where did this come from? Her mother said she never told the child about God. This prompted me to do some Google searching. There were some very interesting posts. But they refer to situations in which parents believe in a traditional God, and in which they want to transfer that belief to their children. But suppose parents believe that God is the entire universe, as Spinoza did. In that case they are in a difficult situation. Can they say, "God loves you" to a child? Yes, they can. But that would contradict their belief that God is not a human-like creature, with heart, brain, etc.

Reflections of this kind are useful; they make us aware of difficulties encountered when the definition of God changes suddenly, from traditional to Spinoza-like. Traditional ways of introducing children to God did not appear at once, they probably evolved very slowly, together with changes in language. The above-mentioned child is my only granddaughter; she is nearly six years old now.

Suppose she asks me "Grandpa, what is God?" How would I answer? I would say "it is something that exists in our minds, like Santa Claus, like the Tooth Fairy, like angels, etc. But are they as real as you and me? These are very difficult questions; some people say yes, some say no, and many are undecided. Perhaps we will talk about this more when you are older."

According to one online reference [13] the famous Swiss cognitive psychologist J. Piaget suggested that children should be introduced to God-related concepts "before or at least by six years of age." I tend to agree. But I double the age limit; introducing abstract concepts too early may be counter productive. The same is true for less complex concepts, such as molecule, gene, force and acceleration. This is well known to science teachers.
Chapter 6; Dear God

In my essay [4] I described four denominations of Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist; I was not aware that the number of denominations is considerably larger, as described in [5]. In another Internet essay [14] I quoted what several Reform rabbis wrote about their own problems with believing in traditional Biblical God. Hers is a fictitious debate between a man and God, described by one of these rabbis, Paul Kipnes:

"MAN: God, You created everything?

GOD: Yes, each creation has its own purpose. Some of it blessedly benevolent; some of it potentially dangerous. Think about lions. Leave them alone and they are just gorgeous creatures. Bother them, and look out!

MAN: What about earthquakes, tornados, and other natural disasters? Why did You create those?

GOD: Call these the dreadful consequence of an imperfect Creation. Call it collateral damage of My desire to create humanity. Natural disasters and unnatural disease were unintended; they weren't in any plan. Setting out to create, I began with exactness and perfection. But when I began creating the universe, I failed to realize that I was creating something that was other-than-Me. And because it was other-than-Me, it was imperfect. All approximations are intrinsically imperfect.

MAN: So You created all those diseases—Alzheimer's, AIDS, and cancerous tumors that ravage our bodies and that cause children to die young and others to suffer so intensely?

GOD: Unintended for sure, but eminently treatable. I give you humans big brains and teach you to understand science and medicine. Then you must decide whether to focus your time and research dollars on curing diseases like cancer or Alzheimer's or to use your God-given resources instead to build sophisticated smart bombs and laser-guided missiles.

MAN: So You admit responsibility for evil and suffering?

GOD: I prefer to focus on My efforts to provide humanity with the ability to lessen suffering. Since earthquakes are unintended but inevitable, you humans have knowledge of them. In fact, all new homeowners in California sign a form acknowledging that they will be living near an earthquake fault and that they
understand the danger.

Still, given the whole 'free choice' component built into Creation, everyone (in theory) gets to decide how to live and where to live. With free choice, you humans have the freedom to make your own decisions—even dangerous and foolish ones. Imperfection allows humans to be greedy, to be cruel, or to ignore the responsibility to help and heal each other. Collectively, you humans have the ability to cure all these diseases and curb all evil. ... "

Chapter 7: Metaphors and Hebrew Words

Modern Reform Judaism is rooted in the nineteenth-century question—Is the Hebrew Bible history or legend? [6] The German Rabbi Abraham Geiger asked: "How much longer can we continue this deceit ... presenting stories from the Bible as if they were actual historical happenings?" He was probably referring to the story of creation of the world in six days, the story of Jewish slaves in Egypt, etc. We respect such stories because they represent beliefs, and moral values, of our ancestors.

Addressing Geiger, another German rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, asked, "Would you deny the Torah?" The answer was simple--"I do not deny the Torah. But ... all laws and all prayers that are unworthy or irrelevant should be eliminated [from our books]." Why do some people think that only a small fraction of contemporary theologians would be willing to follow such advice? Because biblical stories are intertwined with recommended rules of morality. A personal God, according to most clergy, records all our transgressions, and punishes those who disobey; many Christians believe in hell and heaven, and many Jews believe in exclusion and inclusion in the "world to come."

How do Jews answer the "do you believe in God" question? Their honest answers would not be different from answers given by other people; some would say "yes," others would say "no," and the rest would say "I am an agnostic," or something equivalent. But what is God? Different theists answer this question differently. Those who belong to Reform and Conservative denominations often say "figuratively speaking" and "metaphorically speaking." But what do these phrases mean, in the context of theological debates?

Browsing the Internet, I found a good answer, given recently by a Christian physicist, Aron Wall [15] who wrote: "when people say that they believe 'God is metaphor' ... that means that they don't really believe in God; they're actually
atheists cloaking themselves in religious language. On the other hand, if there really is a Creator of infinite power and wisdom who designed the Universe, it makes sense that he would be beyond our capability to grasp. We can say what God is not, but we cannot understand him in any positive way except by making metaphors. Precisely because we Christians believe that God exists, we have to resort to metaphors in order to describe him. "This is not different from what Maimonides wrote in 12th century, and from what I have read in numerous books written by contemporary theologians.

Use of metaphors, in theological books, and during our synagogue services, is not the only obstacle on the path toward clear understanding. The other obstacle, as far as I am concerned, is the use of Hebrew words. To illustrate this, let me refer to page 35 in [5]. It informs me that Books of Moses are subdivided “into 54 portions, called “parshiot (each one is a parshah), also called sisor (each one is a sidra). ... Whoever reads the Haftorah also reads the concluding verses of parashah called the maftir." Who benefits from learning so many Hebrew words during services? Reading with a dictionary is neither effective, nor pleasant.

Chapter 8: Right and Wrong Rules

The book I am reading [16] is loaded with topics of great importance. It begins with a question about God's existence. The authors state that this question should be "confined to theologians and philosophers." I tend to disagree. Responding to this question they write that obeying God's commandments is more important than believing in God, because "Judaism emphasizes deed over creed." Why does "emphasizing deed" make the "does-God-exist" question less important? Creed is the most important part in every religion. Am I wrong in thinking that those who believe in heaven and paradise are more likely than other people to obey God's commandments?

And here is another question. Why should doubts about God's existence be an obstacle to being a good Jew? The book answer is: "If we knew God existed and would punish us for evil acts, then good acts would be much less freely chosen. An element of unknowability about God is necessary so as to allow us to choose good. In order to choose good, we must feel free to do bad, and we would not feel this way if we had definite knowledge that God was present and recording our every action." Once again I disagree; I think that a person believing in the biblical God is more likely than a nonbeliever to follow His moral principles. On the other hand, many atheists are moral, despite the fact that their morality is not based on God's commandments.
According to a recently found webpage [17], there are two kinds of rules related to "right" and "wrong" conduct. They are called Ethics and Morals. The first "is provided to an individual by an external source, e.g. their profession or religion." The second set of rules, by contrast, is internal, rather than external. "Morals refer to an individual's own principles regarding right and wrong." I was not aware of this linguistic distinction.

To illustrate the difference the author describes a defense attorney. "Her morals may tell her that murder is reprehensible and that murderers should be punished. But her ethics as a professional lawyer require her to defend the client to the best of her abilities, even when she knows that the client is guilty." Who decided that in a conflicting situation of that kind a lawyer should follow prevailing rules of ethics rather than rules of internal (subjective) morality? How was this decision justified?

Here is one answer, found on a different website: "Legal ethics must override personal morals for the greater good of upholding a justice system in which the accused are given a fair trial and the prosecution must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt." The same greater-good answer is probably given to soldiers when they are ordered to annihilate enemies, to those who interrogate prisoners, to medical doctors, etc., etc. All rules of conduct are probably flexible.

Browsing the Internet I found many arbitrary descriptions of differences between the words morality and ethics. This is disappointing. For the time being I will accept the first description--morals are internal, ethics are external. It might be useful in the context of the above mentioned situations.

**Chapter 9: Divine Moral Compass**

Most of us are familiar with these ten commandments:

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make idols.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.
Not all theologians believe that Biblical God was the author of the above; many think the Bible was actually written by human beings, inspired by the idea of God.

In the last chapter of his 1999 book, "Simple Words" [18] , Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz wrote: "Many of us will honestly say 'I would like to believe in God. if only I could see something, anything, that proves that God exists, I would gladly accept and believe.' Unfortunately, what most people can see of God would be irrelevant or nonsensical, and what is relevant or sensical cannot be seen. ... For those who already believe, the questions [what is God? and where is God?] are irrelevant.

However, there is a different question that is relevant to both believer and nonbeliever alike: what is it that you do or do not want to believe in? . . . Perhaps the greatest difficulty in relation to God is our inherent inability to form any coherent understanding of the Almighty. ... The word 'God' is used in public prayers or in unvoiced wishes, in common conversations and in courses--with equal meaninglessness. For most people, it means everything--and nothing.

The source of this confusion is, of course, the subject itself. We make it worse, since we use the word 'God' without thinking about it. We trust all kinds of constructs that should be helpful crutches, but these crutches cripple us instead. The most common crutch is the idea of man-like nature of God," who is said to have eyes to see, hands to write, brain to think, etc. That is my interpretation of the biblical statement that humans are created in God's image. The Rabbi wrote: " In order to understand the world emotionally, we anthropomorphize. ... For instance, we speak about the foot of a mountain; we know that a mountain does not have feet, but giving it a human image helps to create an emotional appeal." ...

For many people, writes Steinsaltz, "the image of God is quite clear: a big, white-bearded man sitting in the throne very high in the sky. He has--at least figuratively--a stick in one hand, and a bag of candy in the other, bestowing each on his subjects. ... You may object and say that such an idea is just childish, kindergarten imagery, but how many people actually continue to develop their religious understanding beyond this age?... Unfortunately, most adolescents throw away the whole idea of God with this picture. ... They remain atheists or agnostics for the rest of their lives. ..."

More sophisticated people, who do not expect to see the Almighty walking around in a long white robe, ask for miracles as proof of God's existence. ... Philosophically, however--as pointed out many years ago by Maimonides--a miracle does not really prove anything. ..." A miracle that goes against what we call the laws of nature is simply what it is: something astonishing. It does not
have any intrinsic message." Yes, astonishing discoveries are often announced by highly qualified scientists--I have met some of them myself--but that has nothing to do with God's existence, or nonexistence.

The issue "God is a metaphor" was raised at a recent Torah study session, in my temple. The Rabbi was absent and the meeting was conducted by one of the congregants, N. The question was: "What do we (Reform Jews) mean when we say that God is a metaphor?" "A metaphor for what? " asked N.

I was surprised; I did not know that each metaphor must stand for something specific. My delayed answer (in a private email message) was "This metaphor stands for Order in Nature, or the Laws of Nature. That is what Einstein and Spinoza would probably say. Is this an acceptable answer?" His reply (see below) might lead to interesting discussions.

"Dear Ludwik,

Is order in nature God or is it the consequence of God's actions? If God is not responsible for order in nature then is the natural order the consequence of natural forces having nothing to do with God? In either case it wouldn't be a metaphor for God, would it? Einstein said: 'I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the lawful harmony of all that exists, but not in a God who concerns himself with the fate of the doings of mankind.' Bottom line, I don't understand the answer."

My reply was also short. I wrote:

"Why do I prefer your first, rather than the second, option? Because my purpose, in debating theological topics, is to contribute to the end of dangerous 'we-are-better-than-you' confrontations, still common between scientists and theologians, (and also between theologians from different Jewish denominations). The first option allows me to say 'Yes,' when someone asks me if I believe in God.

Religion, and other ideologies have often been used to justify wars, and other forms of violence, rather than tolerance, brotherhood, and love. ISIS is a typical example.

**Chapter 10: Mysticism and Religion**

The mystical side of Judaism (and other religions) is described in the fifth chapter of [5]. Mysticism, write the authors, "focuses on the immediate personal encounter with a Greater Reality [God] beyond that which can be talked about or
understood rationally." This sentence implies existence of two levels of understanding God: common and deeper than common, called mystical. There are Jews, write the authors, who feel that the so called "deeper spiritual truth" is missing when holy books are studied at the common level. Why is a Hebrew name "kabbalah," referring to Jewish mysticism, used, instead of "advanced Judaism," as in "advanced chemistry," "advanced mathematics," "advanced physics," etc.? What is wrong with familiar adjectives, such as advanced and elementary?

In the same chapter the authors write that for well over 1,500 years, the kabbalah was transmitted to students secretly, presumably because "its ideas represented a threat to established religious thought." Why was teaching of advanced Judaism a threat to teaching of elementary Judaism? The answer lies in different concepts of God, among two groups of believers. Traditional Jews believe that God resides outside the universe while mystics believe that God resides inside people, as illustrated below.

"The majority of Jews," write the authors, "tend to see God as a separate entity, outside the physical universe. In this model, Judaism is a moral framework, describing God as a king or parent and people as the subjects or children. However, for the Jewish mystic, God is not only the Ultimate Transcendent Being but also the Ultimate Immanent Being. Jewish mystics make no separation between person and Deity. Jews with a more mystical inclination say that there is nothing but God. Everything is God."

Several definitions of the word mysticism are shown in [19]. One of them has nothing to do with God. It states that mysticism is "a belief without sound basis." Astrology and fortune telling are, by this definition, examples of mysticism. Most astronomers, as far as I know, do not respect astrologists. What is the attitude of most rabbis toward mysticism?

Someone once wrote: "While mysticism plays an important — and often essential — role in all the world's religions, mysticism itself is not a religion. There are Christian mystics, Jewish mystics, Muslim mystics, Buddhist mystics, Hindu mystics, Protestant mystics, Catholic mystics, and also agnostic mystics. According to [5], mysticism in general, and kabbalah in particular, are the most difficult aspects of Judaism to talk about."

**Chapter 11: Gentiles Believing in Judaism**

A recent article "The Gentiles Who Act Like Jews" [20], brings to mind Jews for Jesus. The author wrote:
"A man with a brambly salt-and-pepper beard, a kippah on his head, and circular glasses balanced on his nose stood behind a podium, lecturing on the parasha, the weekly Torah reading, in a southern twang. He was not a rabbi. He wasn't even Jewish.

In front of him, an audience of about 20 sat in rows, listening attentively. ... They call themselves Righteous Noahides: non-Jews who believe in Orthodox Judaism. According to Jewish theology, there are laws that Jews must obey, the 613 mitzvot, but then there are seven laws for children of Noah—everyone else in the world. They are: Do not deny God; do not blaspheme; do not murder; do not engage in incest, adultery, pederasty, or bestiality; do not steal; do not eat of a live animal; and establish courts.

The Noahide laws, which are derived from passages in the Torah, were enumerated in the Talmud. In the Middle Ages, Maimonides urged their observance on non-Jews, writing, 'Anyone who accepts upon himself and carefully observes the Seven Commandments is of the Righteous of the Nations of the World and has a portion in the World to Come.' But the idea never really caught on among non-Jews.

But about 40 years ago, Chabad grand Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson launched a global 'Noahide Campaign,' writing and speaking about the need for Righteous Noahide communities, believing Noahide laws would bring about peace and understanding and would hasten the coming of the Messiah. Some non-Jews listened. For example, in 1987, President Reagan signed a proclamation glorifying "the historical tradition of ethical values and principles, which have been the bedrock of society from the dawn of civilization when they were known as the Seven Noahide Laws, transmitted through God to Moses on Mount Sinai."

Noahidism now encompasses communities around the world, especially in Great Britain, the Philippines, Latin America, Nigeria, Russia, and the United States. According to Rabbi Michael Schulman, who runs Noahide website AskNoah.org, the Philippines may have the most developed community, with well over 1,000 adults and their children living in a collection of agricultural towns. They run Hebrew schools, community meetings, and even a national summit.

**Chapter 12: Jews in the Soviet Union**

"Judaism for Dummies" [5] is not limited to theological aspects of Judaism. A substantial portion of the book, entitled "An Overview of Jewish History," is also worth reading and thinking about. On page 127 the authors write: "You can't tell the story of human civilization--in the East or the West--without. exploring the
history of the Jews.” Some parts of that tragic history, such as pogroms and the Holocaust, are widely known. This is not true for horrible crimes in the Soviet Union. How many Americans know, for example, that leftist leaders of communist uprising, who survived the October revolution (Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries), were mostly Jewish? Nearly all of them were condemned to death by immediate execution, or to slow death in Siberian camps. This was during Moscow trials, in 1930's. The great majority of Soviet Jews, who were not members of these parties, were killed by Nazis during WWII. The black years of Soviet Jewry--during the years of 1939 to 1953--and Stalin's personal antisemitism, are described in [21].

Chapter 13: Communist Morality

According to Lenin and Stalin, morality should be subordinated to the ideology of proletarian revolution. Denying the validity of religion-based morality, they wrote: what is useful to us is moral, what is harmful to us is immoral. Morality is a weapon in class struggle. Party and Komsomol members were drilled to accept that position, and to act accordingly. The justification was simple. The world is full of injustice and immorality. We want to replace it by a much better scientifically designed social structure -- communism.

An act of torture committed by our enemy, they insisted, should be exposed as unspeakable barbarism. But an act of torture committed by us, to punish an enemy of revolution is not immoral. It is a historical necessity. Likewise, Auschwitz eliminations of people were considered immoral while Kolyma, and other Siberian elimination camps, were considered moral.

Comrade Dzerzhinsky, the first director of punitive Soviet organs, was referred to as a highly moral communist. This honor was a reward for extremely brutal handling of declared class enemies, as ordered by the party. Other Bolsheviks, including those who were later eliminated by Stalin, were also extremely brutal; they were leaders of Red Terror, Civil War, War Communism and Collectivization campaigns. Immorality is probably older than civilizations but Hitler and Stalin elevated it to new heights. It would be interesting to compare old books dedicated to communist morality, found in [22], with what Russian communists write about revolutionary morality today. I suspect the party ideology has not changed; they would probably use terror again after gaining control of the government.
Closely related to morality is the issue of convictions. To a true Bolshevik convictions were determined by the will of the party. Here is how this was explained to a friend in 1932 by an old Bolshevik, Juri Pyatakov [23]: "Since you do not believe that people's convictions can change in a short period of time, you conclude that our statements... are insincere, that they are lies... I agree that people who are not Bolsheviks, the category of ordinary people in general, cannot make an instant change, a turn, amputating their own convictions... We are not like other people. We are a party who make the impossible possible... And if the party demands it, if it is necessary or important for the party, we will be able by an act of will to expel from our brains in twenty-four hours ideas we have held for years... Yes, I will see black where I thought I saw white, or may still see it, because for me there is no life outside the party or apart from agreement with it."

It is ironic that in 1937 Pyatakov was accused of antiparty activities and pled guilty. Was he tortured before the trial or was he persuaded to serve the party willingly, one more time? In any case, he was executed immediately after the trial. A good example of communist convictions is Molotov, the second man in Stalin's inner circle. He certainly loved his Jewish wife, Paulina. But he did not try to defend her when she was accused of being an "enemy of Soviet people [23]." Did he believe that the imprisonment of his wife was necessary or was he simply afraid of Stalin?

Laws of nature, often attributed to God, cannot be broken by humans. But humans are often free to act contrary to God's moral laws. What can be done to reduce the probability of human abuses of morality? Einstein was right; morality is of the highest importance--but for us, not for God," as quoted in Chapter 3 above.

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