

What Do We Mean When We Say “G-d”?



Part I: That There Is a Gd

- 1) Simple Faith/Tradition that we have received
 - It's a pasuk: וְאָבִיךָ וְיִגְדְּךָ זְקֵנֶיךָ וְיֹאמְרוּ לְךָ, *ask you father and he will relate it to you, your elders and they will tell you* (Deut. 32:7)
 - Not necessarily shallow – could be very deep and profound belief.
- 2) Science
 - Torah itself suggests that we look at this: “Lift up your eyes to the stars and see, who has created these” (Isaiah 40:26).
 - The Design (Anthropic) Principle: The intricate balance of life and its interconnectedness – implies design
- 3) The Moral Argument
 - Universal Ethics (AKA Morality and Conscience): E.g. Murder, Rape, Theft of/from innocent people is ‘bad’. But why? Logic? Logic would dictate that I do what I need to do to best achieve my ends. Survival Instinct? But look at the animal kingdom – fish do quite well with murdering one another.
 - Belief in צלם אלוקים is only legitimate source of universal rights.

שִׁפְךָ דַם הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפָּךְ כִּי בְצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם
*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed;
for in the image of Gd He made man (Genesis 9:6).*

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are
endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights.”*

(Declaration of Independence)

Part II: How We Define “G-d”

First Four of Rambam’s 13 Fundamentals of Jewish Faith (Maimonides 1138-1204)

I believe with perfect faith that...

1. Gd is the Creator and Ruler of all things.
2. Gd is One. There is no unity that is in any way like His. He alone is our Gd.
3. Gd does not have a body. Physical concepts do not apply to Him. There is nothing whatsoever that resembles Him at all.
4. Gd is first and last
- ...

First Principle:

From Rambam, Foundations of Torah (Hil. Yesodei HaTorah), Chapter One:

1. The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of [all] wisdoms is to know that there is a First Cause. And He created all that exists. All that exists in the heavens and earth and all in between only exist due to the reality of His existence.
2. If it were imaginable that He did not exist, then nothing else could exist.
3. If it were imaginable that nothing else but Him existed, He would continue to be and would not be negated [in any way] through their negation. This is because all of existence needs Him, and He – Blessed be Him – does not need them at all. Therefore, nothing is quite as real as He is.
4. ... This is what the Torah means when it says, *There is none other than He (Deuteronomy 4:35)*. That is, there is no true existence other than He and besides Him.
5. This Being is God of the world, Lord of the earth... His power is endless and limitless. ...
6. The knowledge of [all] this is a Positive Commandment, as it says, *I am the Lord, your God (Exodus 20:2)*...

Discussion Points:

- Why “Creator and Ruler”?
- Why is nothing as “real” as Gd?

Second Principle

[Ibid.]

Anyone who presumes that there is another god transgresses a negative commandment, as [Exodus 20:3] states: "You shall have no other gods before Me" and denies a fundamental principle [of faith], because this is the great principle [of faith] upon which all depends.

7. This God is one. He is not two or more, but one, unified in a manner which [surpasses] any unity that is found in the world; i.e., He is not one in the manner of a general category which includes many individual entities, nor one in the way that the body is divided into different portions and dimensions. Rather, He is unified, and there exists no unity similar to His in this world.
- ...
- Were the Creator to have body and form, He would have limitation and definition, because it is

impossible for a body not to be limited. And any entity which itself is limited and defined [possesses] only limited and defined power. ...
Since He is not a body, the circumstances associated with bodies that produce division and separation are not relevant to Him. ...
The knowledge of this concept fulfills a positive commandment, [as recorded in the verse] "Hear O Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is one." (*Deuteronomy 6:4*).

Third Principle

8. It is clearly expressed in the Torah and [the works of] the prophets that the Holy One, blessed be He, is not [confined to] a body or physical form, as [*Deuteronomy 4:39*] states: *Because God, your Lord, is the Lord in the heavens above and the earth below*, and a body cannot exist in two places [simultaneously].
Also, [*Deuteronomy 4:15*] states: *For you did not see any image*, and [*Isaiah 40:25*] states: *"To whom can you liken Me, with whom I will be equal."* Were He [confined to] a body, He would resemble other bodies.
...
11. Since it has been clarified that He does not have a body or corporeal form, it is also clear that none of the functions of the body are appropriate to Him:
He is not found within time, so that He would possess a beginning, an end, or age. He does not change, for there is nothing that can cause Him to change.
[The concept of] death is not applicable to Him, nor is [that of] life within the context of physical life. [The concept of] foolishness is not applicable to Him, nor is [that of] wisdom in terms of human wisdom. Neither sleep nor waking, neither anger nor laughter, neither joy nor sadness, neither silence nor speech in the human understanding of speech [are appropriate terms with which to describe Him].
12. Since this is so, all such [descriptions] and the like which are related in the Torah and the words of the Prophets - all these are metaphors and imagery. [For example,] "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh" [*Psalms 2:4*], "They angered Me with their emptiness" [*Deuteronomy 32:21*], and "As God rejoiced" [*ibid. 28:63*]. With regard to all such statements, our Sages said: "The Torah speaks in the language of man."

Discussion Point:

- What do we mean when we say man is made in the "Image of Gd"?

Fourth Principle

From Rambam's Commentary on Mishnah:

The fourth principle involves the absolute eternity of the One [whom we call God]. Nothing else shares His eternal quality. This is discussed many times in Scripture, and the Torah teaches it to us when it says of Him (*Deuteronomy 33:27*): *The eternal God is a refuge*.

Rambam's Guide to the Perplexed (Moreh Nevuchim):

Everything (other than God Himself) was created by God out of absolute nothingness. In the beginning, God alone existed. There was nothing else... He then created everything that exists from absolute nothingness. It all followed His will and desire.

Even time itself is among the things created by God. Time depends upon motion. In order for motion to exist, we must have things that move. And all things were created by God.