



## THE BASICS

Let's become familiar with G-d's basic bio

*What is G-d and where is He? Does G-d have a gender?*

*And who created G-d?*

AVINU MALKEINU—  
OUR FATHER, OUR KING  
Marlene Burns, mixed media, U.S.A., 2012

## I. A. COURSE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *My G-d\*: Defining the Divine*, a six-part exploration of Judaism's insights into G-d. Our study will follow the attractive format of questions and answers, with each subsequent answer providing a new and more complete understanding of the Supreme Being.

Humans have been asking questions about G-d for millennia, and indeed, there are various motivations for our inquiries into the nature and functioning of the Creator. We might be skeptical or agnostic, or we may simply wish to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. On the other hand, we may not be any of the above—because there is also an innate human need to deepen our understanding of G-d, as well as an important Jewish-religious reason for engaging in this endeavor.

\* Throughout this book, “G-d” and “L-rd” are written with a hyphen instead of an “o” (both in our own translations and when quoting others). This is one way we accord reverence to the sacred Divine name. This also reminds us that, even as we seek G-d, He transcends any human effort to describe His reality.



## TEXT 1

## The Awakened Brain

Lisa Miller, PhD, *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life* (New York: Random House, 2021), pp. 7–9

Each of us is endowed with a natural capacity to perceive a greater reality and consciously connect to the life force that moves in, through, and around us. Whether or not we participate in a spiritual practice or adhere to a faith tradition, whether or not we identify as religious or spiritual, our brain has a natural inclination toward and docking station for spiritual awareness. The awakened brain is the neural circuitry that allows us to see the world more fully and thus enhance our individual, societal, and global well-being. . . .

I didn't set out to study spirituality per se. My discovery of the awakened brain began with a desire to understand human resilience and help people who were struggling. Bit by bit, striking data points and my patients' stories of hurt and healing helped me see that spiritual experience was a vital, though overlooked, component of healing. . . .

I've discovered that the awakened brain is both inherent to our physiology and invaluable to our health and functioning.

**LISA MILLER, PHD**

Psychologist and author. Lisa Miller serves as a professor of psychology and education at Teachers College, Columbia University and is the founder of their Spirituality Mind Body Institute, a graduate program in spirituality and psychology. Her research focuses on the quantifiable effects of spirituality in mental health, and she is the author of *The Spiritual Child* and *The Awakened Brain*.



Watch a short animated video on *How to Find G-d*:  
[myjli.com/myg-d](https://myjli.com/myg-d)



## TEXT 2

## Knowing G-d

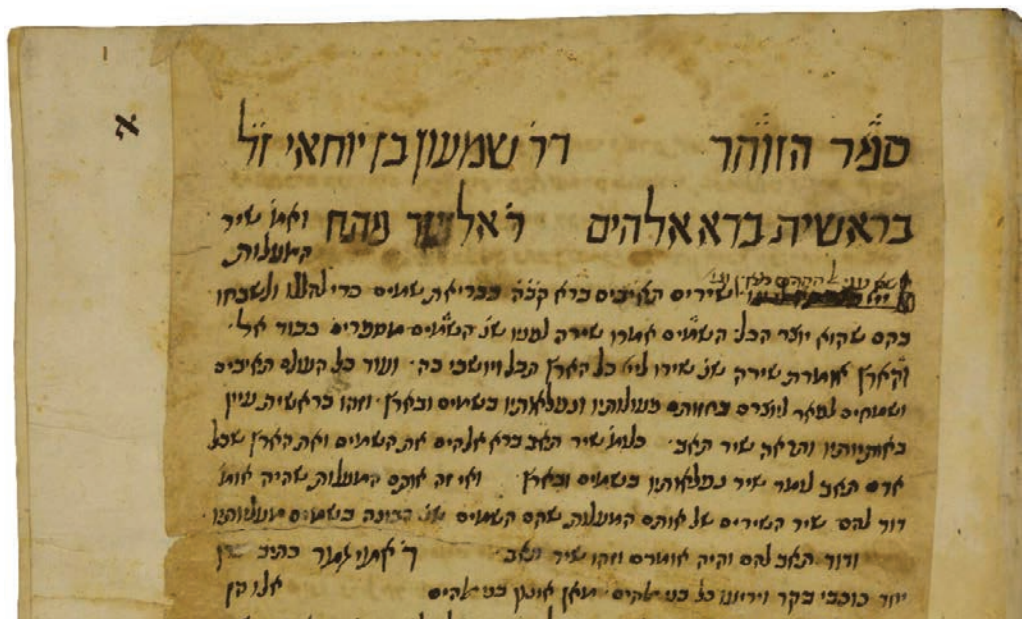
Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya, Likutei Amarim*, ch. 44

כִּי זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם וְתַכְלִיתוֹ, לְמַעַן דַּעַת אֶת כְּבוֹד ה' וְיִקָּר  
תַּפְאֶרֶת גְּדֻלָּתוֹ, אִישׁ אִישׁ כְּפִי אֲשֶׁר יוּכַל שְׂאֵת, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב  
בְּרַעֲיָא מְהִימְנָא פֶּרֶשֶׁת בֹּא: "בְּגִין דִּישְׁתַּמוּדְעוֹן לִיה".

The entirety of human existence and purpose is to gain intimate knowledge of G-d's glory and majestic splendor, each individual to the extent of their intellectual capacity. This goal is stated in the *Zohar* (*RAYA MEHEMNA, PARSHAT BO*): "[G-d created the world] in order that they may know Him."

**RABBI SHNEUR  
ZALMAN OF LIADI  
(ALTER REBBE)  
1745-1812**

Chasidic rebbe, Halachic authority, and founder of the Chabad movement. The Alter Rebbe was born in Liozna, Belarus, and was among the principal students of the Magid of Mezeritch. His numerous works include the *Tanya*, an early classic containing the fundamentals of Chabad Chasidism; and *Shulchan Aruch Harav*, an expanded and reworked code of Jewish law.



The first page of the *Merton Zohar*, a handwritten early copy of the *Zohar*. The manuscript contains a riddle hinting to the name of the scribe Shabtai, and it likely originates from North Africa in the early sixteenth century. (Bodleian Library, Oxford, U.K.)



## TEXT 3

## The Point of Theological Discourse

Rabbi Saadia Ga'on, *Emunot Vede'ot*, Introduction 6

מָה שְׁאַנְחֵנוּ חֻקִּים וּמַעֲיָנִים בְּעֵינֵינוּ  
אֲמוּנָתֵנוּ הוּא לְשֵׁנֵי עֵינֵינוּ:

הָאֶחָד, כִּדִּי שְׂתֵאֲמַת לָנוּ בְּפֶעֶל מָה  
שֶׁיִּדְעֵנוּ מִפִּי נְבִיאֵי ה' בִּידְעָה.

וְהַשֵּׁנִי, כִּדִּי שֶׁנִּשְׁיב לְכָל מִי  
שֶׁיִּטְעֵן עָלֵינוּ בְּעֵינֵינוּ אֲמוּנָתֵנוּ.

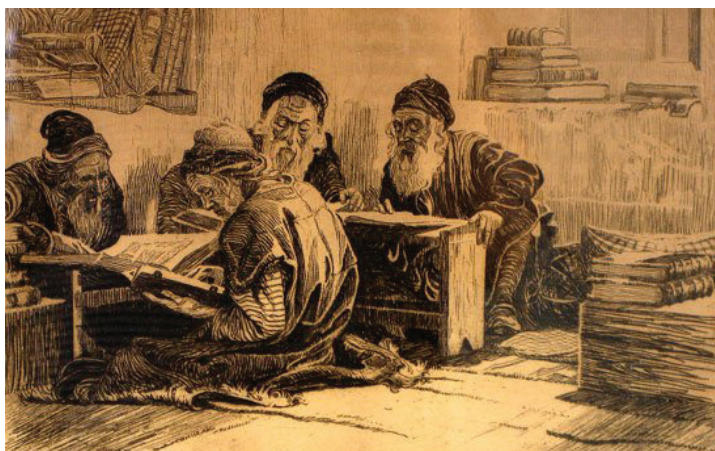
We engage in philosophic and intellectual probes of the principles of our faith for two reasons:

First, to intellectually confirm that which we already know, having been so informed by G-d's prophets.

Second, to empower ourselves to respond to those who take issue with our beliefs.

**RABBI SAADIA GA'ON  
(RASAG)  
882-942 CE**

Rabbinic scholar, philosopher, and exegete. Rabbi Saadia Ga'on was born in Egypt and came to the forefront of the rabbinic scene through his active opposition to Karaism, a divergent sect that denied the Divinity of the Oral Law. In 928, the exilarch David ben Zakai invited him to head the illustrious yeshiva in Sura, Babylonia, thereby bestowing upon him the honorific title "Ga'on." He is renowned for his works on the Torah, Hebrew linguistics, and Jewish philosophy, and his redaction of a siddur.



**THE TALMUD STUDENTS**  
Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874-1925), engraving, 1915.



**Rabbi YY Jacobson**  
on how faith and reason  
can coexist:  
[myjli.com/myg-d](http://myjli.com/myg-d)





FIGURE 1.1

## Reasons to Question and Deepen Our Understanding of G-d

### *Human reason:*

To satisfy our human inclination toward spirituality and our ingrained desire to better understand G-d and our relationship with Him.

### *Jewish reasons:*

- a. To align our minds' conceptions with our souls' beliefs and convictions.
- b. To equip ourselves with responses in the event that our beliefs are challenged.



**A YESHIVA BOY**  
Isidor Kaufmann  
(1853–1921), oil over pen  
and blue ink on panel.

## I. B. WHAT IS G-D?



### TEXT 4

## Idol Away

Midrash, *Bereshit Rabah* 38:13

תַּרַח עוֹבֵד צִלְמִים הָיָה, חַד זְמַן נָפִיק לְאַתֵּר,  
הוֹשִׁיב לְאַבְרָהָם מוֹכֵר תַּחְתָּיו.  
הָיָה אֶתִּי בֶר אֵינֶשׁ בָּעֵי דִּיזְבֹּן,  
וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ: "בֶּר כַּמָּה שָׁנִין אַתָּה?"  
וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ: "בֶּר חֲמִשִּׁין אוֹ שְׁתֵּין."  
וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ: "וַי לֵּיהּ לְהֵהוּא גִבְרָא דְהָיָה בֶר שְׁתֵּין,  
וּבְעֵי לְמִסְגָּד לְבֶר יוֹמִי", וְהָיָה מִתְבַּיֵּשׁ וְהוֹלֵךְ לוֹ.  
חַד זְמַן אֶתָּא חַד אֶתָּא  
טְעִינָא בִּידָהּ חֲדָא פִּינָה דְסֻלָּת.  
אָמְרָה לֵיהּ: "הָא לָהּ קָרַב קְדָמִיהוֹן."  
קָם נָסִיב בּוֹקֶלְסָא בִּידָהּ,  
וְתַבְרִינוֹן לְכָלְהוֹן פְּסִילָא, וְיָהֵב בּוֹקֶלְסָא  
בִּידָהּ דְרַבָּה דְהָיָה בִּינִיהוֹן.  
פִּינָן דְאַתָּא אַבִּיָה,  
אָמַר לֵיהּ: "מֵאן עֲבִיד לְהוֹן כְּדִין?"  
אָמַר לֵיהּ: "מָה נִכְפּוֹר מִינָה?"  
אַתָּת חֲדָא אֶתָּא טְעִינָא לָהּ חֲדָא פִּינָה דְסֻלָּת,  
וְאַמְרַת לִי "הָא לָהּ קָרַב קְדָמִיהוֹן."  
קָרִיבַת לְקָדְמִיהוֹן הָיָה,

### BERESHIT RABAH

An early rabbinic commentary on the Book of Genesis. This Midrash bears the name of Rabbi Oshiya Rabah (Rabbi Oshiya "the Great"), whose teaching opens this work. This Midrash provides textual exegeses and stories, expounds upon the biblical narrative, and develops and illustrates moral principles. Produced by the sages of the Talmud in the Land of Israel, its use of Aramaic closely resembles that of the Jerusalem Talmud. It was first printed in Constantinople in 1512 together with 4 other Midrashic works on the other 4 books of the Pentateuch.

דִּין אָמַר: 'אַנאַ אַיכוֹל קִדְמַאי',  
 וְדִין אָמַר: 'אַנאַ אַיכוֹל קִדְמַאי'.  
 קָם הָדִין רַבָּה דְּהוּהָ בִּינְיָהוֹן,  
 נָסַב בּוּקְלָטָא וְתַבְרִינוֹן".  
 אָמַר לֵיהּ: "מָה אַתָּה מַפְלָה בֵּי? וְיִדְעִין אֵינּוֹן?!"  
 אָמַר לֵיהּ: "וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אֲזַנֶּיךָ מַה שֶּׁפִּיךָ אוֹמֵר?!"

Terah [Abraham's father] was an idol manufacturer  
 and vendor. He once went away and left  
 Abraham to manage the store in his absence.  
 Prospective purchasers would come in and  
 Abraham would ask them, "How old are you?"

They would reply, "Fifty," or "Sixty years old."

"You poor fellow!" Abraham would exclaim.  
 "A fifty-year-old wants to worship a day-old  
 object!" The person would sheepishly depart.

A woman came in with a plate filled with fine  
 flour. "Take this," she requested of Abraham,  
 "and offer it to the idols." Instead, Abraham  
 took a club, shattered all the idols, and put  
 the baton in the hand of the largest idol.

When Terah returned [and saw the shattered idols],  
 he thundered, "What have you done to the idols?"



“I must be honest with you,” Abraham responded.

“A woman came with a plate of fine flour and asked me to offer it to them. But when I set it before them, one of the idols exclaimed, ‘I must eat first,’ while another protested, ‘I must eat first.’ The largest idol then arose, grabbed the club, and demolished the rest of them.”

“Are you mocking me? Do the idols have any awareness?” Terah exclaimed.

“Do you hear what you just said?”

Abraham replied triumphantly.



#### TEXT 5

### Simply Divine

Rabbi Yehudah Lowe, *Gevurot Hashem*, Second Introduction

הוא יתברך שְׁקָרָאוּ רְבוּתֵינוּ ז"ל בְּשֵׁם "הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא" . . . כִּי אֲמַתֵּת עֲצָמוֹ לֹא נוֹדַע, רַק שֶׁהוּא נִבְדָּל מִכָּל גִּשְׁם וְגוֹף וּמִכָּל הַנִּמְצָאִים. וְעַל זֶה נֹאמַר "קְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא", שֶׁעֲנִין "קְדוֹשׁ" נֹאמַר עַל מִי שֶׁהוּא נִבְדָּל . . .

וְרְבוּתֵינוּ ז"ל בְּחֻכְמָתָם הָרָמָה, הֵם שֶׁהוֹדִיעוּ לָנוּ אֲמַתֵּת דְּבָרִים אֵלּוּ, בְּמָה שֶׁקָּרָאוּ אוֹתוֹ "קְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא". רְצוֹנָם לֹאמַר, שֶׁהוּא פָּשׁוּט נִבְדָּל מִכָּל הַנִּמְצָאִים, וְלֹא קָרָאוּ אוֹתוֹ רַק בְּלִשׁוֹן שְׁלִיכָה, שֶׁהוּא נִבְדָּל מִכָּל.

**RABBI YEHUDAH LOEW  
(MAHARAL OF PRAGUE)  
1525-1609**

Talmudist and philosopher. Maharal rose to prominence as leader of the famed Jewish community of Prague. He is the author of more than a dozen works of original philosophic thought, including *Tiferet Yisrael* and *Netzach Yisrael*. He also authored *Gur Aryeh*, a supercommentary to Rashi's biblical commentary; and a commentary on the nonlegal passages of the Talmud. He is buried in the Old Jewish Cemetery of Prague.



Rabbi Manis Friedman  
asks, *What Is G-d?*:  
[myjli.com/myg-d](http://myjli.com/myg-d)

Our sages purposefully referred to G-d as *kadosh*, “the Holy One” . . . because G-d’s truest self is unknowable, detached from and beyond every form of physicality, body, or any other existing entity. It is therefore appropriate to refer to G-d as the Holy One, for the term *kadosh* is used for an entity that is removed. . . .

Our sages, in their great wisdom, informed us of this truth through referring to G-d as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, “the Holy One, blessed be He,” implying that G-d is simple and transcends all that exists. They intentionally chose a negative term to refer to G-d, which does not identify what He is, but rather, denotes that He transcends all that exists.



#### TEXT 6A

### Defining Idolatry

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz), *We Jews: Who Are We and What Should We Do?* (S. Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2005), pp. 130–132

One of the special things about the Jews is a certain mental quality that undoubtedly exists in other nations, but is more predominant among us, and this is the inclination toward idolatry. It is not easy to define idolatry, because this term applies to a broad range of things. . . . In the more general sense, idolatry is not specifically the presence of

**RABBI ADIN EVEN-ISRAEL (STEINSALTZ)  
1937–2020**

Talmudist, author, and philosopher. Rabbi Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) is considered one of the foremost Jewish thinkers of the 20th century. A resident of Jerusalem, Rabbi Steinsaltz was the founder of the Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, a society dedicated to the translation and elucidation of the Talmud, and he authored numerous works about the Talmud and Jewish mysticism. Praised by *Time* magazine as a “once-in-a-millennium scholar,” he was awarded the Israel Prize for his contributions to Jewish study.

real and concrete statues, or as the multiplicity of gods, but the creation of what the Bible calls “other gods”—that is, the turning of some entity as it were, into a supreme goal, into a god. This is the most abstract and superior aspect of idolatry. But this, like the material cult of idols, is in complete contradiction to the essential faith in one G-d.

**TEXT 6B**

### An Attempt at Concretization

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz), *ibid.*, pp. 134–136

Belief in G-d includes from the start, beginning with the Ten Commandments, two components that everyone finds difficult to grasp and to identify with. The first is the perception of G-d as the One and Only, who is therefore all-embracing and all-supreme, divine, above all comprehension, and therefore far above any personal relationship or something defined and specific. To this is compounded another difficulty, which is a faith that is entirely an abstraction, which does not allow any image, form, or other experience that can be grasped.

Idolatry—in all its forms—destroys this unity and replaces it with entities, whether few or many, that can all be defined and grasped. . . .

[Idolatry] is an attempt of simple people to give some kind of form to the divine image, with which they could then develop a closer and more concrete type of relationship. The temptation to identify with and serve something that can be understood, recognized, and to some extent felt and sensed, is very great.

### G-d Understanding #1

G-d is essentially unknowable; we can only understand things *about* Him.



Rabbi Simon Jacobson  
on graduating from our  
childhood notion of G-d:  
[myjli.com/myg-d](http://myjli.com/myg-d)

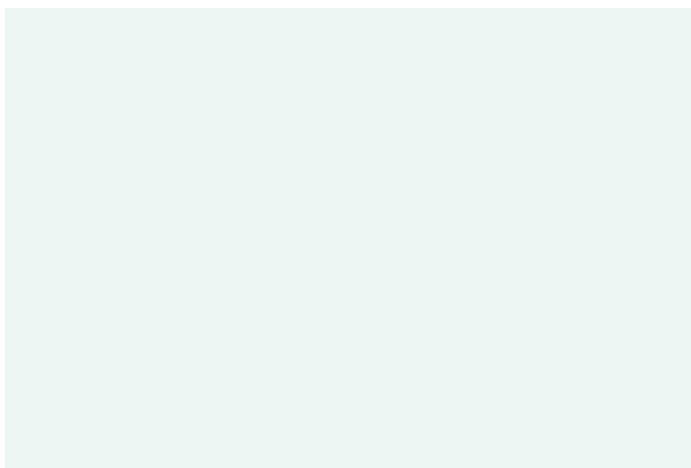
Moses receiving the Tablets, illumination  
in a thirteenth-century German prayer  
book, Eliakim ben Kadosh (scribe).  
(Biblioteca Palatina, Parma, Italy)

## II. WHERE IS G-D?



### EXERCISE 1.1

In the box below, draw a representation of the world. Then add a representation for G-d (by writing “G-d,” or using some other symbol).



### TEXT 7

## A Heavenly Abode

Deuteronomy 26:15

הַשְׁקִיפָה מִמַּעוֹן קִדְשְׁךָ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם,  
וּבֵרַךְ אֶת עַמְּךָ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Gaze down from the Heavens, Your holy  
dwelling place, and bless Your people Israel.



## TEXT 8

## Omnipresence

Isaiah 6:3

קדוש, קדוש, קדוש ה' צְבָאוֹת,  
מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ.

Holy, holy, holy is the G-d of the Heavenly hosts!  
The entire world is filled with His glory!



## QUESTION

Which of these statements resonates with you more:  
“G-d is in Heaven” or “G-d is everywhere”?

## ISAIAH

Biblical book. The book of Isaiah contains the prophecies of Isaiah, who lived in the 7th–6th centuries BCE. Isaiah’s prophecies contain stern rebukes for the personal failings of the contemporary people of Judea and the corruption of its government. The bulk of the prophecies, however, are stirring consolations and poetic visions of the future Redemption.



## TEXT 9

## The Context of Existence

Midrash, *Bereshit Rabah* 68:9

הוא מְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם,  
וְאֵין עוֹלָמוֹ מְקוֹמוֹ.

G-d is the space of the universe;  
the universe is not the space of G-d.



Watch **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks** illustrate how G-d is always there if we know where to look:  
[myjli.com/myg-d](http://myjli.com/myg-d)





FIGURE 1.2

## Where Is G-d?

G-D'S LOCATION	SIGNIFICANCE
<b>ABOVE, IN THE HEAVENS</b>	G-d is utterly transcendent and beyond us.
<b>EVERYWHERE</b>	G-d expresses Himself within our world, through all that happens and all that exists.
<b>EVERYWHERE IS WITHIN G-D</b>	This is the deepest reality: G-d is not contained in "everywhere"; He contains everywhere.
<b>WHERE HE IS ALLOWED IN</b>	G-d's presence needs to be felt in our own lives.

### G-d Understanding #2

G-d is the context (space) that encompasses all of existence.



HEAVEN MEETS EARTH  
Yoram Raanan, acrylic on canvas,  
Israel, 2012.

III. HOW DID G-D COME TO BE?



FIGURE 1.3

Existence: G-d vs. Everything Else

Based on Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:57, 63;  
Rabbi Yosef Albo, *Book of Fundamental Beliefs* 2:27

EVERYTHING	G-D
<p>קִיּוּמִיּוּת</p> <p>An entity that exists</p>	<p>קִיּוּמִיּוּת וְלֹא בִּקְיָמוֹת</p> <p>An existence unlike any other form of existence</p>
<p>אֶפְשָׁרִי הַקִּיּוּמִיּוּת</p> <p>Contingent existence</p>	<p>מְחֻיָּב הַקִּיּוּמִיּוּת</p> <p>Necessary existence</p>
<p>קִיּוּמִיּוּתוֹ מְזוּלָּתוֹ</p> <p>Dependent existence</p>	<p>קִיּוּמִיּוּתוֹ מְעַצְמוֹתוֹ</p> <p>Independent existence</p>



**CONSTANT CREATION**  
Sarah Chaya Elisha, acrylic on canvas, U.S.A., 2005. Depicted here is the continuous bond between G-d and people.



## TEXT 10A

## Introduce Yourself!

Exodus 3:13

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים, הִנֵּה אֲנִי בָא אֶל בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי  
אֵלֵיכֶם, וְאָמְרוּ לִי מָה שְּׁמוֹ, מָה אֶמַּר אֲלֵהֶם?

Moses said to G-d, “When I come to the Children  
of Israel and inform them, ‘The G-d of your  
fathers has sent me to you,’ they will respond,  
‘What is His name?’ What should I tell them?”



## TEXT 10B

## The Existence That Exists

Ibid., 3:13

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה,  
אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה.

G-d replied to Moses,  
“*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh.*”



Who Created G-d?  
Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak  
Breitowitz responds:  
[myjli.com/myg-d](http://myjli.com/myg-d)



## TEXT 11

## Essential Existence

Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:63

וְהִנֵּה זֶה בְּאוֹר עֵינַי שֶׁהוּא מְצוּי שְׁלֹא בְּמִצְיָאוֹת,  
בְּמִצְאָתָּהּ מְצִיַּת אוֹתוֹ הָעֵינַי וּפְרוּשׁוֹ כִּי, הַמְצוּי  
אֲשֶׁר הוּא הַמְצוּי, כְּלוּמָר מְחִיב הַמְצִיָּאוֹת.

This phrase conveys that G-d's existence is not an ordinary existence. We could summarize the concept as such: "G-d is the Existence that exists." In other words, He is an *essential* [and absolute, rather than a *contingent*] existence.

### G-d Understanding #3

Unlike everything else in the universe, G-d is a *necessary* and *noncontingent* existence.

**RABBI MOSHE BEN MAIMON (MAIMONIDES, RAMBAM) 1135–1204**

Halachist, philosopher, author, and physician. Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain. After the conquest of Córdoba by the Almohads, he fled Spain and eventually settled in Cairo, Egypt. There, he became the leader of the Jewish community and served as court physician to the vizier of Egypt. He is most noted for authoring the *Mishneh Torah*, an encyclopedic arrangement of Jewish law; and for his philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*. His rulings on Jewish law are integral to the formation of Halachic consensus.



The *Copenhagen Maimonides* is the most famous Hebrew manuscript in Denmark's Royal Library. It was commissioned in Barcelona by Menachem Betzalel, a physician of King Pedro IV, and copied by scribe Levi the son of Isaac from Salamanca. There has been much debate over the identity of the artist, but it is believed that the illumination was done by Ferrer Bassa, a muralist and illuminator from Barcelona, and completed in 1348. Shown here is the initial word panel of the first edition of Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*. (The Royal Library, Copenhagen)

IV. IS G-D A HE, A SHE, OR A THEY?

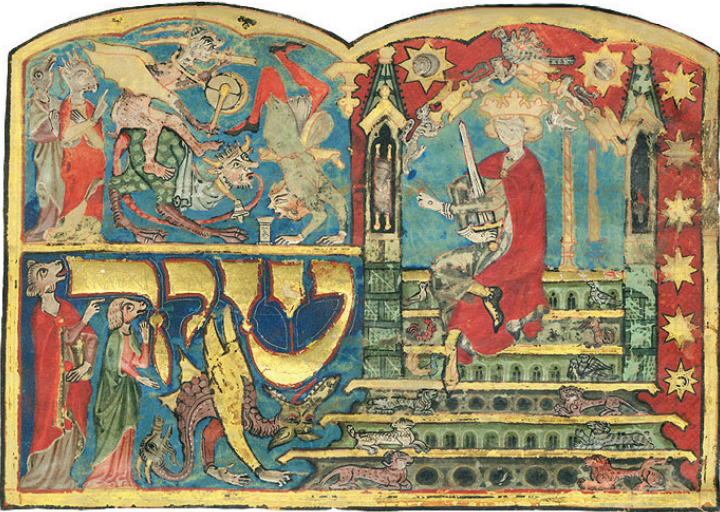


FIGURE 1.4

Notable Entities Described in the Torah with Feminine Pronouns

ENTITY	SAMPLE SOURCE
THE JEWISH NATION	The entirety of the Song of Songs depicts the Jewish nation as a woman.
THE TORAH	Deuteronomy 4:8; Isaiah 2:3
THE DIVINE HUMAN SOUL	Isaiah 57:16; Psalms 150:6
THE LAND OF ISRAEL	Numbers 14:8; Deuteronomy 11:12
THE SABBATH	Exodus 31:17; Leviticus 23:3

Frontispiece to the Song of Songs in the *Tripartite Machzor*, a three-volume prayer book copied in the early 1300s. This elaborate decoration depicts King Solomon on his famed throne surrounded by various figures alluding to events and accomplishments during his lifetime. (British Library, London)





## TEXT 12

## The Dual Image of G-d

Genesis 1:27

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם  
אֱלֹקִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ, זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם.

G-d created the human in His image; in  
the image of G-d He created him—male  
and female He created them.



## TEXT 13

## Dual-Gender Names

Nachmanides, *Ha'emunah Vehabitachon*, ch. 2

אֵין כָּל שֵׁם וּמִדָּה שֶׁלֹּא יְהִי נִזְכָּרִים פְּעָמִים  
כָּךְ וּפְעָמִים כָּךְ . . . וּלְכָךְ נִהְיָ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ ז"ל לְכַנּוֹת  
"שְׂכִינָה" בְּלִשׁוֹן נְקֵבָה בְּכֻמָּה מְקוֹמוֹת . . .

הַשְּׁמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה, פְּעָמִים בָּאִים בְּלִשׁוֹן זָכָר  
וּפְעָמִים בָּאִים בְּלִשׁוֹן נְקֵבָה. וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ  
הוּא מֵיחָד בְּכֻלּוֹ, וְכֵלֶן מֵיחָדִים בּוֹ.

All Divine names and attributes appear  
on occasion in each gender. . . . Thus, our  
sages regularly refer to the Divine Presence  
(the *Shechinah*) in the feminine. . . .

**RABBI MOSHE  
BEN NACHMAN  
(NACHMANIDES, RAMBAN)  
1194–1270**

Scholar, philosopher,  
author, and physician.  
Nachmanides was born  
in Spain and served as  
leader of Iberian Jewry. In  
1263, he was summoned  
by King James of Aragon  
to a public disputation  
with Pablo Cristiani, a  
Jewish apostate. Though  
Nachmanides was the clear  
victor of the debate, he had  
to flee Spain because of the  
resulting persecution. He  
moved to Israel and helped  
reestablish communal life  
in Jerusalem. He authored  
a classic commentary  
on the Pentateuch  
and a commentary  
on the Talmud.



**Mrs. Shaindy Jacobson**  
explores *Why Is G-d*  
Referred to in the  
*Masculine?*  
[myjli.com/myg-d](http://myjli.com/myg-d)



The Divine names appear in both feminine and masculine forms because G-d's indivisible unity is revealed within this plurality, and they are all unified within G-d's unity.



TEXT 14

1+1=1

Genesis 2:24

עַל כֵּן יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ אֶת אָבִיו וְאֶת אִמּוֹ,  
וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ, וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׁר אֶחָד.

Therefore, man shall leave his father  
and mother, and cleave to his wife, and  
they shall become one flesh.

Wedding scene painted  
on a wimpel, a long linen  
sash traditionally used  
by Jews of Germanic  
origin to wrap a Torah  
scroll. Denmark, 1816.





## TEXT 15

## Divine Groom and Terrestrial Bride

Mishnah, Taanit 4:8

"בְּיוֹם חֲתֻנָּתוֹ" (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ג', יא), זוּ מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה.

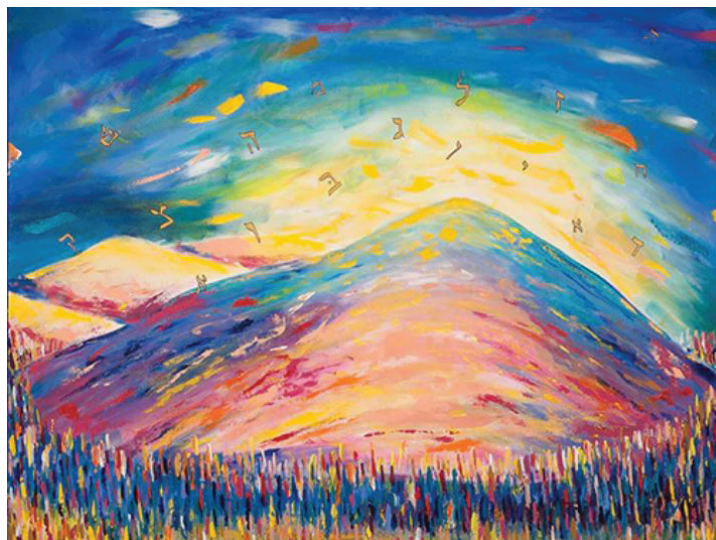
"On the day of His marriage" (SONG OF SONGS 3:11): This refers to [the day of] the Giving of the Torah.

### G-d Understanding #4

G-d is neither male nor female, but G-d manifests in both male and female modalities.

### MISHNAH

The first authoritative work of Jewish law that was codified in writing. The Mishnah contains the oral traditions that were passed down from teacher to student; it supplements, clarifies, and systematizes the commandments of the Torah. Due to the continual persecution of the Jewish people, it became increasingly difficult to guarantee that these traditions would not be forgotten. Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi therefore redacted the Mishnah at the end of the 2nd century. It serves as the foundation for the Talmud.



**MATAN TORAH**  
Tikva Sadik (Chamani),  
acrylic on canvas, 2019.

## KEY POINTS

- 1 Asking questions about G-d is not a sign of weakness in belief. Even the ardent believer must do so in an attempt to gain deeper understandings of G-d. It is important that our relationship with G-d encompass our totality and that our minds should understand what our souls naturally feel.
- 2 Many of our conceptions of G-d are incorrect and even childish. Like Abraham long ago, we need to first un-know the G-d of our current perception before we can gain an accurate understanding of the Divine.
- 3 Although we can know much *about* G-d, He Himself is unknowable. The essence of idolatry is the attempt to “concretize” G-d and fit Him within a familiar framework—to create a god in our own image.
- 4 In Jewish sources, we find depictions of G-d being located “above” in the Heavens, and we are also told that G-d is everywhere. While these are both true from a certain perspective, there’s a deeper reality: G-d contains the world, holding its existence in His space—everywhere is within G-d.

- 5 G-d's existence is radically different from the existence of all else. All things but G-d are *contingent* existences, brought into being by a cause—and by definition, they need not exist. G-d is a *necessary* existence: an existence that must be and therefore has no cause.
- 6 On an essential level, G-d transcends gender and is nonbinary. Yet, G-d manifests Himself in both male and female modalities. When we refer to G-d in masculine terms, we refer to G-d as He manifests, or behaves, in a masculine manner—i.e., as our provider and husband. Doing so places emphasis on our importance to G-d and our relationship with Him.



## Proofs for G-d's Existence

### Philosophical Arguments for G-d's Existence

#### WHY REASON?

**Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakudah,**  
*Duties of the Heart*, Introduction

Tradition alone, without rational inquiry, suffices for people who struggle with abstract intellectual tasks. But people blessed with understanding must use their minds to ascertain the truth of our tradition.

A parable: A king instructed his officer to collect a certain sum of money from the king's servants. The king warned the officer to count the coins, weigh them, and verify their quality. But the royal servants befriended the officer until he trusted in them. They brought the money to him and assured him that it was correct in amount, weight, and quality. He believed them and was too lazy to verify their account for himself. When the king heard, he questioned the officer as to the total count and weight of the money, but the latter could not answer with certainty. Though the sum may have been correct, the king condemned him for relying on the servants instead of verifying the amount for himself.

#### TO KNOW G-D

**Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*,**  
*Laws of the Fundamentals of*  
*the Torah* 1:1-6

The foundation of foundations and firmest pillar of all wisdom is *to know* that there is a First Being. . . . To know this matter is a positive commandment, as it says, "I am the L-rd your G-d" (Exodus 20:2).



### FIRST CAUSE ARGUMENT

**Maimonides, Mishnah, Sanhedrin,  
Ch. 10, Introduction**

The first foundation is the existence of the Creator: that there exists a Being . . . that is the cause of the existence of all other beings. This Being is the source of their existence, and from It derives their continued existence. If we were to eliminate Its existence, then all other beings would be nullified, and nothing would remain.

**Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakudah, *Duties of the Heart*, Treatise on Unity, ch. 5**

Nothing can make itself. This leads to the conclusion that this world has a Creator Who created it from nothing.

### ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

**Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakudah, *Duties of the Heart*,  
Treatise on Unity, ch. 6**

If a person poured ink on clean paper, it would be impossible for orderly writing and legible lines to appear. And if someone did produce a paper with legible writing and claimed that ink was spilled on paper and the writing formed on its own, we would call them a liar. For we feel certain that order and coherence cannot spontaneously emerge without an intelligent person's intent. If this is true of mere alphabetical symbols, how could one imagine that the world, whose engineering is far more detailed and whose formation is infinitely more fine, deep, and beyond our comprehension, emerged without intent of an Intender and without the wisdom of a wise and powerful Being?

### FINITUDE ARGUMENT

**Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakudah, *Duties of the Heart*, Treatise on Unity, ch. 5**

Anything that is comprised of more than one thing must have been created because its individual parts must precede it and something or someone that preceded it had to bring them together in an act of creation. Something that is eternal is that which has no cause and, therefore, no beginning. If it has no beginning, then it has no limitation or conclusion. Therefore, if something has a beginning, it is not eternal. If it is not eternal, then it had to be brought into existence from nothing. If so, anything that is composite is not eternal, and therefore must have been created.

## The Strength of Tradition

### REASON'S LIMITATION

*Sefer Hachinuch, Introduction*

If the wisest of people struggle to grasp the mysteries of the grasses and fruit, how can we expect to comprehend what is beyond our terrestrial realm, the mysteries of G-d's existence? Our ancestors prepared a table for us—they investigated and arrived at true knowledge, and they passed down this tradition from generation to generation.

A parable: Imagine if thousands of people from different eras testified not to drink from a certain river because they have seen people die after drinking its waters. And an expert physician said to you, "Do not believe them. From a logical perspective, these waters are not toxic. They are clear, bright, and healthy. Drink and enjoy!" Clearly, an intelligent person would defer to the testimony of tradition.

Similarly, the proper path is to fulfill all the words of the Torah, which was received by trustworthy witnesses, which the Master of wisdom gave to people.

### PROOF FROM TRADITION

*Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, Kuzari 1:10–25*

In the court of law, the strongest form of proof is an eyewitness's statement. We only know historical fact because of those who witnessed and recorded the event. It follows that the more witnesses there are to an event, the more certain we can be of its truth.

When G-d gave the Torah to His people, Israel, He gave it to them in the presence of 600,000 adult men, besides the many women and children. This was in order that they all be believable witnesses about the events they experienced.

Our ancestors transmitted their experiences to their children and their children's children until this day. There has never been a break or interruption in our history and tradition from the time of Mount Sinai until this day. This is our foundational evidence, and we need no other.

## COMPLEMENTARY FAITH

**Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, *Keter Shem Tov* 206**

Those who believe in G-d because of the tradition passed down from their ancestors possess an ironclad faith that will not waver in the face of philosophical arguments. However, their faith is not internalized; it is not their own.

Those who believe in G-d because of their own intellectual investigations have a passionate, personal relationship with G-d, fashioned from the material of their own personalities. However, their faith is vulnerable to philosophical arguments that contradict their position.

But those who believe in G-d both because of tradition and because of their own understanding have both advantages. This is why we say in our prayers, “*our* G-d and the G-d of our *fathers*.” We are to internalize our faith, “*our* G-d,” and rely on our tradition, “G-d of our *fathers*.”

## THE ARGUMENT FROM JEWISH CONTINUITY

**Rabbi Yaakov Emden, *Siddur Sulam Beit Kel*, Introduction**

Anything that is comprised of more than one thing must have been created because its individual parts must precede it and something or someone that preceded it had to bring them together in an act of creation. Something that is eternal is that which has no cause and, therefore, no beginning. If it has no beginning, then it has no limitation or conclusion. Therefore, if something has a beginning, it is not eternal. If it is not eternal, then it had to be brought into existence from nothing. If so, anything that is composite is not eternal, and therefore must have been created.

## Masculine and Feminine

Just as G-d contains both genders within Himself, so, too, creation at large features both masculine and feminine elements. The two come together to “be fruitful and multiply,” i.e., to create something new and beautiful, as the verse says, “Male and female He created them. G-d blessed them, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’” (Genesis 1:27-28). In every male-female relationship, the masculine aspect is defined by its ability to bestow seeds of potential, and the feminine aspect is defined by its ability to nurture, cultivate, and develop a seed to maturity—resulting in a complete, mature, and beautiful creation.

In this vein, we find many relationships in Judaism that are described as the union between male and female.



### G-D AND THE JEWS

In various places in the Bible—most notably in King Solomon’s Song of Songs—the relationship and intimacy between G-d and the Jewish nation is depicted as the loving relationship between husband and wife.

#### THE MALE SEED

G-d’s creation and the natural world.

#### THE FEMALE DEVELOPMENT

Using the resources within creation to serve G-d.

#### THE PROGENY

A perfected world; the revelation of the infinite, supernatural light of G-d within creation.

Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn, *Torat Shmuel* 5627, pp. 273–277



### CHOCHMAH AND BINAH

The two primary intellectual faculties are *chochmah* and *binah*. In this relationship, *chochmah* is the male and *binah* the female. In kabbalah, *chochmah* and *binah* are known as the “father” and “mother” that give birth to emotions.

*Chochmah* is the cognitive power of receptivity and awareness. It could be awareness of and receptivity to something outside of oneself, or it could be awareness of and receptivity to something that springs from the subconscious strata of our psyche. *Binah* is the process of mentally analyzing, processing, and developing the *chochmah* awareness.

#### THE MALE SEED

The unprocessed awareness.

#### THE FEMALE DEVELOPMENT

A fully developed and articulated idea and understanding.

#### THE PROGENY

An emotion that corresponds with the processed and internalized idea.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, *Likutei Amarim*, ch. 3



### SOUL AND BODY

In the soul-body relationship, the soul is the groom and the body is the bride. In this context, the body refers not only to the physical flesh and blood, but also to the larger mundane physical identity and its needs and impulses (in distinction to the soul's spiritual, holy identity).

#### THE MALE SEED

The soul's serene, tranquil, and natural love of G-d that is the product of its closeness to G-d (similar to a sibling relationship).

#### THE FEMALE DEVELOPMENT

The body learns to appreciate and internalize the soul's love for G-d, thus developing its own style of love for G-d—a fiery, passionate, yearning love that is the product of its distance and alienation from G-d.

#### THE PROGENY

Absolute intimacy and oneness with G-d, and a world sanctified through the work of the body within the world.

**Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn, *Torat Shmuel* 5627, pp. 273–277**

### WRITTEN TORAH AND ORAL TORAH

The Written Torah refers to the Five Books of Moses, and more generally, to the twenty-four volumes of the Scriptures. The Oral Torah is the colossal body of Jewish law and wisdom that the sages developed over the ages through analyzing and unpacking the ideas and secrets embedded by G-d in the Written Torah. The relationship between the Written and Oral Torahs is akin to that of a male and female. Just as the seminal seed that issues from the male is developed by the female into a fully formed child, so, too, the Oral Torah develops cryptic passages from the Written Torah into fully formed ideas and commandments.



#### THE MALE SEED

The basic outline of G-d's wisdom and will in the Written Torah.

#### THE FEMALE DEVELOPMENT

The human effort to fully unpack G-d's wisdom and will through using the principles of the Oral Torah.

#### THE PROGENY

A comprehensible and comprehensive guide for life.

**Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya, Igeret Hakodesh*, ch. 29**

## G-d as Described in Jewish Liturgy

The objective of prayer is to connect to G-d, but there are many ways to connect. Some prayers are supplications for our needs, some offer thanksgiving, some speak in awe of G-d's majesty, and others are praises of G-d. Much of what Judaism teaches about the mysterious yet approachable nature of G-d is contained in the poetry and prose of our liturgy (and other odes to G-d composed over the generations). Here's a selection:

### You Are the G-d . . . אֲתָהּ הוּא

You are the G-d in Heaven and on earth, and in the loftiest Heavens of Heavens. Truly, You are the first and the last, and besides You there is no G-d. . . . You made the Heavens, the earth, the sea, and all therein. Who among all the works of Your hands, celestial or terrestrial, can say to You, "What are You doing, and what are You making?"

The above passage is part of the daily morning prayers. It is based on a compilation of biblical passages and first appears in the Midrashic text, *Tana Devei Eliyahu*.

### Adon Olam

### אֲדוֹן עוֹלָם

**Master of the universe, Who reigned  
before anything was created:**

**At the time when, by His will, all things were  
made, His name was proclaimed King.**

**And after all things will cease to be,  
the Awesome One will reign alone.**

**He was, He is, and He will be in glory.**

**He is One; there is no other to  
compare and to consort with Him.**

**Without beginning, without end;  
power and dominion belong to Him.**

One of the most well-known and beloved liturgical poems, the Adon Olam prayer is commonly attributed to Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol, an eleventh-century rabbi, philosopher, and poet from Granada. It is recited as part of the morning prayers and, in many communities, it concludes the Shabbat and festival morning and/or evening services. Its verses are dissected at length by the mystical and Chasidic masters as a means to understanding the nature of G-d's sovereignty.



## Lecha Hashem Hagedulah

## לְךָ ה' הַגְדֻלָּה

G-d, Yours is the greatness, power, glory, victory, and splendor; for all in Heaven and on the earth [is Yours].  
G-d, Yours is kingship; You are exalted supreme over all rulers.

Wealth and honor are from You; You govern all.  
In Your hand are might and power, and it is in Your hand to grant greatness and strength to all.

This text from I Chronicles (29:11–13) is recited as part of the daily morning prayers and is also chanted by the congregation when the Torah scroll is escorted from the ark to the *bimah* (reading table). The first verse alludes to the seven Divine emotional attributes discussed at length in the mystical works.

## Yigdal

## יְגִדָּל

Exalted and praised be the Living G-d;  
He exists, and His existence is unbound by time.

He is One and there is no unity like His Oneness;  
He is inexplicable, and infinite His Oneness is.

He has neither bodily form nor is He a body;  
nothing compares to His holiness.

He preceded all that was created;  
He is first, nothing preceded His precedence.

He is Master of the universe to all formations;  
He demonstrates His greatness and His sovereignty.

He granted His flow of prophecy to  
His treasured, splendid people;

In Israel, none like Moses arose again,  
a prophet who perceived His vision clearly;

G-d gave His people a Torah of truth,  
by means of His prophet, the most  
trusted of His household.

G-d will never amend nor exchange His  
law for any other one, for all eternity;

He scrutinizes and knows our hidden  
innermost secrets; He perceives a  
matter's outcome at its inception.

He recompenses human beings with kindness  
according to their deeds; He places evil on  
the wicked according to their wickedness.

By the end of days He will send our Messiah to  
redeem those longing for His final salvation;

G-d will revive the dead in His abundant  
kindness; blessed forever is His praised Name.

In many communities, Yigdal, a poetic rendition of the thirteen principles of the Jewish faith as codified by Maimonides, is recited at the beginning of the daily morning prayers and/or at the conclusion of the evening prayers. The poem is attributed to Daniel ben Yehudah, a rabbi and rabbinical judge in Rome in the fourteenth century.

*Atab Zocher*

## אַתָּה זֹכֶר

You recall the actions of all people  
and recollect all primordial forms.  
In Your presence all the hidden  
is revealed, [as well as] the many  
mysteries from the beginning of  
time. For there is no forgetfulness  
before Your throne of glory, and  
nothing is concealed from Your  
sight. You remember all that was  
done, and nothing that was formed is  
concealed from You. All is revealed  
and known before You, G-d, our  
G-d; You observe, and Your gaze  
extends to the end of all generations.

The silent Musaf prayer of Rosh Hashanah features three unique blessings. The second, known as “remembrances,” contains biblical verses that discuss G-d’s “recollection” of the world and the Jewish people. The above passage is the opening of this section and was composed by the renowned Talmudic sage known as Rav (175–247 CE), founder of the famous Talmudic academy of Sura in Babylon.

*Atab Hu Elokeinu*

## אַתָּה הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ

You are our G-d:

In Heaven and on earth, mighty and revered.

Surrounded by myriads;  
He speaks and it comes to be.

He commanded and it was created;  
He is remembered for eternity.

Life of the worlds, pure of eyes.

He dwells in concealment;  
His crown is deliverance.

His garment is righteousness. His robe is zeal.

He is garbed in vengeance.  
His secret is uprightness.

His counsel is faithful; His work is truth.

He is just and upright,  
near to those who call upon Him in truth.

Exalted and uplifted;  
He dwells in the Heavens.

He suspends the earth on its foundation.

He is living and enduring, awesome,  
exalted, and holy.

The above poem of unknown authorship is recited in many communities during the High Holiday morning prayers. Following a style that is common in Jewish liturgy, this ode to G-d is composed alphabetically. The first clause begins with an *alef*, the second with a *bet*, and so on until the last clause, which begins with a *tav*, the last letter of the alphabet.

## The Ultimate Knowledge

## תכלית הידיעה

The ultimate knowledge of You  
is that You are unknowable.

Just to know that You are—  
this is our portion from all  
our philosophic exertion  
and exhaustive inquiry.

Only the negligible comprehension of  
what You are not drapes the seeker in  
Your sanctuary with righteousness.

And by understanding the distance,  
a person can approach and bow to You.

The above poem is not part of the prayer liturgy, but it is a touchstone of any Jewish thinker who has endeavored to understand G-d. It was composed by Rabbi Yedayah Bedersi (Hapenini), a rabbi, philosopher, and poet from Barcelona (c. 1270–1340), and published in his book of poems *Bechinot Olam*. The poem describes the futility of the human mind's search to know the essence of G-d.

## *Ein Kitzveh*

## אין קיצֶבֶה

There is no end to Your years and  
there is no limit to Your length of days.

The angels who glorify You are  
immeasurable, and the mystery  
of Your name is inscrutable.

Your name is fitting for You,  
and You are worthy of it.

And Your name is invoked  
by our name.

The above passage is from the awe-inspiring Unetaneh Tokef prayer that is part of the High Holidays Musaf service. This prayer is attributed to Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany (c. 11th century).