At bedtime a little girl asks her Dad, where is God? The father, says to the girl, “touch my arm.” She touches his arm. He says to her, “touch my head.” She touches his head. He says to her, “touch my chest.” She touches his chest. Then he says to her, “touch my Love.” She reaches for his arm, his head, and his chest. The father responds, “you already touched those, now touch my love.” But she could not, and she smiles at him.

Rabbi Harold Schulweis, explains that what his daughter was experiencing in this bedtime game was an introduction to a deeper understanding of faith, an understanding of faith that is neither literal nor completely free of form. A few weeks later when they repeated the game, he asked her, “Where is love?” This time she did not touch him but pointed to her own chest, saying love is inside of me. He said to her, if that is where love is then hug yourself, kiss your hand. At this she and he both laughed as they realized the flatness and emptiness of these gestures. It was at this moment that the little girl discovers that Love requires an other, that it exists ‘between” people, not solely in either one of them, but as a result of the feelings and emotions that two people bring to an encounter, a relationship.

Like love, God exists in the “betweenness” of two things. In the gap created between what our mind and reasoning tells us to do, and what the Torah commands us. God, like love flows back and forth between what we know and what we feel. This understanding of God, is not literal, it is not entirely the Adonai or Eloheim of the Torah, nor is it only our individual instinct and intuition of how the world works. The God that the young girl struggles to find, that like love is impossible to touch, can be found in the space between Torah and reason, between intuition and commandment. In the space, created by these two separate foundations of our life, hangs a bridge. And if we travel that bridge, somewhere along the way we will encounter God.

The first person to travel that bridge was Abraham. As the Midrash tells it, when Abraham was a young man, maybe of Bar Mitzvah age like Marissa he was helping his father mind the family store. His father Terah was an idol maker, one day Terah went away on business, perhaps an idol convention in Las Vegas (they were in the desert). While he was away, Terah left Abraham to mind the store. Abraham was not a very good idol salesmen. Three times a customer came into the store to purchase an idol, and all three times Abraham insulted the customer to the point that they left.

Towards the very end of the day a woman came into the store with plate full of flour and requested that Abraham offer it to the idols. Abraham became infuriated at this request, he put the plate down, picked up a stick and smashed all the idols to pieces.

When his father came home and saw the idols he had made laying in pieces on the floor, he called to Abraham. “Abraham, what happened here.” Abraham explained that a woman had come with a plateful of flour and requested that I offer it to the idol. As I was offering it to them, one of the idols yelled out, I want to eat it first, thereupon another idol yelled out. No me first, to this the largest of the idols said no I will eat first, and he took a stick and smashed all the smaller idols to pieces.” Terah got very mad at this, “Abraham what do you take me for a fool, are you not listening to what your own mouth is saying, these idols are just stone they couldn’t have done any of what you have just said.” To this Abraham replied, then why do we worship them, why bow down to them, why make offerings to them. And thus began Abraham’s journey to understand God.

Abraham first conceived of a God that was more than physical, whose powers were significant and full of wonder when he was in his early teens.

One morning Abraham went out into the field and began to wonder about God. If the Idols his father built were not God, then who created the sun that hung in the sky. Abraham reasoned that the sun must be God because it dominated everything around it, and all of the earth below. But as night followed day, and the moon rose higher as the sun descended, Abraham realized that the moon, must be more powerful than the sun, and that it must be God. All night long Abraham stared at the moon, amazed by its awesome power, comforted that he had finally found God. But when morning came, the moon disappeared and the sun rose again. This puzzled Abraham, if neither of these two was more powerful than the other, then whatever controlled them, what ever made then rise and set, that must be God.

For Abraham whatever God was, it was not simply a stone one created and it was not something that shared its power with anything else. These two basic tenants of our faith, principles of Judaism that we perhaps take for granted, are not the result of a direct instruction from God, it is not that Abraham was commanded to think this or believe this. No Abraham arrived at the conclusion on his own, faith was his guide, but reason his tool. When we look at Judaism and the Torah only through the eyes of a literalist, when we see the Israelites accepting the Ten Commandments only because God

told them to. When the Torah becomes for us a history book, and nothing more then we deny ourselves the purpose of our creation, the use of our insight as well as our faith to understand the world.

When I was a little boy my Mom would endlessly chastise me about wearing a jacket when it was cold out. The rule in the house was put on a jacket when you go outside, but if she caught me outside without a jacket her response was not to repeat the rule, instead she would yell out to me, “Danny use a little sechel, have some common sense its raining cats and dogs put on a Jacket.” Mind you I have yet to see it rain cats and dogs, but her point was no different than why God created people with a mind and the ability to reason. God in the Torah commands us to believe, V’ahavtah et Adonai elohehcha, You shall love Adonai your God. But our tradition, again much like my mother and the jacket would much rather we arrive at that conclusion through a process of reason, then some rote application of a commandment we have not tried to understand. For Abraham and for us, loving God and believing in God is something he wants to do, but find hard to do. Its difficulty does not stop him from searching for an understanding that makes sense, it instead prompts him to look deeper, to think harder to try and understand, that which seems impossible to understand.

Many of us either give up on trying to understand why we believe what we believe attributing it all to being commanded to do so or others find the whole process too hard, too difficult and while they have not lost their desire to believe in something they would rather give it up than take the time to figure it out. For both the believer who does not understand why, and the non-believer who does not understand what they don't believe, Abraham's application of reason can be a teaching. When we give up, throw up our hands and say I don't care, I believe and that's the end of it, or I don't believe and that's the end of it, we commit the greatest of sins, we stop believing in ourselves, and our own abilities to figure things out.

Philosopher Carlye Marney offers this insight, she wrote "A window stuck open is as useless as a window stuck closed." Our own failures to pursue an understanding of why we believe what we believe, may be traced for some to a window stuck open that hides our ignorance, or a window stuck closed that stifles our curiosity. Our own good sense, our reason is the window and a window locked in one position only serves half its purpose. Questions about God, searching for God are the lubrication, the WD-40 for

the stuck window of our soul. We must not run from what we don't understand, but confront it, explore it, reason with it, find a way to touch love.

One more story of Abraham, in this week's parsha we read the near sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac. How could a man of reason be led to believe that God wanted him to sacrifice his son? Faith in God led Abraham from his tent with his son Isaac, faith in God guided him on his three day walk to Mt. Moriah. Faith in God caused him to bind his son and place him on the alter, but reason stayed his hand, reason prevented the knife from reaching his son.

The Torah declares, that an angel of the Lord called to Abraham, "Abraham, Abraham" He answered "He'naini, here I am" And then the angel of the Lord said to him, "Lay not your hand upon the boy, nor do anything to him" The angel's voice came from inside of Abraham, it came from his reason, his conscience. Abraham told himself that the God he believed in would not want him to kill his son, would not want the blade to reach its mark. Reason stayed Abraham's hand. Abraham had come so close to Torah in his journey, that he knew to get any closer would be to lose his sense of self, that sense that had guided him in his faith from the time he smashed his

father's idols. Abraham took one step back from the text, one step away from a literal view of everything the Torah commands, and that one step allowed him to see the whole world with clarity, neither blinded by the overwhelming brilliance of a literal view of God, nor senseless and confused from a view of the world without God.

Our goal need not be absolute faith, nor the converse, our goal should be to understand, to apply reason everyday in our life. To make our decisions out of wisdom not ignorance blinded by neither love nor hate, to see clearly through a window on the world neither stuck open nor stuck closed.