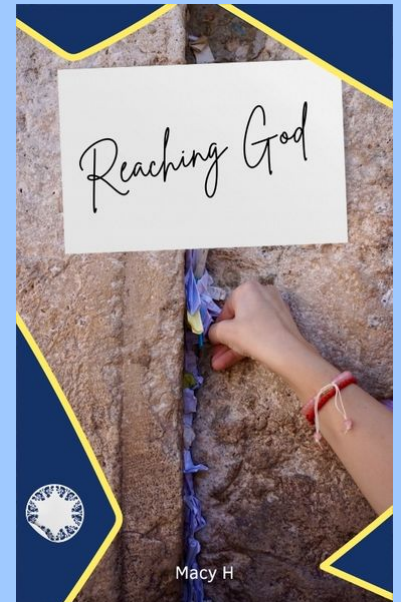




Reaching God



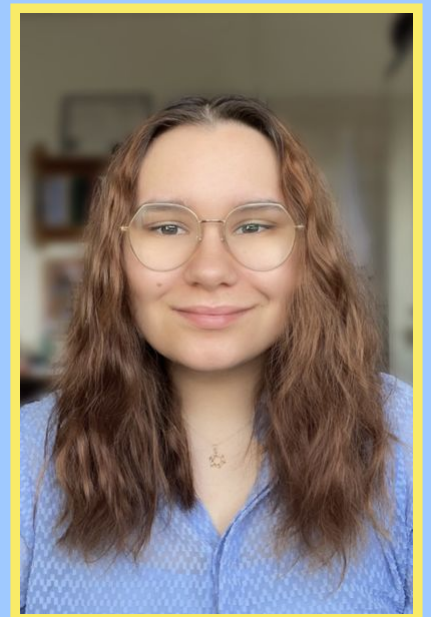
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Writing language: **English**

The connection I made there, between flesh and stone and God, is unbreakable, I know that; it has given me strength through difficult times, brought me gratitude for the things and people around me, and showed me joy in the places where it had once been absent.



In the past year or so, I've spoken (and written) a lot about how my relationship with God and my faith has changed. Mostly, this has involved the things that are visible to those around me; no longer wearing trousers, observing holidays and Shabbat more closely, and focusing on my religion in my daily life, but there is a more personal, more intrinsic difference within myself that most people don't see – perhaps because it isn't so obvious to them.

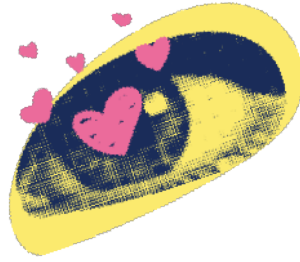
In April 2023, I visited Israel for the first time and I have thought about it most days since. When I look back, I can pinpoint the day that I visited the Kotel, Shabbat, as the day when everything in my life changed. I can still remember the most minor details from that evening, from what I was wearing – a white shirt with embroidered sunflowers and a yellow dress – to the weather in Jerusalem – warm, but not suffocatingly so. It's like that day is etched into my mind, those moments where everything stood still and raced forwards simultaneously.

I think, still, of the apprehensive steps I took down towards the Kotel, with hands covering my eyes and butterflies escaping the nest of my stomach. In truth, I felt nauseous; I had so many worries, mostly that I wouldn't feel anything at all or, even worse, that it would feel wrong in some way. It's almost confusing to me how these were the thoughts that consumed my mind in those moments, yet I still remember every step, every stone under my feet, every miniscule, seemingly unimportant thing, but I'm infinitely grateful that I do.



I realise that my worries were a result of overthinking, but I'd seen so many people talking about how their experience at the Kotel, especially their first, had shaped them in some way and how it had become such an important aspect of who they are. I wanted that for myself; I wanted that life-altering moment, that singular experience that would define who I was and who I would become. What I didn't realise, through all of my anxieties, through all of my expectations, was just how much would change, not just for me, but within me, too.

The few minutes that it took me to walk up to the Kotel all led to the moment that I placed my hand upon it. When my palm and my fingers rested against stone thousands of years old, it felt to me as though God took my hand and held it in return. My entire body felt alight, consumed by something inconceivable that I couldn't understand and still fail to.



In the simplest terms, I suppose I would say that the world around me became narrow. Anyone who has visited the Kotel will be able to tell you how busy it is; you have to push for your place at the wall and, even then, there will be multiple people pressed up against you, desperate to say their own prayers and to speak to God. It is, generally, overstimulating and overwhelming, but the moment that I placed my hand against that stone, all of it disappeared.

There were no whispered prayers or cries filling my ears, no bodies pressed against my own, no evening sun warming my skin; there was just God, just stone, and nothing else.

I'm not entirely sure of how long I stood there, reading prayers from a siddur before abandoning them in favour of simply talking to God, but in my memories, it feels like a lifetime. I said once, in an extended essay for a university module, that when I walked away, eventually, from the Kotel, not turning my back on the stone wall, I felt as though I never stopped facing towards it, as though every moment of my life since, I have been turned towards it. Those words still ring true for me.

So, it's that day, twenty months ago as I write this, that has sculpted every moment since. I speak to God frequently and, though I never quite feel the way I did that Shabbat at the Kotel, I know I'm being heard. The connection I made there, between flesh and stone and God, is unbreakable, I know that; it has given me strength through difficult times, brought me gratitude for the things and people around me, and showed me joy in the places where it had once been absent.

What I mean to say is that, yes, I have made a few changes outwardly since. I talk of God more, I dress differently, I observe my faith in a different way, but none of that compares to the singular change within me; that I see and feel God in everything, everywhere, at all times.

