

## Beliefs About God in the Jewish Culture of Jesus

For the past two weeks I have been reviewing how belief models are made and used by the brain. *Belief models are complex meme structures that consist of Identity Memes (names), Support Memes (other names), and Strategy Memes (actions to take when Identity Memes are recognized).* Human brains generate realities from it belief models that people “*experience as life.*” Belief models are spread to others by narratives (stories).

*Narratives are to the brain what food is to the stomach.  
They are the glue that holds members of collectives together.*

In ancient cultures, the most important narratives were “*Sacred Narratives.*” Every culture has stories that define who they are and how they were created. Jesus was a member of the *Jewish culture in Judea/Galilee in the first century CE.* Below are comments about the role **Jewish Sacred Narratives** have played – *and are still playing* – in the lives of Jewish people. The first comments are from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

“Jews have been scattered, dispersed and exiled. **We never lost our identity.** Why? Because at least once a year, on the festival of Passover, **we told our story** and we taught it to our children and we ate the unleavened bread of affliction and tasted the bitter herbs of slavery. So we never lost our identity.”<sup>1</sup>

David S. Ariel provides the following overview of their importance.

“Judaism is not a religion of fixed doctrines or dogmas but a complex system of evolving beliefs. Despite its diversity, **there is an overarching rubric that unites Jews of every persuasion,** from the most orthodox, liberal or secular. This rubric is what I call “**sacred myths**” . . . **these sacred myths form the framework for the Jew’s ongoing search for personal meaning in his or her own life, the life of the Jewish community, and society at large . . . Sacred myths are articulations of our most deeply held beliefs that are not subject to verification for truth or falsehood.** While the truth of these myths is valid and sacred for those who hold them, it does not necessarily follow that other people’s myths are false or wrong . . . To call the most cherished beliefs of a culture “myths” does not mean that they are fairy tales. Every culture presents **its understanding of the world in the language of its own sacred myths** which might not make sense to outsiders. Sacred myths of Judaism are the key to understanding the special nature of Jewish spirituality.”<sup>2</sup>

Now let’s focus on Jewish beliefs about God.

- *The goal to be Jewish, for many, is to **be a seeker of the unlimited ways in which God can be realized** within their lives.*
- *There are many in every generation of Jews that sees the same goal, but in their own way, and express it in the language of their own day.*
- *What one generation calls “seeking God,” another might call “seeking transcendence.”*

## **Beliefs About God in the Jewish Culture of Jesus: Part 2**

- *What one generation calls “covenant,” another might call “responsibility.”*
- *What one generation refers to as “the divine image,” another might call “human destiny.”*
- *There is no one authoritative Jewish dogma of God.*
- *There are some things about the conception of God all Jewish thinkers agree on.<sup>3</sup>*

In Jewish cultures beliefs about God are linked to the lives of people.

- *The great sacred narrative of the destiny of the Jewish people explains that the search for higher meaning animates every aspect of Jewish life.*
- *It means to strive to recognize that all people are created in the divine image.*
- *Spirituality is expressed by strengthening the divine image within ourself.<sup>4</sup>*

Our next step is to identify the **Sacred Narratives and rituals** Jesus and his Jewish audience held and practiced. I will continue this discussion in the next email.

Shalom,  
Jim Myers

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Jonathan Sacks quote from a Youtube transcript.

<sup>2</sup> *What Do Jews Believe? The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism* by David S. Ariel © 1995; Schocken Books, New York, NY; pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> *What Do Jews Believe?*; p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *What Do Jews Believe?*; pp. 251-252.