

Recognize the Ebb and Flow of Relationship

Our yearning for God does not get satisfied once and for all. We all know periods when our relationship with God feels absent. At such times, our hearts resonate with the words of the psalmist (Psalm 69:4): "I am weary with calling, my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for God."

At other times we feel God's presence gracing our lives and we open ourselves to the beauty of the world and of our relationship with all that is within and around us. But inevitably such moments fade and we find ourselves yearning to sense God's nearness again.

Ways to Grow in our Relationship with God

There are many ways that we can respond to our yearning for and grow in our relationship with God:

- *Explore the resources of your local synagogue* on spirituality and consider finding a few others with whom to start a spiritual support group.
- *Find a spiritual guide* with whom you can talk about your spiritual life. Set up regular times to meet to discern ways in which God is present (and absent) in your life.
- *Find a spiritual friend* and listen to one another regularly to provide witness and support.

- *Cultivate a personal spiritual practice / discipline.* This might be daily meditation or prayer, regular study, taking on a particular mitzvah you feel will deepen your spiritual life.

Guide Us on Our Journey

Spiritual yearning takes us on a journey toward greater insight, love, wisdom and compassion. Let us awaken to the miracle of our breathing, the gift of our food, the cosmic carnival of the earth rotating around the sun, which allows for our very existence. Let us open ourselves to greater awareness, deeper appreciation and keener sensitivity to God's presence in our lives. And let us give thanks to You, Eternal God, *HaMekhin mitzadei gaver*, "who guides us on our journey."

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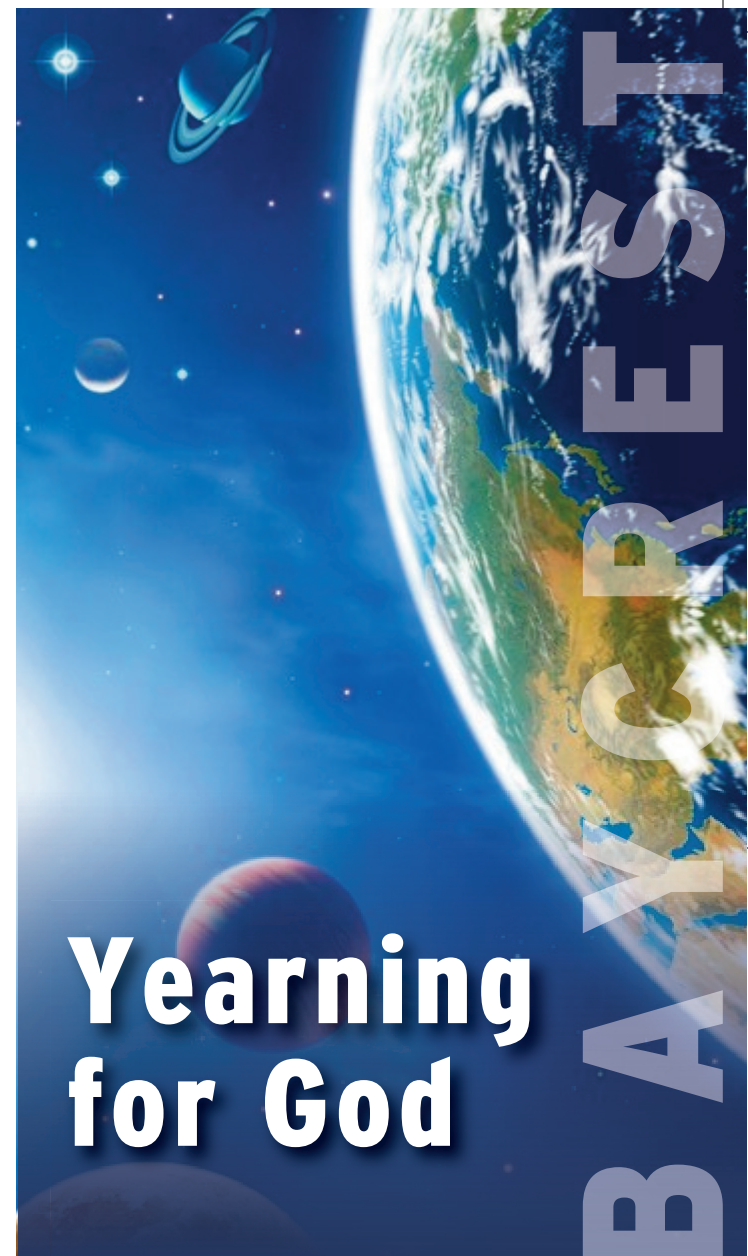


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Searching for God's Presence

Many people, if not most, don't talk much about God, yet many of those same people yearn for depth, connection and truth beyond themselves. Often this is the yearning for God. Although at times challenging, there is great peace that comes from knowing God's presence: cultivating an open and responsive heart; being alert to the vitality within and around us; experiencing ourselves as part of an interconnected whole and recognizing the beauty, awe, wonder and mystery of creation.

Recognize Our Yearning

We experience our yearning for God in many ways. Sometimes our yearning begins with an underlying sense of emptiness or shallowness. We may feel lost or that something is missing in our lives. Sometimes we desire greater fullness and vitality in our lives to fill the emptiness we feel. We desire a deeper relationship with God in which we might discover profound beauty, worth and meaning.

For others of us, yearning for God comes at a particular crossroad in our lives: when our physical or mental health is challenged, or in the midst of a life change such as marriage, divorce, the birth of children or the loss of a loved one. We yearn for God as a source of comfort, hope or perspective; an assurance that our lives make sense.

Sometimes, our yearning is connected to a special moment that we experienced but from which we now feel distanced: a deep peace after a walk in the woods, a sense of union with a beloved, a fleeting insight when all creation felt coherent and whole. When we seek to reconnect in such a way, then we are already in a relationship with God.



Love as Metaphor and Manifestation of God

Jewish mystics describe human yearning for God as the intense desire of the lover for the beloved. Being near God can be awesome and overwhelmingly frightening. We feel that sense of awe when we lie awake during the crack of thunder at night,

when we walk beneath towering trees in a forest, when we stand before death or witness the birth of a child. But being close to God can also be incomparably sweet, comforting and beautiful like being in love. Love dissolves the boundaries of the self and relaxes the ego's defenses, enabling us to extend beyond our sense of self.



Connecting with Something Bigger than Us

Yearning for God expresses the desire to connect with something bigger than the self, to feel the interconnection of all being and all creation as well as the unity that underlies it. This sense of connection happens in different ways: in nature, in intimate personal relationships, in prayer, in meditation and in religious ritual. These moments can fill us with a sense of belonging, comfort and meaning. When we experience our yearning for God, we need to focus on activities that will help us find God's presence in our lives. Developing regular spiritual practices can help us cultivate and maintain our relationship with God.

