God is beyond human comprehension, but that has not stopped Jewish thinkers from attempting to describe God. The Jewish God is referred to with many names and euphemisms, though God's scriptural names are traditionally only pronounced during religious activities. Belief in one God is one of Judaism's defining characteristics. Nonetheless, some parts of the Torah seem less monotheistic than others. In addition, there are minor currents of thought within Judaism that play down the importance of belief in God.

Overview: This course will trace how humanity created the concept of God, and how that God is the answer to all of our thoughts, wants, and ideas from science to religion. From the very young to the very old the idea and concept of God evolves and grows just like we do.

Week 1 - Unit 1: God and Us
Description: In the beginning we start with our own personal beliefs and experiences with God In this unit we will introduce ourselves and discuss our own personal beliefs and experiences with God. What caused you to think and feel this way. Has it evolved over time? How does this belief serve you, and how could it serve the people you work with?

Assignment:
Watch the assigned video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVvKuI8oK3c (Oh, God! 1997)
Consider one or two these questions and please journal about them: Do you experience God? If so, how? If not, have you ever? What has your experience with God been like? If you could use any other word for God during this course what would it be and why?

The God of the Bible has a multitude of roles and attributes that often contrast sharply with each other. In this sense, God is like a person — experiencing a range of emotions, often torn between competing allegiances and values. The God of the Bible communicates with people through prophets and is even open to critique. Of the varied biblical representations of God, the two that became particularly prominent in Jewish thought are God's oneness and God's role as creator of the world.

Week 2 - Unit 2: God created God - article: GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE - Rabbi David Leiber's DHL
Description: Where God came from. There are over 100 names for God used in the Torah - Why? The God of the Bible is an evolving God. How are these titles different from and similar to one another. Equally the God of our for-father and mothers is different from that of the Prophets. How is each God portrayed depended on the book of the Torah we study?

Assignment:
Read and prepare to discuss Rabbi David Leiber's DHL (z''l) article - GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE
Journal assignment: What questions do you have to the God of the Hebrew Bible?

Classical rabbinic literature portrays God in a similar way. However, in rabbinic writings, God no longer communicates with people through prophecy, and God is no longer considered a direct legal authority. One of the most radical Jewish descriptions of God can be found in literature, an early corpus of mystical texts, which actually describes the physical dimensions of God. Though most early Jewish thinkers did not shy away from depicting God in human terms, Philo, a first-century philosopher, was an exception. He integrated Greek philosophy with Judaism and conceived of God in a more abstract way.

Week 3 - Unit 3: The God of the Greats - article: GOD IN MIDRASH By: RABBI ILANA GRINBLAT and GOD IN THE TALMUD By RABBI GAIL LABOVITZ PH.D.
Description: We jump in time to the rabbinic period in Judaism to look at how the rabbis of Midrash and the Talmud changed and shaped what God is. How has this God changed from the God of the Bible?

Assignment:
Read and prepare to discuss articles: GOD IN MIDRASH By: RABBI ILANA GRINBLAT and GOD IN THE TALMUD By RABBI GAIL LABOVITZ PH.D.
Journal challenge: Personal midrash - write a brief and sincere letter to god about anything on your mind. Then have God write one back to you. Just as sincerely.

The medieval philosophers departed from the non-systematic theology of biblical and rabbinic literature. Philosophers like Maimonides worked tirelessly to make their philosophical interests coincide with the truths of the Bible. They wrote proofs for the existence of God and struggled with passages in the Torah that seem to compromise God's unity. The medieval mystics–or kabbalists–also developed systematic theologies. They posited that God in Himself–known as the Ein Sof, or Infinite–cannot be discussed or described. However, God is revealed in the 10 sefirot, divine attributes or powers, and this manifest form of God is intelligible to humankind.

Week 4 - Unit 4: God in Kabbalah - article: GOD IN KABBALAH By RABBI PINCHAS GILLER, PH.D.
Description: The God of these mystical paths differs from that of the more tangible stories in the Torah. What does it mean to receive God as the Kabbalists assume? And what does it mean to cling to God like glue as the Hassidic masters propose? Additionally, knowing how Jewish law and practice evolved from Kabbalistic circles, how has beliefs in God impacted how we act and carry ourselves in the world.

Assignment:

Read and prepare to discuss article: GOD IN KABBALAH By RABBI PINCHAS GILLER, PH.D.
Journal: Your own thoughts about God during this point in time in our class.

Secularization and the values of the modern world have created challenges for traditional conceptions of the Jewish God. Jewish thinkers adjusted to the rationalistic universalism of early modern philosophy by focusing on the ethical implications of Judaism's belief in one God. Later, existentialists like Martin Buber focused on the experiential relationship between humans and God. Mordecai Kaplan and Richard Rubenstein took the challenges of scientific naturalism and the Holocaust so seriously that they rejected the traditional Jewish God. Finally, feminism raised serious questions about the problems of a male God.

Week 5 - Unit 5: The God of the Philosophers - article GOD IN MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT By RABBI ELLIOT DORFF, PH.D.
Description: God as an idea - not an entity. We now enter the world of the Jewish philosopher. God is more abstract here than any other time in Judaism. Concepts and ideas of God get reinterpreted and changed to fit a more esoteric line of thinking.

Assignment:
Read and prepare to discuss article GOD IN MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT By RABBI ELLIOT DORFF, PH.D.
Journal question: Did one philosophical approach stand out overs for you?

Week 6 - Unit 6: God and Revelation
Description: How many Jews are there in the world? That's how many Gods there are in the world. God is One, but the idea of God varies from person to person. how is it that we come to know God, and how might that different from movement to movement.

Assignment:
In class shiur
Journal question: When was the first time your felt you came to feel God's presence and could articulate it?

Week 7 - Unit 7: The God in Prayer
Description: How do we related to God through prayer? The God of prayer has roots in Biblical literature, but who, what, when, why is the God that we pray with in our Tefillah? Does God want, need, or care about our prayers?

Assignment:
In class shiur
Journal question: Do you pray? If so, why and how? If not, why and do you do something in it's place? What do you say?

Week 8 - Unit 8: The Forest from the Trees: God, Evil, and Us
Description: The perspective of this class with be as a forest from the trees. Although we will also draw on our own personal perspectives to inform this conversation as well. Nonetheless, we will wrestle with what it means to experience evil in God's world.

Assignment:
In class shiur
Journal question: Can you recall a time in which you witnessed God's response to Evil in our world?

Week 9 - Unit 9: God and Us Revisited - article: GOD AND US By RABBI JONATHAN WITTENBERG
Description: In our final unit will we recall the beliefs we shared in the first class and explore how they may have evolved. This conversation will require looking back over all of the previous classes to determine what might have given us further questions to consider.

Assignment:
Read and prepare to discuss article: GOD AND US By RABBI JONATHAN WITTENBERG
Journal assignment: Choose to continue to journal about your thoughts and experiences with God.