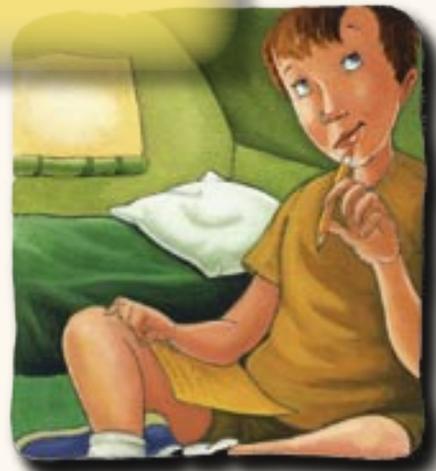


I Have Some Questions About God

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invaluable insights on this project.*

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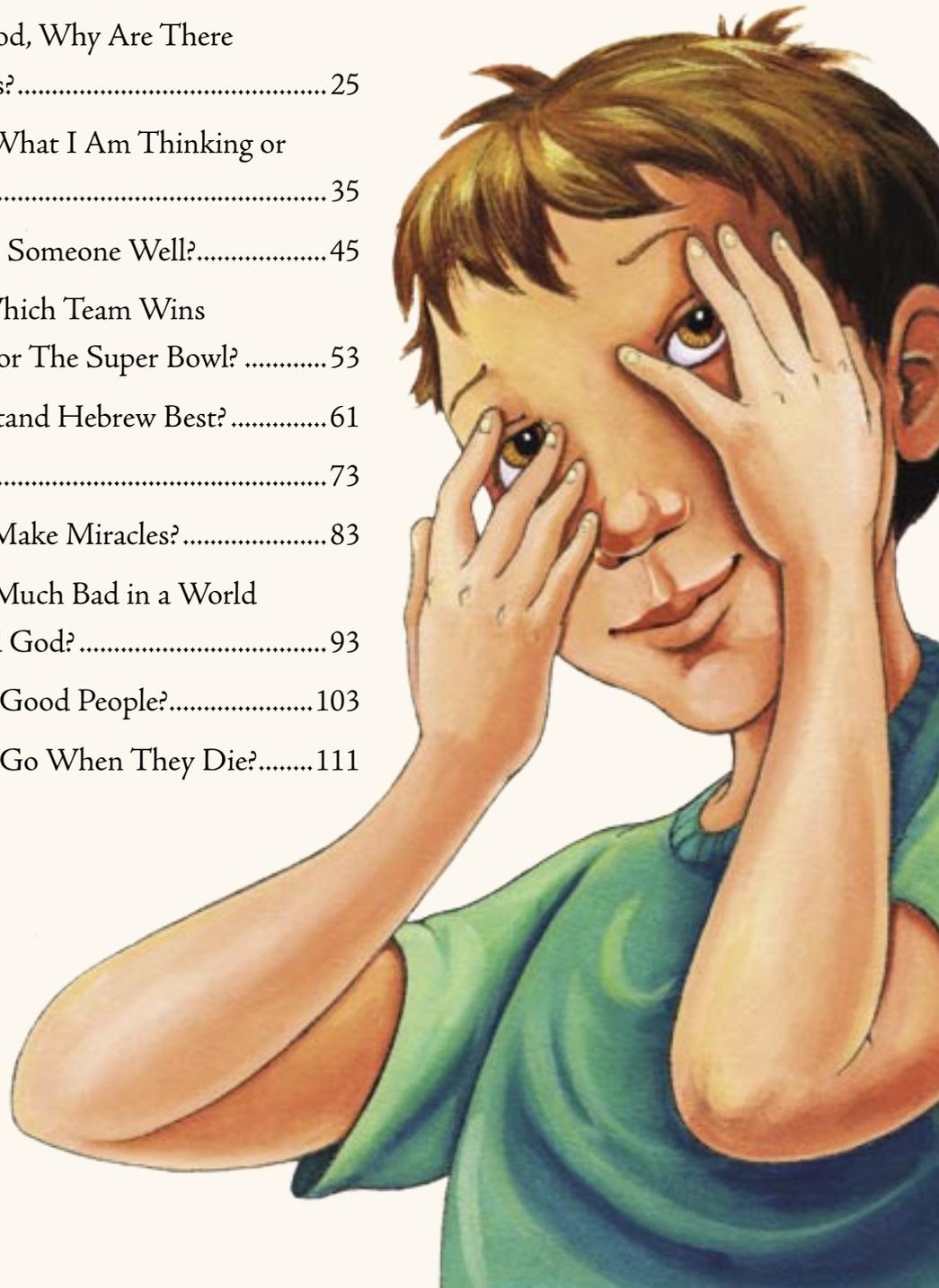
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I Have Some Questions about God

I have a friend named Ben. Ben does not believe in God, but God is one of Ben's favorite subjects. Ben argues about God all the time. He spends a lot of time trying to prove to me that there is no God. I spend a lot of time trying to prove to him that there is a God. Neither of us will ever win. There is nothing I can say that will prove to him that there is a God, and there is nothing he can say to me that will make me doubt that there is a God.

I have no mathematical equation that I can write on a blackboard to prove that God is real. I can't take Ben to a museum and show him some ancient artifact on which he can use a magnifying glass to see God's fingerprints. I can only tell Ben my feelings and my thoughts.

There is nothing Ben can mix in a test tube that will prove to me that there is no God. He cannot open up a history book and show me a fact or a story that will get me to stop

believing that God is here. All Ben can do is tell me why he doubts that there is a God and he can ask me questions about God that he thinks I can't answer.

Ben doesn't know that I have lots of questions about God, too. Everyone does.

If you believe in God—you have questions about God.
If you don't believe in God—you have questions about God.
And if you are not sure—then you, too, have questions about God.

This book is a collection of twelve questions about God that we collected from lots of kids. We asked oodles of kids for their questions about God and these were the most popular. Then we went to six rabbis in England and America and invited them to answer the questions. Most of their answers are stories. Most of the time they have different answers.

This book is a collection of their best answers to your questions. Read, enjoy, question, and join the discussion.

Joel Lurie Grishaver

What questions do you have about God?

Sample Only



How Do We Know There Really Is A God?



Answer One: Rabbi Sybil Sheridan

The Garden in the Middle of the Forest

Two explorers were hacking through miles of undergrowth in a rain forest in the middle of nowhere. They came across a garden. “How amazing!” said one. “Just look at all this beauty. The trees are evenly spaced. There are flowers everywhere. And all of it is covered by the peaceful sound of splashing water.”

“How can such a garden exist in the middle of a jungle?” asked the other.

The first answered, “It means we are near civilization. There is probably a palace around here. If we walk on a bit, we’ll come to a town.”

So the two walked on, but there was no sign of a palace or a town.

“This garden is a miracle,” said the first explorer.

“No, it’s not,” replied the second, “some wealthy ruler has decided to plant a garden a long way away for real peace and quiet. If we wait here long enough, he will come to enjoy it.”

So the two men waited, but no rich ruler came.

“Gardeners!” exclaimed the second explorer after a time, “There must be gardeners. Look at the design, the straight lines of the flowerbeds. There is not a weed in sight. If we wait here long enough, we will meet the gardeners and we can ask them where the garden came from.”

They waited in the garden. They watched the seasons change. Flowers withered and faded, to be replaced with new young blooms. The trees flowered and bore fruit and then dropped their leaves. The leaves blew away, leaving the garden as neat and as beautiful as before. For months they waited in the garden, but no one came.

“There is no gardener. The garden is just a miracle,” announced the first explorer.

“Maybe, the gardener comes at night while we are asleep. Perhaps, we should take turns watching through the night for him,” said the second.

So they watched all night and all day. The flowers continued to bloom and fade. The trees budded and burst into flower. All year they waited in the garden, but no one came.

“Perhaps,” said the second explorer, “the gardener is invisible. That would explain why we have seen no one at all.”

“And perhaps there is no gardener. The garden just grew this way on its own.”

They sat and watched the garden. And after a long, long time they said together, “We will never know.”

The truth is, we can't know for certain if there really is a God. We can only guess that there is a God by picking up clues left around the world for us to find. Just because you can't see or touch something doesn't mean it isn't there. You can't see electricity, but you can see what it does. You can't touch oxygen, but without it you would die. Look around the universe and you can see God working, keeping it all going for us to enjoy.

Answer Two: Rabbi Ed Feinstein

I Just Have to Care



A man once came to a Hasidic rabbi named Menahem Mendel of Kotsk to complain. He said to him, “Rabbi, so many bad things happen in the world. I can’t believe in God any more!”

The rabbi listened and said, “Why do you care?”

This surprised the man. “What do you mean, why do I care? It hurts me to see people hungry, sick and suffering. How could I not care?”

But the rabbi asked him again, “Why do you care?”

The man, now very angry, tried to answer, “Rabbi, it makes me angry to see a world filled with war and disease and hunger. Why must people suffer?”

The rabbi shook his head and asked again, “Why do you care?”

Now the man was really mad. He shouted at the rabbi, “I care, Rabbi, that’s all, I just care. I have to care. I just can’t stand by and watch people suffer! I’m a human being, and I care.”

“Good,” said the rabbi, “And as long as you care, we know God is real.”

As long as we care, we know God is real.



Answer Three: Rabbi Jeff Salkin

Uh-Oh

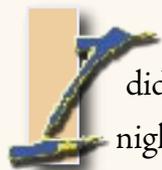
One sign there is a God is the “Uh-oh! feeling.” If you have ever done something wrong (or something that you thought might be wrong), you can often hear that little voice inside you saying that it is wrong. We call that voice “conscience.” Now, no one is really sure where the conscience comes from. I would say that God is the source of the conscience.

God gives us that quiet voice that says “Uh-oh.”



Answer 4: Aaron Roth

The Puppy



I didn't used to believe in God. I thought that science explained everything. Then one night, my father brought home a puppy. It was a purebred Golden Retriever pup, a girl, just six weeks old. Along with the rest of my family, I instantly fell in love with this fur ball we now know as Nelly. That got me thinking about the idea of love. Until that moment I believed that love was nothing more than a change in the chemical balance in the brain that made us feel pleasure and affection. But for some reason, after Nelly licked me, I started to think of the ability to love as a privilege, a gift. Love is probably the most significant reason I turned back to God. That is not to say that I never loved until that moment, far from it. I just started to think of it differently and started to do it more. Love can't be an accident.

Aaron Roth is seventeen years old and he went from not believing in God to believing in God. For Aaron, love was the proof that God exists. The feeling of love is so powerful that it had to have been created out of love—God's love.

Your Turn

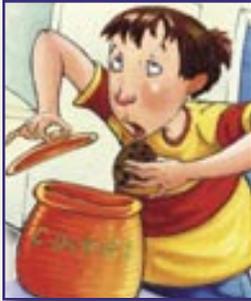
How do you know there is a God? Is one of these answers close to your answer?



Rabbi Sybil Sheridan's story **The Garden in the Middle of the Forest**: The world we live in is like a perfect garden growing in the middle of the forest. We cannot figure out how it got there and we cannot see the force that created it. The garden seems too perfect to be an accident, but we just don't know. We can never be sure about God.



Rabbi Ed Feinstein's story **I Just Have to Care**: A man tells his Rabbi that he cannot believe in God because too many people are sick or hungry or suffer in other ways. His rabbi tells him the fact that he cares proves there is a God. Caring about other people is a gift from God.



Rabbi Jeff Salkin's belief that the **Uh-Oh** feeling is a sign: Different things give us hints that there is a God. One of them is the fact that people have a conscience.



Aaron Roth's story of falling in love with **The Puppy**: He knew that love could not be an accident. Love has to be a gift from a loving God.

Do you have another reason for believing that there is a God?



Many different rabbis have told this story. A boy is playing hide-and-seek. The boy hides so well that his friends give up and go home. Still the boy hides for a long time, waiting to be found. After a long time he runs to his grandfather in tears. He says, "I was hiding and no one was seeking. They stopped looking for me." His grandfather hugged the boy and said, "God says exactly the same thing. "I am hiding and they stopped looking for me."

1. Why do you think that God is hidden and hard to find?

2. In which of these places can you get a glimpse that God is present?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A beautiful sunset | <input type="checkbox"/> A Hebrew school classroom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A mother with a newborn child | <input type="checkbox"/> Two best friends talking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Someone feeding a hungry person | <input type="checkbox"/> An artist making a painting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbors arguing | <input type="checkbox"/> An Olympic record being broken |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A class cleaning a polluted stream | <input type="checkbox"/> A family having a Shabbat dinner |

3. Name two other places where you can see a clue that God is around.



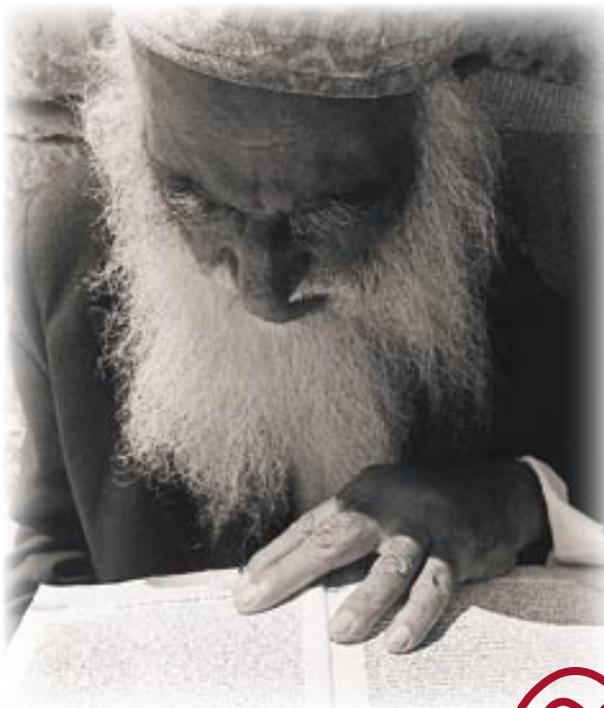
Hannah Szenes (Senesh) was a Jewish spy who tried to help Jews escape from Poland during World War II. She was not religious, but she wrote a poem. "Eli, Eli."

My God, My God,
I pray that these things never end:
The sand and the sea,
The rush of the waters,
The thunder of heaven,
Human prayers.

Hannah Szenes, written in Caesarea, near Kibbutz Sdot Yam, 1942.

1. Why would someone who did not go to services or observe most religious customs write a poem about God?

2. What else would you put on a list of things that you hope will never end?



There is a famous mitzvah (commandment) in the Torah:

You must love the Eternal your God

Deuteronomy 6.5

Rashi was a famous biblical commentator. He had a lot of problems with this commandment. Rashi said, "It is impossible to command love. Love is something that grows." Rashi then explained, "What God actually wants us to do is to follow the mitzvot in the Torah—these are things that show love." Through doing these things we will come to know and love God.

Here are some mitzvot. In what way does each of these demonstrate love?

- a. Saying the Shema at bedtime
- b. Eating matzah during Passover
- c. Helping a poor person
- d. Taking care of the environment
- e. Celebrating Shabbat
- f. Studying Torah
- g. Respecting the elderly
- h. Not cheating at business

What are some other things you should do to show your love for God?



**Where Does
God Come
From?**



Answer One: Rabbi Brad Artson

A Lesson from Monique



I am an *abba*. *Abba* is Hebrew for “Daddy.” I have two children, Shira and Jacob. Since they are twins, they are both the same age—six years old. This is a story about Shira. It’s also a story about things that fall apart and things that last forever.

Shira and I were visiting at her Mama’s house (that’s what she calls her grandmother, my mother). She was opening up Mama’s drawers, looking through her cabinets, and exploring her house. We were on a treasure hunt. At the bottom of one closet, Shira discovered an old shoebox. Inside, she found a stuffed doll, a cat. The cat looked very old

and very used. Her tail stuffing was long gone. One eye had popped off, and her belly was open at the top. Shira had discovered the doll that I slept with every night when I was a baby and a little boy.

Looking at the doll for the first time in thirty-five years, I could feel the same feelings of love I had when I was a child. But now, as a grown up, I could also see that Monique (that was the name I gave the doll when I first got it) was falling apart. Dolls don't last forever. They are made of cloth and stuffing and thread. Dolls, like everything you can touch, wear out over time. Monique was pretty close to being unusable.

When she was new, she was a beautiful doll. When they first brought her home, her eyes were shiny black, her fur was soft and fluffy, and she had a music box inside her belly that played a pretty song. Whoever made her had done a good job. But that was a long time ago, and her body wouldn't last much longer. But the feelings she had stirred in me weren't physical. Feelings like love and joy and connection don't have to have an end, and they don't have to have a beginning either. They just go on and on and on.

Shira took the doll out of the box and asked, "Abba, what is this?" I told her that the doll used to be my doll when I was a little boy and that her name was Monique. Shira looked at me, looked at Monique, and then held it to her chest. "Abba, now Monique is ours. We can both share her." Shira was able to see past the physical Monique, the part that would fall apart. She was able to feel what I felt. She could make that doll a way of connecting to the love she and I have for each other. Shira has slept with Monique every night since that visit to Mama's house.

People are born at a particular time. But thoughts, feelings and joy don't have a beginning or an end. Like my feelings for Monique, they can be passed from one person to another. The source of those feelings is God. God doesn't have a beginning or an end. God doesn't come from anywhere. God always was and always will be.



Answer Two: Rabbi Sybil Sheridan
and Rabbi Jeff Salkin

God is Forever

Many of our rabbis gave the same answer to this question. Here are two answers that are more or less the same.

There has always been God, but there haven't always been places "to come from." God was around even before there was a "here." It doesn't matter if your best friend comes from New York or Nebraska. What matters is the kind of person he or she is. It's the same with God. It doesn't matter where God is. It could be that God is outside outer space and looking down on the world. It could be that God is inside each of us. *What matters is what God does for us and what we can do for God.*

Rabbi Sybil Sheridan

Nowhere. God comes from nowhere. God is everywhere. God has always been around. God will always be around. God has no start. God has no end. *It's hard to imagine, but it's true.*

Rabbi Jeff Salkin

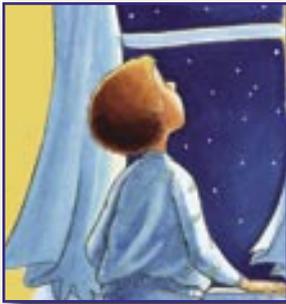
Your Turn

Where does God come from?

This is a question we love to ask but the answers we get are not simple. God does not come from Cleveland or Baltimore. God does not come from Mars or Pluto or the Ring Nebula. There was “No Thing” before God who gave birth to God.



Rabbi Artson had a doll named Monique that he loved when he was very young. Later, his daughter Shira found and also loved Monique. The feeling of love was passed from one person to another. Rabbi Artson explains that God is like a feeling. Feelings don't have beginnings. Feelings, like love for a doll, are things that can be passed on and on.



Both Rabbi Salkin and Rabbi Sheridan said, “God doesn't have a beginning. God is forever.” Even though that is hard to imagine, that is one of the things that makes God different from the things that God created.

Where do you think God came from?

All three of our rabbis said “God didn't come from anywhere.” Do you have your own way of explaining this?

The Letter Bet Teaches us A Lesson

ב is Bet. Bet is the first letter in the Torah. It starts the word בְּרֵאשִׁית Bereshit, beginnings.

The Rabbis asked, “Why does the Torah begin with a Bet?” One of the answers they gave was this, “The Bet is closed on three sides. We will never know what is above us in heaven. We will never understand what is below us. We will never know what came before creation, because the Bet is closed to the past too. The only open side is the future. We can help plan and create the future.”

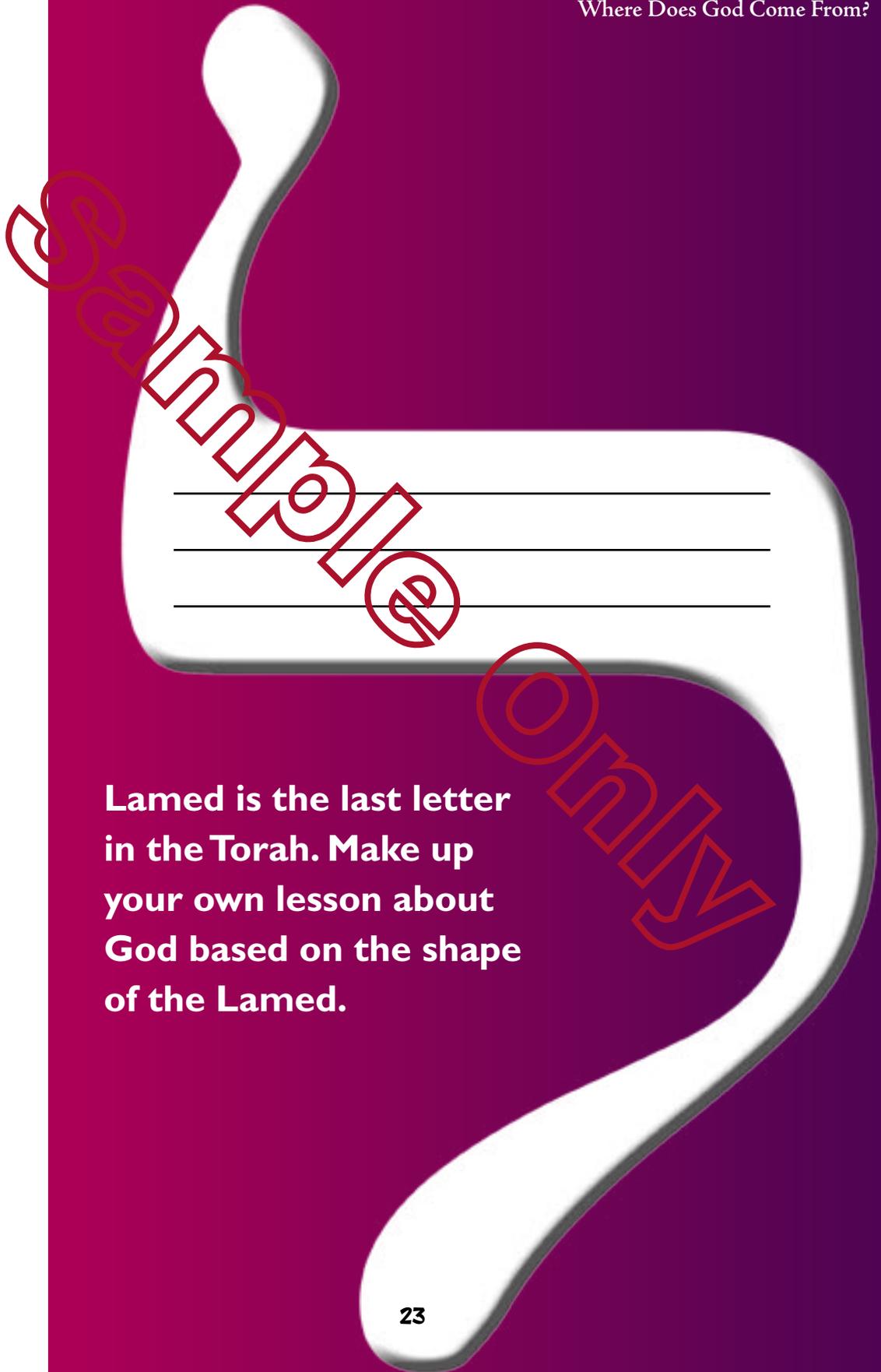
Zohar, Bahir

The Bet has a foot that is pointed back toward the Alef. That teaches us that God was there before creation—God was before anything else.

Malbim

ONLY

SAMPLE



Lamed is the last letter in the Torah. Make up your own lesson about God based on the shape of the Lamed.





The Talmud teaches that there were three partners in your creation: your mother, your father and God.

List three things you got from your mother.

List three things you got from your father.

List three things you got from God.



Sample Only

If There Is One God, Why Are There So Many Religions?