

I heard the most fabulous story recently, and it is the perfect introduction to tonight's sermon. A man is on his way to his daughter's wedding in New York City, and he can't find a place to park. The lots are full, there are no open spaces on the street, and he is running late. He is beginning to panic. If he is late for his own daughter's wedding, she might never forgive him. So he offers a prayer, "Dear God, I cannot be late for my daughter's wedding. If you help me find a place to park, I promise I will become observant. I will keep kosher, wear tallis and tefillin, pray three times every day, and become *shomer Shabbos*, just help me find a place to park so I won't be late for the wedding." At exactly that moment, just ahead of him, a car parked right in front of the synagogue pulls out and leaves him the perfect parking spot. The man lifted his eyes toward Heaven and said, "Never mind, I found one."

My friends, is the the kind of God you believe in, a God who sits on a heavenly throne, bestowing Divine gifts and favors on those who ask for them—sometimes? I will tell you that my beliefs about God have nothing to do with God being some sort of celestial vending machine, in which I put the spiritual equivalent of money and receive the Diet Coke from God. Nor

do I believe that God is a Divine Santa Claus, bestowing gifts on me when I am good, but putting coal in my stocking when I fail to measure up. My friend and colleague, Rabbi Harold Kushner, frequently asks those who tell him they do not believe in God to describe the God they do not believe in, and he invariably responds that he does not believe in that God, either. Hence the question with which I titled this sermon: “What God Do You Believe In?”

There is no shortage of unsatisfactory answers to this question. Imagine if I ask if you believe in mustard. When you say yes and I ask what that means, you say, “You know, something yellow.” It tells us nothing about your belief in mustard, and the theological equivalent tells us nothing about one’s belief in God. The same is true of the response, “I don’t really have specific beliefs about mustard, but I believe it is out there.”

So what God do you believe in? I will share with you the God I believe in. He is the God of the Torah. Now I have to explain what that means.

Before the Torah, people believed in gods. The Torah introduced the revolutionary idea, unheard of in human history, that there is one, universal, invisible God. I believe in that God.

The Torah says that time had a beginning, and God existed before the beginning of time. Physics agrees that time had a beginning, and I believe in the God Who existed before the beginning of time.

The Torah says that God is the Creator of the Universe. I believe in that God.

The Torah says that God, not some wise old Israelite, wrote the Ten Commandments. I believe in that God, the moral authority of the universe, without Whom there is no objective right or wrong, good or evil, only things we like or do not like. That is the God that Judaism introduced to the world, and I believe in Him. This is God in Whose image we are created, which means that we have a moral compass. Sadly, as the old joke goes, some of us have a Tates compass, one that never points in the same direction, and he who has a Tates is lost.

And now for something the Torah never says. The Torah never says that God controls everything that happens in the world. It was certainly the worldview of biblical figures, but that

statement is never made by the Torah, and I do not believe it. If I believed that everything that happens happens because God wants it to happen, I would not be able to worship God.

Here is a very important question. Some may say that there is a God, but the Torah didn't come from God, the Ten Commandments didn't come from God, God never revealed His will to humanity in any way, and God does not judge our actions, my question is this: How does believing in such a God differ from the beliefs of an atheist? One says there is nothing out there, the other says there is something out there, but it is irrelevant if whatever one thinks is out there taught us nothing and asks nothing of us.

And so, my friends, this is the God in Whom I believe: the Creator of the Universe, the Giver of the Ten Commandments, the moral authority of the universes Who judges our behavior. I know that some may hold these beliefs and add more to them, and I have no quarrel with that. But I will conclude with a question for anyone who believes in a God Who did not create the universe and give the Ten Commandments: what has the God you believe in done?