

Supplementary Materials for “Covenant”

Discussion Questions

1. “The Jewish part of myself need not be—indeed, should not be—separate from the rest of who I am. The Torah demands and offers wholeness. In our day it requires all that 21st-century men and women can bring to the task. Thanks in part to that conviction, imbued in me since childhood, my love of family and friends is inextricably intertwined with love of God and Torah.” [p. 2]
 - a. How do the loves “of family and friends” and “of God and Torah” build on the “double covenant” that is described at the beginning of the essay?
 - b. Are there ways that you personally find wholeness in Torah? What are they?

2. “As important as religious belief is to Judaism, it is not everything, and, arguably, is not the main thing. One cannot emphasize this point enough in a society and culture that tend to treat ‘religion’ as a separate sphere, cut off from the major business of life, and to assume that only a high degree of separation from the beliefs and practices of the mainstream entitle one to the mantle of being ‘religious.’” [p. 2]
 - a. How has belief, or lack thereof, impacted your connection to Judaism? How do you think it has impacted those who taught you what it means to be a Jew?
 - b. In the subsequent paragraph, Eisen contrasts “religion,” defined in a narrow sense, with other aspects of Judaism: “history, language, literature, folk customs, communal organizations, and intimate connection to the Land of Israel.” Which of these, if any, is more central to your Jewish identity than belief?
 - c. In what ways do you think of your Judaism as being mainstream with respect to wider society, and in what ways do you see it as existing in a different sphere?

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3. “The Torah offers a way called mitzvah that—if we walk it diligently—guides and transforms all of life: when we rise up and when we lie down, when we sit at home and when we walk upon the way.”
[p. 2]

- a. The recitation of the Shema’ presupposes that one carries its ideas and ideals at all times. What are the Jewish ideas and ideals that you carry with you and that influence what you do as you go about your day-to-day life?
- b. Are there mitzvot that are integrated into your everyday life and routines? If so, which are they and what effect do they have on other aspects of your life?