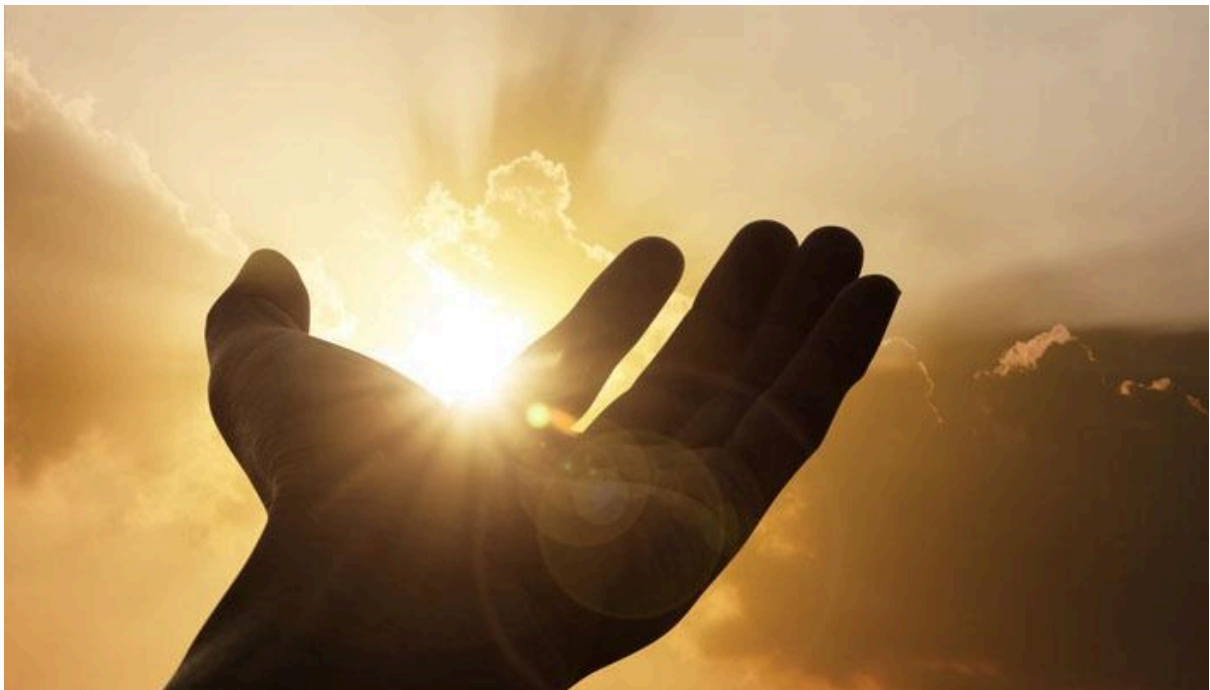


What does the Jews' covenant with God mean?

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We live our lives as a tapestry of relationships: with parents, siblings, partners and other relatives; with friends, neighbors, and colleagues; with the larger world and the environment; and with God. Our relationships are a lens through which we see ourselves because we gain self-understanding when we consider how others see us and feel about us. In addition, our relationships are a vehicle for our interaction with the world. Jewish tradition teaches us to take each relationship seriously by nurturing and attending to it so it can be as healthy and constructive as possible.

Jews believe that we have a covenant with God. A covenant is a relationship of reciprocal love, caring, and loyalty. Individuals can have covenants with one another — marriage is a covenantal relationship — but the covenant that the People Israel has with God involves the entire people. One of the chief benefits of that special relationship is that it helps to define us as a people who have connections (relationships) with one another because we are all party to the same covenant with

God. In other words, it contributes to our communal self-understanding and encourages us to examine who we are in relation to God, and who we ought to be. Another benefit, arising from the first benefit, is that it reminds us that *everyone* in the community is a member of the covenant and important to God, and therefore, they should be important to us; no one should be permitted to slip through the cracks. A third benefit is that our covenant with God helps us focus on our obligation to live as our tradition teaches — the way God wants us to live: generously, compassionately, and with concern for justice and the welfare of others.