

Contending With God? This Reader Is For You.



In the literature of the Jewish people, we have great works of faith, testaments to a millenia-long fascination with God. This faith, like the people who practiced it, has many different faces. There is the faith of *Psalms*, and the faith of *Kohelet*. The faith of *Shir HaShirim*, and the faith of *Iyov*. In each, we see a different facet of the religious journey, a different road towards God. The religious journey is complex, and sometimes faith can look like its opposite, something that thinkers like Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook were fond of pointing out.

Commenting perhaps on this dynamic, the great Rebbe of Pshischa shared a remarkable teaching.

Considering the verse, “rebels you have been with the Lord your God,” has an interesting word choice – מְרִיבִים הָיִיתֶם עִם ה' . Instead of saying “you have been rebels” **against** God, the verse is “you have been rebels **with** the Lord your God.” The Rebbe, in his characteristic sweet style, pointed out that many rebel **with** God, contending with God in a deeply relational way. This is a disagreement with God that remains on the side of God, deeply unified with God in heated, passionate engagement.

We hope to honor this tradition by putting together a compendium of those that contended with God. The chosen voices here reflect a variety of ages and eras. The first, *Yossele Rackover Speaks to God*, a work with a fascinating backstory that enthralls the reader instantly. The second—a bit dryer, but no less meaningful—is an academic essay (albeit one with heart) by Shraga Bar-On, on Hillel Zeitlin’s search for God. If you don’t know much about Zeitlin, this is the perfect time to open your eyes to this powerful prophet of the early twentieth century. A man of faith and paradox, Zeitlin lived an intense life, ultimately dying at the hands of the Nazis. If these questions move you, you also might want to check out Dov Weiss’s *Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism*, a sharp read that explores this facet of Jewish thought deeply and movingly. The third piece, by musician Nick Cave, explores what a relationship with God can look like for those who may not believe, for those on the other side of the wall. Cave’s beautiful words, while not from the Torah, offer a deep reflection about living a God-oriented life in the 21st century.

We invite you along this journey, and hope you enjoy this ride through God-fascinated Jews from 1920 until today.