

# How To Answer The Big Questions

*By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok  
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Many ask the big questions; who or what is G-d and what does G-d want from us? In order to answer the second question, the first must also be answered. What G-d wants from us is integrally bound up with our awareness of who and what G-d is? One with a mistaken view of G-d will by definition only have a mistaken view of what G-d wants. So, before we ask what G-d wants let us seek to answer who is G-d in the first place.

Asking about G-d is no small task. There are so many centuries of embellished myths and legends to overcome. Most people today, in one way or another, hold to the rather juvenile belief that G-d is some kind of super/greater human being; an old man with a long white beard sitting on a cloud or a throne with throngs of ministering angels, all with cute little wings, serving before Him. These novel portrayals can be found in the most ancient of literature.

Yet, modern people fail to understand that the writers of these accounts were writing using poetic metaphors. They never intended their accounts to be understood literally. Ancient Semitic writers were by no means rationalists by modern standards. The rationalism of ancient Semitic writers was by our modern definition both poetic and mystical. To put it in terms familiar with Torah Judaism, their pshat is not our pshat. How the ancients thought and wrote and what they considered to be simple and straightforward are radically different from how we are today. Their spirituality was far from juvenile; but our understandings or better to say, misunderstandings of what they wrote is what is truly juvenile.

When a modern rationalist comes to the metaphorical accounts recorded in Torah, written as it is from an ancient Semitic point of view, they often misinterpret the style of the writing and mistakenly interpret metaphors as literal. This misinterpretation is by no means rational. Therefore one making such a mistake cannot honestly be called a rationalist and certainly not a scholar. There is another term used to describe those who are unable to recognize the true rationale in ancient Semitic literature all the while claiming that theirs is the true understanding. Such individuals are called fundamentalists.

There are all different types of fundamentalists. There are secular fundamentalists who look at the ancient Semitic metaphorical accounts recorded in Torah and dismiss them out of hand as outdated nonsense. Then there are the religious fundamentalists who embrace the ancient accounts as literal truths, seemingly oblivious to their original intent. One side rejects the literal account and the other side embraces it;

both sides however are grievously in error in that they view the metaphorical as literal and respond to it according to their own individual agendas.

I am sure if the original writers of Torah and later prophetic literature were alive today they would reject the fundamentalists of both sides and explain their Semitic poetic metaphorical writings in ways that the honestly rational of minds would today appreciate and embrace.

In order to properly understand G-d and what G-d wants from us, we have to approach the original Torah and prophetic material from the point of view of those who wrote the literature and not from the point of view of modern day fundamentalists, who in very unscholarly ways, misinterpret it.

Fundamentalists, both secular and religious, essentially perpetuate a serious crime against religion, spirituality and G-d Himself. By interpreting metaphor as literal and poetry as prose, they have totally confused the true identity and reality of G-d and have served to distance countless numbers from the truths of spiritual reality. In order to properly understand both G-d and Torah one must be rational in the way the term was originally understood by the ancient authors and not how the meaning of the term has been skewered today.

Rationalism is an interesting and often misunderstood term. It has been embraced by fundamentalists today who claim that they are the true rationalists. Yet, the true rationalist's views the fundamentalist as being nothing other than a primitive boor. True rationalists are seekers of truth, regardless of where such truth may lead them; they cannot afford to be dogmatic. While they understand the concept of faith, they also understand its parameters. True rationalists seek to understand the universe; they are seekers of natural law and objective truths. They have zero patience for fundamental proclamations that refuse to mature with expanding realities.

Centuries ago there arose the great Rabbi Maimonides. Aside from being a world class physician and leading Torah scholar, he was also a scientist and seeker of natural truth. In his day the highest level of scientific accomplishment was expressed through Aristotelian philosophy. Therefore, Maimonides used Aristotle to explain Torah and reality most specifically in his book, Moreh Nebukhim, the Guide for the Perplexed.

Maimonides took advantage of the best information available in his day. If he were alive today, he would have definitely looked at modern scientific discovery and like every other scientist today, he would leave Aristotle behind in the distant past. Maimonides today would certainly have been a student of modern Quantum physics, String and "M" theories, with all their talk of parallel dimensions and alternate realities. He would also have found modern scientific discoveries to fit very comfortably with anciently revealed Torah wisdom, very much unlike Aristotle.

Here is where we distinguish between the true rationalist and the fundamentalist. Like Maimonides the true rationalist will expand his definition of what is and is not rational based upon the expanding horizons of reality. Whereas the fundamentalist will only look at the past and never look at the reality of the present. By doing so,

they miss the reality of what is and cling to the fantasy and fiction of what was once believed.

This difference between true rationalist and fundamentalist is critical to our understanding of the nature of G-d. The fundamentalist still clings to his immature and juvenile ideas and attitudes. The fundamentalist hides his face from reality and discovery. He refuses to accept truth because truth requires change and change is something the fundamentalist is not willing to do.

The true rationalist on the other hand seeks to know truth, to grow and mature through education, as discovery leads to greater and deeper understandings of ultimate truth. The one time Aristotelian has graduated to Einstein and from Einstein to the Quantum and from the Quantum to the Strings and the M. From here, who knows where the next step in the great process of discovery will take us. One thing is of course certain, the more and more we learn about science and nature, the closer and closer we come to the actual truth of the reality of the Creator.

Who is G-d? The answer depends upon who you ask; the true rationalist or the fundamentalist. What does G-d want of us? This too depends upon who you ask; the true rationalist or the fundamentalist. One will answer you with childlike stubbornness and rigidity. One will answer you with maturity that comes about through discovery and the embrace of deeper understandings of truth.

One thing is certain, true science will never ever contradict true Torah. Ultimately the two are one. There is only one objective reality underlying all our subjective perceptions of reality. The spiritual child obviously needs to grow up before it can appreciate the deeper truths of the adult. The fundamentalist too needs to expand his narrow horizons before he can see for himself the true broader horizons that the true rationalist sees ever so clearly.

G-d is not a little old man with a white beard warning us to be nice and not naughty. There are no such actual realities as the portrayals our Sages described using physical metaphors. Our Sages used the common vernacular to describe to us abstract spiritual realities. This is the only way to relate these abstract concepts to the infantile fundamentalist mind. Yet, once we mature we must go beyond child's play.

The deeper understandings of spiritual truths have always been safeguarded by our Sages. They were called secrets, the Sodot of the Torah. These deeper levels of understanding were kept secret not so much for their own protection but rather to protect the infantile mind from confusion before their ability to mature and integrate greater discovery.

Spiritual maturity is therefore necessary for one to become a true rationalist, similar to Maimonides. Mind you, even the fundamentalists in his day condemned Maimonides because they could not fathom the depths of his rationalism. Can we imagine what Maimonides would say today in light of modern science and how much opposition today this would generate?

So, who is G-d? What has science and discovery revealed to us about the true nature of reality? The secular atheist will loudly proclaim that science teaches absolutely nothing about a Creator. Yet, we recognize that even the secular atheist is in his own way a fundamentalist who refuses to accept uncomfortable truths. Modern science clearly reveals the wondrous "Hand" underlying our universe and how profound reality truly is. Modern science has discovered the "Big Bang" origin of our universe. They now know for sure that Aristotle was wrong and that our universe had a beginning. Logic necessarily dictates that if there is a beginning, then there must too be a beginner that initiated the process.

Call it Intelligent Design. Therefore, call G-d the Intelligent Designer. He is not a little old man; he is not human at all. Indeed, He is not even a "He." In spite of Torah and religious vernacular it is more accurate to refer to G-d as an "It," a reality that transcends everything human. G-d therefore is the Intelligence of the universe, the Universal Mind and the Consciousness of Creation.

Centuries ago, many of our Sages used Hebrew terms that describe these very concepts. G-d was called the Sekhel HaPoal, the Active Intelligence. Indeed even the Torah itself expresses this concept. G-d's Name in Hebrew, spelled Yod Kay Vav Kay is derived from the Hebrew root for the verb "to be." The verb "Hovey" means "being." When adding the prefix Hebrew letter Yod, we take the base form of the root verb and transform it grammatically from the passive to the active tense. Thus "Yod-Hovey" would translate as Active Being, or Being in Action. This is no little old man or any other kind of super-human. This is a reality so transcendent and different that we cannot possibly imagine it or in any way ascribe to it any type of form. This is the underlying reasoning to the Second (of the Ten) Commandments, not to portray G-d with any image or form.

We have such a profound truth and such a profound Torah that expresses that truth. We do serious injustice to both the Creator and His Torah by viewing them with fundamental immaturity.

What then does the Intelligent Designer wants of us? I would say that "It" wants from us is to be intelligent as It Itself is. To be intelligent as is the Intelligent Designer requires of us that we embrace reality. Yet, in order to embrace reality, we must first know what it is. If we do not explore then we will never discover. Therefore, only when one outgrows the fundamentalist mentality can one begin to walk the proper path.

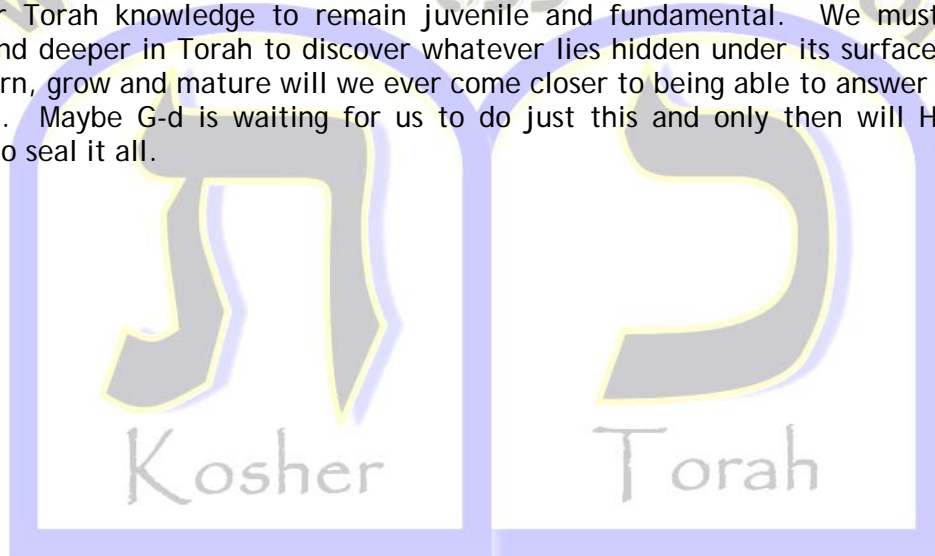
G-d wants us to be what we are, intelligent creatures created in "His" Image. As the Intelligent Designer has revealed "Its" profundity through the nature of the universe He/It designed, so too must we, created in His/Its image equally express our own profundity and thus become what we truly are: human beings created in the image of the Creator. Only in this, our enlightened form, can we ever come to study and understand Torah properly. Only a mature adult can ever fulfill Torah Law properly.

Today's religious fundamentalists are nothing more than spiritual adolescents. In spite of however religious they are on the outside, they are usually rather spiritually empty on the inside. Many of our Sages throughout the centuries have recognized this each

in their own communities and have warned against it. Fundamentalism is a dangerous condition. It can only be overcome by those who spiritually grow up, mature and embrace the greater and fuller depths that our Torah has to offer. Only a true rationalist can be rational and not succumb to fundamentalist narrow-mindedness. Only such a one can properly know G-d and thus serve Him.

In the end, the big questions remain ultimately unanswered. We can gather glimpses of truth from time to time as we pursue paths of study and discovery. Yet, will we ever evolve to the point when we will know everything? This is another good question, one to add to the original two. We say that the Creator is all knowing and that we are created in His/Its "Image." Maybe this means that we too can eventually rise to the level of knowing all.

Prophecy states during the Messianic era all humanity will achieve a level of higher knowledge. Other prophecies state that even prior to the Messianic era the process of expanding knowledge would begin. We are now in this period. Knowledge is definitely expanding. Our understanding of the greater universe is expanding as well. We must not allow our understand of Torah to fall behind the times. We must never allow our Torah knowledge to remain juvenile and fundamental. We must delve deeper and deeper in Torah to discover whatever lies hidden under its surface. Only as we learn, grow and mature will we ever come closer to being able to answer the big questions. Maybe G-d is waiting for us to do just this and only then will He send Mashiah to seal it all.



שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד