



LEVISSON INSTITUTE
Teacher Training Programme
May 8th 2011 Den Haag

Teaching God: Rabbi Dr Michael Shire
Leo Baeck College, London

Dear Colleague,

I look forward to being with you to discuss strategies and educational approaches to teaching God in the Jewish classroom. This is no easy task and we would not be focusing a whole day upon it if it were something we could all do without thinking and learning about it. There is also the assumption that it is important to the raising of Jewish children and sustaining Jewish families.

However the definition of God is not the same for everyone which is why the most important Jewish prayer, *Hatefila* (Avot in the Amidah) speaks of the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Isaac and Rebeka and the God of Jacob and Rachel and Leah. The Ba'al Shem Tov (18th century Poland) already asked the question, Is this the same God or does each generation perceive God in their own way? We will need to ask this question too, of our own beliefs, disbeliefs and questions about God.

Our morning spent together will focus on Changing Jewish views of God and our own perceptions or doubts about God. May I ask you to read three chapters from the book, 'Teaching about God and Spirituality' edited by Roberta Louis Goodman and Sherry Blumberg and published by ARE

Chapter 1: The Changing Nature of God by Rifat Sonsino

Chapter 7: Nurturing a Relationship To God and Spiritual Growth:
Developmental Approaches by Roberta Louis Goodman

Chapter 10: Educating the Spirit by Michael Shire

http://books.google.com/books?id=BZ0WUMe3y70C&pg=PA6&dq=rifat+sonsino&hl=en&ei=fd-5TePDG42n8QPTorEw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CD8Q6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=rifat%20sonsino&f=false

Our afternoon together will present different models of teaching God including: Handmade Midrash, Godly Play, Story telling, talking to children about God, prayer and *korei kodesh* (sacred reading).

There will be plenty of time for questions and discussion. By the end of the day I hope that we will all have clarified our understandings of the variety of Jewish approaches to God and experienced a number of practical pedagogies that can be used in the classroom, in the synagogue and at home.

I would like to suggest that you do one exercise before we meet together. Please ask a child of any age 'what they think or feel about God' or 'when they feel close to God'. It will be interesting to hear the results of your conversations with children.

I look forward to our special day together,
With all good wishes

Rabbi Michael Shire
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