

# How to Use Speaking of Faith Discussion Guides

## Facilitator Notes



### *From Krista Tippett*

I'm delighted that you've purchased this Discussion Guide. I hope you find it a meaningful extension of your experience of Speaking of Faith.

These Discussion Guides were developed with a number of possible settings in mind—places of worship, schools, religious education study groups, family discussions, and informal gatherings such as book clubs. Our aim is to help you find ways to carry on the conversations you hear on Speaking of Faith—to trace the program's intersection of religious ideas and real life in your family or community. In my experience, when we do that, we also learn how to walk that line together more imaginatively and practically.

Feel free to adapt this guide to your particular needs and interests. Don't feel compelled to refer to it as a textbook, or to work through every single question. We've composed a wide range of topics and questions so you can choose the most important, most resonant and most appropriate for your group. You might focus deeply on a single question or move through many. You may work through the topic in one discussion, or extend it over two or more.

This guide is designed to be useful whether or not you have listened to the program. But it may enrich your experience to listen to all or part before you gather for conversation. Programs are available at [speakingoffaith.org](http://speakingoffaith.org)—you can stream the audio, or support Speaking of Faith by purchasing the program on CD or as an MP3 download.

What comes next? We'd love to hear from *you*. We're excited to learn where this guide leads you, and how we can join with our listeners and Web visitors to make each conversation smarter, wiser, and more fruitful. We will use your feedback as we explore the many ways we can keep working and talking together. Write to us at [mail@speakingoffaith.org](mailto:mail@speakingoffaith.org).

—Krista Tippett, host, Speaking of Faith

### About Speaking of Faith

Speaking of Faith is public radio's conversation about religion, meaning, ethics, and ideas. It is produced and distributed by American Public Media. Each week, Krista Tippett and her guests ask how perspectives of faith might distinctively inform and illuminate our public reflection.

Speaking of Faith learning materials are developed with major funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

## Einstein and the Mind of God: Einstein's God Discussion Guide



Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein (courtesy AIP Emilio Segre Visual Archives)

### *From Krista Tippett*

**A**lbert Einstein was raised in a Jewish home. He rejected traditional faith at a young age, though his Jewish identity was important to him again later in life. He didn't believe in a personal God who would interfere with the laws of physics. But he was fascinated with the ingenuity of those laws and expressed awe at the very fact of their existence. All of his life, he thrilled to all he could not yet understand. He was more than content with what he called a "cosmic religious sense"—animated by "inklings" and "wondering," rather than answers and conclusions.

With physicists Paul Davies and Freeman Dyson we explore Albert Einstein's way of thinking about God, mystery and eternity. With Paul Davies, I was able to pursue how Einstein changed our view of space and especially time, a subject that has always intrigued me. Before Einstein, as Davies describes it, human beings thought of space and time as fixed and immutable, the backdrop to the great show of life. But we now know they are elastic and intertwined, part of the show themselves. Though we are scarcely aware of this in daily life, time does not move at the same rate for everyone, everywhere. It is, in a word, relative. Furthermore, Einstein described our perception of time as an arrow—traversing linear and compartmentalized past, present, and future—as a "stubbornly persistent illusion." Such language is evocative from a religious standpoint. Davies finds an affinity between Einstein's view of time and the religious notion of a reality "beyond time," and of "the eternal."

*All of his life,  
[Einstein] thrilled  
to all he could not  
yet understand.*

*continued* ►

### About Speaking of Faith

Speaking of Faith is public radio's conversation about religion, meaning, ethics, and ideas. It is produced and distributed by American Public Media. Each week, Krista Tippett and her guests ask how perspectives of faith might distinctively inform and illuminate our public reflection.

Speaking of Faith learning materials are developed with major funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

Production of "Einstein's God" is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Einstein and the Mind of God: Einstein's God

### Discussion Guide



I'd like to share one of the most heartening, wise pieces of writing by the spiritual Einstein I found in my research. Einstein was a passionate letter writer. One of his correspondents, for a time, was Queen Elisabeth of Belgium. He had struck up a warm friendship with her and her husband, King Albert, just before World War II. In one tragic season in the midst of already tumultuous political times, her husband died suddenly, as did her daughter-in-law. Einstein wrote to her:

. . . Mrs. Barjansky wrote to me how gravely living in itself causes you suffering and how numbed you are by the indescribably painful blows that have befallen you.

And yet we should not grieve for those who have gone from us in the primes of their lives after happy and fruitful years of activity, and who have been privileged to accomplish in full measure their task in life.

Something there is that can refresh and revivify older people: joy in the activities of the younger generation—a joy, to be sure, that is clouded by dark forebodings in these unsettled times. And yet, as always, the springtime sun brings forth new life, and we may rejoice because of this new life and contribute to its unfolding; and Mozart remains as beautiful and tender as he always was and always will be. There is, after all, something eternal that lies beyond the hand of fate and of all human delusions. And such eternals lie closer to an older person than to a younger one oscillating between fear and hope. For us, there remains the privilege of experiencing beauty and truth in their purest forms . . . .

I now have a new sense of Albert Einstein—as a wise man, not just a great mind. He was fully human and flawed, but he was undeniably an original, and not just as a scientist. If past, present and future are an illusion, as he said, none of us ever really disappears; we all leave our imprint on what is now. I have a profound sense of Einstein's imprint, and it comforts me. I suspect that if he heard he was the subject of a program called *Speaking of Faith* in the early twenty-first century, he would make a funny, kindly, self-deprecating quip. But if he could listen with twenty-first-century ears, he might be intrigued by how his generous, questioning, “cosmic” religious sense is deeply kindred with the religious and spiritual yearnings of our age.



—Krista Tippett, host, *Speaking of Faith*

### Visit [speakingoffaith.org](http://speakingoffaith.org)

For more information about *Speaking of Faith* and the topic of this discussion guide, or to sign up for a weekly e-mail newsletter or free weekly podcasts, visit [speakingoffaith.org](http://speakingoffaith.org).

## Einstein and the Mind of God: Einstein's God

### Discussion Questions



*I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings.*

Albert Einstein

1. In describing his religious views, Einstein wrote, "I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves. Enough for me, the mystery of the eternity of life and the inkling of the marvelous structure of reality, together with the single-hearted endeavor to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the reason that manifests itself in nature."
  - *Do you find it difficult to imagine a God who is capable of both creating the universe and taking an interest in the lives of individual human beings? Why or why not?*
  - *What experiences have given you an "inkling of the marvelous structure of reality"? For example, birthing a child, witnessing an eclipse, harvesting a garden, etc. How did these experiences inform your understanding of God?*
  
2. Einstein describes his childhood experience of seeing a compass for the first time: "This needle behaved in such a determined way and did not fit into the usual explanation of how the world works. That is that you must touch something to move it." The experience made a deep and lasting impression that prompted him to conclude, "There must be something deeply hidden behind everything." He spent his life seeking to comprehend that hidden order and to describe it mathematically. Einstein often spoke of this as his longing to understand what God was thinking.
  - *What is your earliest recollection of an experience that "did not fit into the usual explanation of how the world works"? Was it a positive experience that prompted wonder, or a negative experience that led to disillusionment?*
  - *In your view, does the idea that mathematics reveals a hidden order behind everything support or detract from the notion of a divine Creator?*
  
3. In an address at a conference on science, philosophy and religion in 1941, Albert Einstein declared that science can only be created by those who aspire toward truth and understanding. He famously concluded: "Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind."
  - *What examples (recent or historical) can you think of that might illustrate Einstein's statement, "Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind"?*
  - *In contemporary culture, do you feel there is a good balance between science and religion, or is one considered more authoritative than the other?*

## Einstein and the Mind of God: Einstein's God

### Discussion Questions

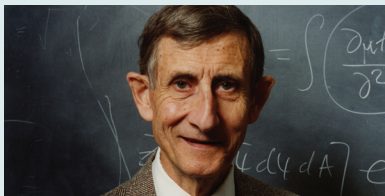


*[Einstein] took a very solemn view of science. And science was, to him, a religion. . . He said that anybody who does not approach science with religious awe is not a true scientist.*

**Freeman Dyson**

*The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead. A snuffed-out candle."*

**Albert Einstein,**  
*The World as I See It*



**Freeman Dyson** is a theoretical physicist and professor emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He has published many scientific papers and written many books, including, *Disturbing the Universe*.

**4.** Physicist Freeman Dyson states, "The world is full of mysteries . . . Every time we discover something, we find two more questions to ask, and so there is no end of mysteries in science. That's what it's all about. And the same is true of religion.

- *Have you ever thought of science as something that is characterized by mystery? Why or why not?*
- *Are you more comfortable with the idea of mystery in science or in religion?*
- *In your experience, is religion more about a pursuit of questions or a pursuit of answers?*

**5.** Einstein thought a great deal about measuring time. His theory of relativity identifies the so-called Big Bang as the origin of time—that there is no time before it. Physicist Paul Davies points out that Augustine, a fifth-century theologian, considered the same issue and arrived at a similar conclusion—that the world and time were created simultaneously. According to Davies, Augustine "placed God outside of time altogether, a timeless, eternal being."

- *Do you find it surprising that both a scientist and a theologian would arrive at similar conclusions about the concept of eternity? Why or why not?*
- *What is your view of the concept of eternity?*
- *What answer might you give to a child who asks, "What was God doing before he created the universe?"*

**6.** Paul Davies draws a parallel between Einstein's view of time and the Australian aboriginal concept of "Dreamtime." Dreamtime acknowledges two times—the one by which we live our lives, and then an abstract notion that might be considered the opposite of time—perhaps eternity. This dualism acknowledges that there is time and there is eternity, and some things have an existence outside of time.

- *Do you believe time and eternity are like parallel lines—coexistent but separate? Or do you believe time and eternity may be interactive—that it's possible to have points of contact between the two?*
- *Have you ever had an experience in which time felt absent or altered? Describe what happened.*
- *Assuming the dualism of Dreamtime, what things (or beings) would you like to imagine having an existence outside of time?*

## Einstein and the Mind of God: Einstein's God

### Discussion Questions



*My religiosity consists in a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little that we, with our weak and transitory understanding, can comprehend of reality. Morality is of the highest importance, but for us, not for God.*

**Albert Einstein**

*I'm not an atheist and I don't think I can call myself a pantheist. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many different languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God.*

**Albert Einstein**



**Paul Davies** is a theoretical physicist and founder and director of Beyond: Center for Fundamental Concepts in Science at Arizona State University. He has written widely about Einstein's understanding of time, including *How to Build a Time Machine*.

7. In acknowledging how physics impacts one's view of the universe and our place within it, Paul Davies first notes the perspective of physicist Steven Weinberg who has said, "The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless." Davies then articulates his own perspective: "Weinberg sees the same facts as I do but without coming himself to believe that there's any point behind it all. And that's where he and I will part company. We'd agree on all of the science, but to me it overwhelmingly suggests that the universe is about something, that there is a point to it, and that we're part of whatever point that is." So Davies, contrary to Weinberg, maintains that the more we understand about the universe, the more likely it is that we will share in its meaning.
- *Whose perspective—Weinberg's or Davies'—comes closest to your view?*
  - *Assuming Davies' perspective, what do you imagine might be the point or purpose of the universe? What role would humanity play in achieving that purpose?*

## Einstein and the Mind of God: Einstein's God

Notes



### Resources

For additional resources about this topic, review Program Details at <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/einstein/index.shtml>