

*Lesson*

# 2

## DISCOVERING ONE

### THE EXTRAORDINARY IMPACT OF MONOTHEISM

*As a young man, Abraham, the Jewish people's original Patriarch, defied his pagan surroundings and began to introduce humanity to the concept of one G-d—the Creator and Director of the universe. This cornerstone of the Jewish faith gradually spread throughout civilization, bringing drastic changes not only to the global religious landscape but also to the way humanity views and approaches life.*



*Abraham Contemplates the Stars, engraving for Die Bücher das Bibel (The Books of the Bibel), Vol. 7, Ephraim Moses Lilien, 1908.*



## QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Is monotheism significant only to your “religious views” and “religious life,” or would you say that belief in exclusively one G-d also impacts your feelings about life in general? In what way?

Greek astronomer at the  
observatory of Alexandria,  
Egypt, engraving for Camille  
Flammarion's *Astronomie  
Populaire: Description générale  
du ciel*, Paris, 1880.



# TEXT 1a

MAIMONIDES, *MISHNEH TORAH*, LAWS OF IDOLATRY 1:2 

וּפְשֵׁט דְּבַר זֶה בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם לְעַבֵּד אֶת הַצּוּרוֹת בְּעַבֹּדוֹת מְשֻׁנוֹת זוּ מְזוּ  
וּלְהַקְרִיב לָהֶם וּלְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת.

וְכִיּוֹן שְׂאָרְכוּ הַיָּמִים, נִשְׁתַּפַּח הַשֵּׁם הַנִּכְבָּד וְהַנּוֹרָא מִפִּי כָּל הַיְקוּם  
וּמִדַּעְתָּם וְלֹא הִכִּירוּהוּ, וְנִמְצְאוּ כָּל עַם הָאָרֶץ הַנְּשִׁים וְהַקְּטָנִים אֵינָם  
יּוֹדְעִים אֱלֹהֵי הַצּוּרָה שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב וְשֶׁל אָבִן וְהַהִיכָל שֶׁל אַבְנִים שֶׁנִּתְחַנְּכוּ  
מִקְטָנוּתָם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לָהּ וּלְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְהִשָּׁבַע בְּשִׁמָּהּ. וְהַחֲכָמִים שֶׁהָיוּ  
בָּהֶם, כְּגוֹן כְּהֵנִיָּהֶם וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן, מִדְּמִין שֶׁאֵין שָׁם אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי הַפּוֹכְבִּים  
וְהַגְּלָלִים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ הַצּוּרוֹת הָאֵלוּ בְּגִלְלָם.



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.

Thus, idolatrous beliefs spread throughout the world. People would worship images in all sorts of strange ways and offer sacrifices to them and bow down to them.

As the years passed, the true G-d was forgotten from the minds of all people, and they gave Him no recognition. The common people knew only the images of wood or stone and the temples of stone—which they had been raised, from their youth, to bow down to and worship and in whose name they took oaths. Even the priests and wise people among them believed that there is no god other than the stars and planets, for whose sake they had made those images.

# TEXT 1b

MAIMONIDES, *GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED* 3:29 

יְדוּעַ כִּי אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלִיו הַשְּׁלוֹם גָּדַל בְּאוֹמֵת הַצֶּאֱבָב"ה, וְשִׁטְתָּם שָׂאִין שֶׁם אֱלֹהֵי כִי אִם הַפּוֹכְבִּים. וְכֹאשֶׁר אוֹדִיעַךְ בְּפֶרֶק הַזֶּה סִפְרֵיהֶם הַמְצוּיִם עֲתָה בְּיַדֵּינוּ אֲשֶׁר תּוֹרְגְמוּ לְלִשׁוֹן הָעֵרֶבִי, וְדַבְּרֵי יְמֵיהֶם הָעֵתִיקִים, וְאִגְלָה לְךָ שְׁטוּתֵיהֶם וְשִׁיחוּתֵיהֶם כְּפִי שֶׁנֶּאֱמְרוּ בָהֶם, יִתְבָּאֵר לְךָ מֵהֶם אוֹמְרִם בְּפִירוּשׁ כִּי הַפּוֹכְבִּים הֵם הָאֱלֹהִים, וְשֶׁהַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הִיא הָאֱלֹהִים הַגָּדוֹל. וְכֵן אָמְרוּ גַם יְתֵר שְׁבַעַת הַפּוֹכְבִּים אֱלֹהוּת, אֲלֵא שֶׁשְׁנֵי הַמְּאוֹרוֹת יוֹתֵר גְּדוֹלִים... וְלִפְיֶךָ הָיוּ כָּל הַצֶּאֱבָב"ה בְּדַעַה שֶׁהָעוֹלָם קִדְמוֹן, כִּי הַשָּׁמַיִם לְדַעַתָּם הֵם הָאֱלֹהִים...


וְעַל פִּי אוֹתָם הֵשֶׁקְפוֹת שֶׁל הַצֶּאֱבָב"ה הָעֵמִידוּ אֶת הַצְּלָמִים לְפּוֹכְבִּים, צְלָמֵי הַזָּהָב לְשֶׁמֶשׁ, וְצְלָמֵי הַכֶּסֶף לְיָרֵחַ, וְחִלְקוּ אֶת הַמַּתְּכוּת וְהָאֶקְלִימִים לְפּוֹכְבִּים, וְאָמְרוּ אֶקְלִים פְּלוֹנֵי אֱלֹהֵי הַפּוֹכֵב הַפְּלוֹנֵי, וּבְנוּ הַהִיכָלוֹת וְהָעֵמִידוּ בָהֶם הַצְּלָמִים, וְדִימוּ כִּי כּוֹחוֹת הַפּוֹכְבִּים שׁוֹפְעִים עַל אוֹתָם הַצְּלָמִים, וְאִזּוּ יִדְבְּרוּ אוֹתָם הַצְּלָמִים וְיִבִּינוּ וְיִשְׁכִּילוּ, וְיִנְבְּאוּ אֶת בְּנֵי אָדָם, כְּלוֹמֵר: הַצְּלָמִים, וְיִודִיעוּ לְבְנֵי אָדָם תּוֹעֲלִיּוֹתֵיהֶם.

It is well known that our patriarch Abraham was brought up among the Sabeans, who believed that there is no divine being except the stars. In this chapter, I will survey their books and ancient chronicles that have been translated into Arabic, and I will depict their foolish beliefs and statements according to those books. You will see that they regard the stars as deities, and the sun as the chief deity. They believe that all seven stars and planets are gods, but the sun and the moon are greater than the rest. . . . The Sabeans thus believed that the universe had always existed because they believed the celestial beings to be gods.



In accordance with these Sabeian theories, they erected images corresponding to the celestial beings—golden images to the sun, silver images to the moon, and so on. Moreover, they associated various metals and climates with the powers of the planets, saying that certain planets are the gods of certain climatic zones. They built temples and placed images in them. They believed that the stars sent forth their influence upon these images, enabling these images to think, comprehend, communicate, and prophetically inform human beings concerning what is good for them.

## TEXT 1c

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS, *A LETTER IN THE SCROLL*  
(NEW YORK: FREE PRESS, 2009), PP. 66–69 

Just as there were many stars and planets and countless species of animals, so there were many gods. They fought, struggled, and established hierarchies of dominance, slowly establishing order out of chaos.

We have many records of those ancient times, and though the names of the gods change—depending on whether we speak of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Canaan or ancient Greece—the stories are remarkably similar. The god of the sky does battle with the god of the sea, and



**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**  
1948–

Former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom. Rabbi Sacks attended Cambridge University and received his doctorate from King's College, London. A prolific and influential author, his books include *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* and *The Dignity of Difference*. He received the Jerusalem Prize in 1995 for his contributions to enhancing Jewish life in the Diaspora, was knighted and made a life peer in 2005, and became Baron Sacks of Aldridge in 2009.

out of his victory establishes dry land, usually over the dead body of his slain victim. The god of the lightning and rain impregnates the goddess of the earth, and thus crops grow and the land brings forth its produce. There is no sharp distinction between nature, the animals, the gods, and mankind. . . . In the stories they told about them, [the gods] are usually personifications of the forces of nature—the sun, the sea, the wind, the rain. . . .

The ancient world was one in which order was constantly threatened by chaos, at times in the form of floods and droughts, at others by war from invading tribes. Through the stories they told, they explained to themselves why this is so. Disturbances here reflect more ultimate struggles elsewhere, between the gods. . . . If the god of the sky won his battle with the sea, there would be no floods that year. If the god of rain successfully mated with the goddess of the soil, the harvest would be good. . . . Humanity, in its various gradations, is replaceable.

*Is there a relationship between monotheism and morality? Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz explains:*



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## Exercise 2.1

Considering the pagan beliefs described in Texts 1a–1c, indicate with a  $\checkmark$  or an  $\times$  which of the following attributes would apply to any of the gods they believed in.

1. The One and Only	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Precedes and transcends all of nature	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Nonmaterial	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Omnipotent	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Creates ex nihilo	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. In exclusive control of everything	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Creates benevolently	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Just and righteous	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Creates purposefully	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Cares about the happenings in the universe	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Holds humankind in high regard	<input type="checkbox"/>

# TEXT 2

MIDRASH, *BEREISHIT RABAH* 39:6 (יג)

מִשָּׁל לְאֶחָד שֶׁהָיָה עוֹבֵר מִמְקוֹם לְמְקוֹם, וְרָאָה בֵּיטָח אַחַת דּוֹלָקוֹת. אָמַר,  
 "תֹּאמַר שֶׁהַבֵּיטָח הַזֶּה בְּלֹא מִנְהִיג?"! הֲצִיץ עָלָיו בַּעַל הַבֵּיטָח, אָמַר לוֹ: אֲנִי  
 הוּא בַּעַל הַבֵּיטָח.

כִּן לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה אָבִינוּ אַבְרָהָם אוֹמֵר: "תֹּאמַר שֶׁהָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּלֹא מִנְהִיג?"!  
 הֲצִיץ עָלָיו הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְאָמַר לוֹ: אֲנִי הוּא בַּעַל הָעוֹלָם . . . הַיְוִי:  
 "וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם" . . . (בְּרֵאשִׁית יב, א).

A parable: A man was traveling from one place to another and encountered a well-lit palace. He said, "Is it possible that this palace has no master?"

The owner of the palace looked out and said, "I am the master of the palace."

Similarly, our father Abraham said, "Is it fathomable that this world has no master?"

G-d looked out and said to him, "I am the Master of the universe." . . . This is the background behind, "G-d said to Abraham . . ." (GENESIS 12:1).



*BEREISHIT 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.



# TEXT 3

MAIMONIDES, *GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED* 3:29 

וְכַאֲשֶׁר גָּדַל עֲמוּדוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, וְנִתְבָּרַר לוֹ שֵׁיִשׁ שָׁם אֱלֹ-הֵּ נִבְדָּל, לֹא  
 גוּף וְלֹא כַח בְּגוּף, וְשָׁכַל אֱלֹהֵי הַכּוֹכָבִים וְהַגְּלִגְלִים - מֵעֲשִׂיוֹ, וְהִבִּין  
 אֲפָסוֹת אוֹתָם הַהֶבְלִים הָהֵם אֲשֶׁר נִתְחַנְּנָה עֲלֵיהֶם, הֵחֵל לְסַתּוֹר שְׂטָתָם  
 וּלְבַאֵר הַפֶּסֶד הַשְּׁקִפוֹתִיָּהֶם, וּפְרָסָם הַפְּכָם, וְקָרָא "בְּשֵׁם ה' א-ל עוֹלָם"  
 (בְּרֵאשִׁית כ"א, ל"ג) - קָרִיאָהּ הַכּוֹלְלֶת מִצִּיאוֹת ה' וְחֲדוּשׁ הָעוֹלָם מֵאֲתוֹ  
 יִתְבָּרַךְ.

*What's so harmful  
 about idolatry? Three  
 contemporary scholars  
 address this:*



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As Abraham, the “Pillar of the World,” matured, it became clear to him that there is a Divine Being Who is abstract, neither a body nor a force residing in a body, and that all the planets and the stars are His doing. He understood the worthlessness of the nonsense with which he had been raised, and he began to disprove their beliefs and demonstrate the fallacy of their outlook. He publicly taught otherwise and “called in the name of the G-d of the world” (GENESIS 21:33), proclaiming the existence of G-d and His Creation of the universe.

## Exercise 2.2

The following passages are segments of the story of Creation as related in the first chapter of Genesis. As you read these passages, try to identify—from what *is* said and what *is not* said—how Judaism views G-d and His act of Creation. Then enter your findings in the chart that follows.

### GENESIS, CHAPTER 1

In the beginning, G-d created heaven and earth. . . . And G-d said, "Let there be light." And there was light. G-d saw that the light was good, so G-d separated between the light and the darkness. G-d called the light "day," and the darkness He called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning: day one.

. . . G-d said, "Let there be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens to separate between the day and the night, and they shall be for signs and for appointed seasons and for days and for years. And they shall be for luminaries in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth." And it was so. G-d made the two great luminaries: the greater luminary to rule by day and the lesser luminary to rule at night, accompanied by the stars. And G-d placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule by day and at night, and to separate between the light and the darkness. And G-d saw that it was good. And there was

evening, and there was morning, a fourth day.

. . . G-d said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and they shall rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over the animals and all of the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." And G-d created man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female he created them.


G-d blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over all of the beasts that tread upon the earth." And G-d said, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the entire earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. . . ." And it was so.

And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day.

Considering the passages from Genesis, indicate with a  $\checkmark$  or an X in the middle column which of the following statements could be said about G-d. In the next column, indicate which words in the verse (or which ideas that are absent from the narrative) make some of these points clear to us.

	$\checkmark$ /X	WORDS FROM TEXT
1. The One and Only		
2. Precedes and transcends all of nature		
3. Nonmaterial		
4. Omnipotent		
5. Creates ex nihilo		
6. In exclusive control of everything		
7. Creates benevolently		
8. Just and righteous		
9. Creates purposefully		
10. Cares about the happenings in the universe		
11. Holds humankind in high regard		

## TEXT 4

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS, *A LETTER IN THE SCROLL*  
(NEW YORK: FREE PRESS, 2009), P. 73 

The account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis is stunningly original, quite unlike any other in antiquity. . . . There are no contending forces, no battles of the gods, no capricious spirits. G-d speaks, and the universe comes into being. G-d is not in nature but above it, transcending it and ordering it according to His word. Nature has no will, or set of wills of its own. . . . This was an immense intellectual leap. . . . If G-d created the world, then it is, in principle, intelligible. The mists of irrationality have been dispelled.

## TEXT 5

VIKTOR FRANKL, *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING* (BOSTON: BEACON PRESS, 2006), P. 101

He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.

**VIKTOR EMIL FRANKL**  
1905–1997

M.D., PhD, founder of logotherapy. Frankl was professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School. During World War II, he spent 3 years in various concentration camps, including Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and Dachau. Frankl was the founder of the psychotherapeutic school called logotherapy. Frankl authored 39 books, which have been published in 38 languages. His most famous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, has sold over 9 million copies in the U.S. alone.

# TEXT 6

HUSTON SMITH, *THE RELIGIONS OF MAN* (NEW YORK: HARPER AND ROW, 1958), P. 229

The G-d of the Jew possessed none of these traits which, in greater or lesser degree, characterized the gods of their neighbors. It is here that we come to the supreme achievement of Jewish thought . . . in the character it ascribed to the G-d it discovered to be One. The Greeks, the Romans, the Syrians, and most of the other Mediterranean peoples would have said two things about their gods' characters. First, the gods tend to be amoral; second, toward man they are preponderantly indifferent. The Jews reversed the thinking of their contemporaries on both points. Whereas the gods of Olympus tirelessly pursued beautiful women, the G-d of Sinai watches over the widows and orphans.

HUSTON CUMMINGS SMITH  
1919–2016

Philosopher and scholar. Dr. Smith was a professor of philosophy at MIT. He was regarded as one of the world's most influential figures in religious studies and authored at least 13 books on the world's religions and philosophies.

*When the Rebbe reached out to Dr. Viktor Frankl, as told by **Rabbi Yaakov Biderman**:*



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# TEXT 7

HENRI FRANKFORT, *THE INTELLECTUAL ADVENTURE OF ANCIENT MAN*  
(CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 1977), P. 366

Throughout the Mesopotamian texts we hear overtones of anxiety, which seem to express a haunting fear that the unaccountable and turbulent powers may at any time bring disaster to human society.

**HENRI FRANKFORT**  
1897–1954

Egyptologist and archaeologist. Born into a Dutch Jewish family, Frankfort became a leading scholar in the fields of archaeology and cultural anthropology, especially on the religious systems of the ancient Near East. He authored many books and articles on these subjects.

Illustration of Abraham smashing his father's idols, from the *Herlingen Haggadah*, 1725. (The Braginsky Collection)





# TEXT 8a

RABBI BACHYA IBN PAKUDAH, *DUTIES OF THE HEART*, CHAPTER 2 

כִּי הָאָדָם כְּאִשֶּׁר יֵדַע עַל זִוְלָתוֹ שֶׁהוּא מְרַחֵם וְחוֹמֵל עָלָיו, בּוֹטֵחַ בוֹ, וְנִפְשׁוֹ  
נִרְגַּעַת עָלָיו בְּמֵה שֶׁיֵּטִיל עָלָיו מַעֲנִינָיו . . . שִׁיְהֵא אוֹתוֹ שְׁבֻטַח עָלָיו חֶזֶק,  
בְּלִתֵּי מְנוּצָח נֶגֶד רְצוֹנוֹ, וְלֹא יִמְנַע בְּעֵדוֹ מוֹנֵעַ מִלְמַלָּא צָרְכָיו. לְפִי שְׂאֵם  
יְהִיָּה חֶלֶשׁ לֹא יִתְנַן הַבְּטָחוֹן עָלָיו אֲף עַל פִּי שְׁנִתְבַּרְרָה חֲמִלְתּוֹ וְהַשְׁגָּחָתּוֹ,  
מִפְּנֵי הַמְּנַעוֹת הַדְּבָרִים מִמֶּנּוּ עַל הָרוֹב . . . שִׁיְהִיָּה זֶה שְׁבוּטָחִים עָלָיו  
בְּתַכְלִית הַטּוֹב וּבְתַכְלִית הַחֶסֶד . . .  
הֲרֵי מִי שֶׁנִּתְקַבְּצוּ בוֹ כָּל אֵלֶּה . . . וְחֻבָּה עַל מִי שֶׁיֵּדַע אֵת זֶה לְבִטּוּחַ עָלָיו,  
וְיִרְגַע עָלָיו בְּנִגְלָהוּ וּבְסִתְרוֹ וּלְבוֹ וְאַבְרָיו, וְיִתְמַסַּר לְרְצוֹנוֹ, וְיִקְבַּל מִשְׁפָּטּוֹ  
בְּרִצּוֹן, וְיַחֲשׁוּב עָלָיו טוֹב בְּכָל מִשְׁפָּטָיו וּפְעָלָיו.

When you know that there are people who have compassion and pity for you, you will trust them and be at peace in all matters upon which you depend on them . . . provided that they are strong, undefeatable, and cannot be prevented from fulfilling what is requested of them. But if they are weak, they cannot be relied upon, even if it is clear that they are compassionate and caring, due to the many areas in which they are restricted. . . . In addition, you must be certain that they are absolutely generous and kind. . . .

Now, if people were to have all these traits . . . it would behoove those who know this to place their trust in them, and to be totally at peace, internally and externally, in their hearts and limbs, and to be faithful to them, and to accept and favorably regard all their judgments and actions.



RABBI BACHYA IBN PAKUDAH  
11TH CENTURY

Moral philosopher and author. Ibn Pakudah lived in Muslim Spain, but little else is known about his life. *Chovot Halevavot* (*Duties of the Heart*), his major work, was intended to be a guide for attaining spiritual perfection. Originally written in Judeo-Arabic and published in 1080, it was later translated into Hebrew and published in 1161 by Judah ibn Tibbon, a scion of the famous family of translators. Ibn Pakudah had a strong influence on Jewish pietistic literature.

*Psychological optimism  
or theological optimism?*  
**Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson**  
addresses this:



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# TEXT 8b

RABBI BACHYA IBN PAKUDAH, *DUTIES OF THE HEART*,  
INTRODUCTION TO THE GATE OF TRUST (י

אך תועלת הבטחון . . . מהן - מנוחת הלב מן הדאגות העולמיות . . .  
והוא בהשקט ובבטחה ובשלווה בעולם הזה, כמו שכתוב (י'מ"ה יז, ז):  
”ברוך הגבר אשר יבטח בה' והיה ה' מבטחו”.

*Natan Sharansky reveals the secret of his endurance in Soviet prison in this exclusive interview with JLI:*




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The benefits of trust in G-d . . . include tranquility of the heart in the face of worldly worries. . . . The one who has trust finds serenity, security, and peacefulness within this world. As it is written, “Blessed is the man who trusts in G-d; G-d will be his reassurance” (JEREMIAH 17:7).

Israeli soldier praying, 30 November, 2011. (Israel Defense Forces)



# TEXT 9

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS, "THE BIRTH OF HOPE  
(BECHUKOTAI 5779)," RABBISACKS.ORG 

Hope is one of the very greatest Jewish contributions to Western civilization, so much so that I have called Judaism “the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind.” In the ancient world, there were tragic cultures in which people believed that the gods were at best indifferent to our existence, at worst actively malevolent. The best humans can do is avoid their attention or appease their wrath. In the end, though, it is all in vain. We are destined to see our dreams wrecked on the rocks of reality. . . .

The great tragedians were Greek. Biblical Hebrew did not even contain a word that meant “tragedy” in the Greek sense. Modern Hebrew had to borrow the word: hence, *tragedia*. . . .

Hope is not unknown in such cultures, but it is what Aristotle defined as “a waking dream,” a private wish that things might be otherwise.

**Rabbi Simon Jacobson**  
*explains why hope and  
purpose are critical gifts  
of Judaism:*



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## Exercise 2.3

- 1 Recall an experience you've had in which, after a period of doubt, things turned out unexpectedly well.
- 2 Now, if you can, recall the feelings and thoughts you had before the unexpectedly good results.
- 3 Think of a concern that you are presently facing. How might the past experience that you just thought about, coupled with the teachings about trust that we just examined, be used to change your current feelings?

# TEXT 10

MIDRASH, *EICHAH RABAH* 3:8 

מֶלֶךְ שְׁנֹכְנֵס לְמִדְיָנָה, וְהָיוּ עֲמוֹ דְכָסִין וְאַפְרָכִין וְאַיִסְטְרִילוּטִין ... חַד  
אָמַר: אֲנִי נָסִיב דְכָסִין לְגַבִּי. וְחַד אָמַר: אֲנִי נָסִיב אֲפְרָכִין לְגַבִּי. וְחַד  
אָמַר: אֲנִי נָסִיב אִיִּסְטְרִילוּטִין לְגַבִּי.

הָיָה פִּקְח אֶחָד לְשֵׁם. אָמַר: אֲנִי נָסִיב לְמַלְכָּא ...

כִּן עוֹבְדֵי פּוֹכְבִּים, יִמְהוּן עוֹבְדֵי לַחֲמָה, וְיִמְהוּן עוֹבְדֵי לְלִבְנָה, וְיִמְהוּן עוֹבְדֵי  
לְעֵץ וְאֶבֶן. אֲבָל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינֶן עוֹבְדִין אֶלָּא לְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא. הֲדָא הוּא  
דְכַתְיִב: "חֻלְקֵי ה' אֲמָרָה נִפְשֵׁי" (אֵיכָה ג, כד), שְׂאֲנִי מִיַּחַד אוֹתוֹ שְׂתִי  
פְעָמִים בְּכָל יוֹם, וְאוֹמֵר: "שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד" (דְּבָרִים ו, ד).



**EICHAH RABAH**

A Midrashic text on the Book of Lamentations, produced by the sages of the Talmud in the Land of Israel. Its language closely resembles that of the Jerusalem Talmud. It was first printed in Pesaro, Italy, in 1519, together with 4 other midrashic works on the other 4 *megilot*.

An analogy: A king entered a province accompanied by dukes, prefects, and commanders. . . . One person said, “I am taking a duke as my patron.” Another said, “I am taking a prefect as my patron.” And still another said, “I am taking a commander as my patron.”

One clever individual was there among them who said, “I am taking the king. . . .”

So it is with the nations of the world: Some of them worship the sun, some worship the moon, and some of them worship wood and stone. But Israel serves none other than G-d Himself.

This is the intent of the verse, “G-d is my portion,’ says my soul” (LAMENTATIONS 3:24), whose Oneness I proclaim twice each day, “Hear, O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One” (DEUTERONOMY 6:4).

# TEXT 11

RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL OF LUBAVITCH, *DERECH MITSVOTECHA*, P. 138A 

וְכַךְ הָיָה נִשְׁמַע הַלְשׁוֹן מִמּוֹרֵינוּ וְרַבֵּינוּ נִשְׁמָתוֹ עֵדוֹן בְּדַבְּרֵי קוּנָה, שְׁהָיָה  
אוֹמֵר בְּזֶה הַלְשׁוֹן:  
אֵיךְ ווִיל זַע גָּאָר נִיֶּסֶט. אֵיךְ ווִיל נִיֶּט דָּאִיִּן גֵּן עֵדוֹן. אֵיךְ ווִיל נִיֶּט דָּאִיִּן  
עוֹלָם הַבָּא כּוֹלֵי. אֵיךְ ווִיל מְעַר נִיֶּט אַז דִּיךְ אֵלֵיִן.

When our master and teacher [Rabbi Shne'ur Zalman of Liadi] would enter a state of spiritual ecstasy, he would be heard exclaiming:

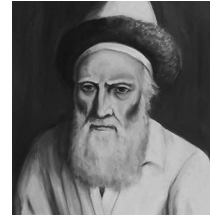
“I want nothing at all! I don’t want Your Paradise. I don’t want Your World to Come. I want nothing but You alone.”

# TEXT 12

RABBI SHNE'UR ZALMAN OF LIADI, *TANYA*, CHAPTER 44 

פִּי זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם וְתַכְלִיתוֹ, לְמַעַן דַּעַת אֶת כְּבוֹד ה' וְיִקָּר תַּפְאֶרֶת גְּדוּלָתוֹ,  
אִישׁ אִישׁ כְּפִי אֲשֶׁר יוּכַל שְׂאֵת, כְּמוֹ שְׁפָתוֹב בְּרַעֲיָא מְהִימְנָא פְרָשֵׁת בֵּא  
(מב, ב), “בְּגִין דִּישְׁתַּמוּדְעוֹן לִיָּה.”

This is the whole *raison d'être* of man: to come to know the glory of G-d and the splendid majesty of His greatness, each person according to their capacity. As is written in the *Zohar* (2, 42B), [G-d’s creation of the world is] “so that humanity may know Him.”



RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL OF LUBAVITCH  
(*TSEMACH TSEDEK*) 1789–1866

Chasidic rebbe and noted author. The *Tsemach Tsedek* was the third leader of the Chabad Chasidic movement and a noted authority on Jewish law. His numerous works include halachic responsa, Chasidic discourses, and kabbalistic writings. Active in the communal affairs of Russian Jewry, he worked to alleviate the plight of the cantonists, Jewish children kidnapped to serve in the Czar’s army. He passed away in Lubavitch, leaving seven sons and two daughters.



RABBI SHNE'UR 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.



## Exercise 2.4

On a scale of 1–10, ask yourself: How often do I contemplate G-d being the Creator of the entire universe, including myself and all aspects of my life?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RARELY									OFTEN

How might I specifically benefit if I thought about this more often, perhaps on a regularly scheduled basis?

What is preventing me from making regular meditation about the Creator a part of my routine?

What steps can I take to make this practice more a part of my routine?

## KEY POINTS

- 1** Beyond Judaism's direct influence on the world's major religions, elements of the Jewish concept of monotheism have greatly influenced modern thinking in general.
- 2** The pagans believed that the various forces of nature were gods, each vying for dominance, and all indifferent to humankind.
- 3** Abraham spread the belief in the one, nonmaterial, benevolent G-d Who created the world and humanity for a dignified purpose.
- 4** Knowing that the entire universe was created intentionally by G-d brings us to the realization that the world in general, and our lives in particular, have a purpose. Meaning and purpose give us motivation and happiness in our lives.
- 5** We can be optimistic when we realize that G-d has exclusive control over all that transpires in the universe and that He is interested in our benefit and good.
- 6** Recognizing and contemplating G-d's oneness and greatness is not only a means to an end but is humankind's goal in and of itself.

# Appendix

## TEXT 13

MIDRASH, *BEREISHIT RABAH* 38:13 

תָּרַח עֹבֵד לְצִלְמִים וּמוֹכֵר הָיָה. חַד זְמַן נָפִיק לְאַתֵּר, הוֹשִׁיב לְאַבְרָהָם מוֹכֵר תַּחְתָּיו. הָיָה אֶתִי בַר אֵינֶשׁ בְּעֵי דִיזְבֹּן, וְהָיָה אָמַר לִיָּה: בַּר כְּמָה שְׁנֵין אַתָּה?

וְהָיָה אָמַר לִיָּה: בַּר חֲמִשִּׁין אוֹ שִׁיתֵין.

וְהָיָה אָמַר לִיָּה: וַיִּי לִיָּה לְהֵוָה גְּבָרָא דְהוּא בַר שִׁיתֵין וּבְעֵי לְמִסְגַּד לְבַר יוֹמָא, וְהָיָה מִתְבַּיֵּישׁ וְהוֹלֵךְ לוֹ.

חַד זְמַן, אֶתְתַּת חֲדָא אֵיתְתָא טְעִינָא בִידָהּ חֲדָא פִינָה דְסֻלְתָּ. אָמְרָה לִיָּה, הָא לָהּ, קָרַב קוּדְמִיָּהוּן.

קָם, נְסִיב בּוּקְלָסָא בִידֵיהּ, וְתַבְרָהוּן לְכוּלְהוּן פְּסִילָא, וְיֵהֵב בּוּקְלָסָא בִידָא דְרַבָּה דְהָיָה בִינֵיהוּן.

פִּינָן דְאַתָּא אַבּוּהָ אָמַר לִיָּה: מֵאֵן עֵבִיד לְהוֹן כְּדִין?

אָמַר לִיָּה: מַה נְכַפּוּר מִינָךְ! אֶתְתַּת חֲדָא אֵיתְתָא, טְעִינָא לָהּ חֲדָא פִינָה דְסֻלְתָּ, וְאַמְרַת לִי: הָא לָהּ, קָרַיב קוּדְמִיָּהוּן, קָרִיבַת לְקֻדְמִיָּהוּן, הָיָה דִין אָמַר: אָנָּא אֵיכוּל קְדָמָא, וְדִין אָמַר: אָנָּא אֵיכוּל קְדָמָא. קָם הָדִין רַבָּה דְהָיָה בִינֵיהוּן, נְסִיב בּוּקְלָסָא וְתַבְרָינּוּן.

אָמַר לִיָּה: מַה אַתָּה מַפְלָה בִי, וַיִּדְעִין אֵינּוּן?!

אָמַר לִיָּה, וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אֲזַנֵּיהָ מַה שְּׁפִיךְ אוֹמֵר?!

Terach was an idol manufacturer. Once he had to travel somewhere, and he left Abraham in charge of his store. When someone would come in to buy idols, Abraham would ask, “How old are you?”

They would reply, “Fifty or sixty.”

Abraham would then respond, “Woe to him who is sixty years old and wants to worship something made today!” Ashamed, the customer would leave.

One time, a woman entered carrying a dish filled with flour. She said to him, “Here you go; offer it before them.”

Abraham arose, took a club in his hands, and broke all of the idols, and then he placed the club in the hands of the largest idol among them.

When his father returned, he asked, “Who did all of this?”

Abraham replied, “I cannot conceal this from you. A woman came bearing a dish of flour and told me to offer it before them. As I did so, they each began to say, ‘I will eat first,’ while the others said, ‘I will eat first.’ The biggest one rose, took a club, and smashed the rest of them.”

Terach said, “Do you think you can trick me? Do these idols have any cognition?!”

To which Abraham replied, “Do your ears hear what your mouth is saying?!”

# TEXT 14

TALMUD, SOTAH 10A–10B 

וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם בְּשֵׁם ה' אֱ-ל-עוֹלָם (בְּרֵאשִׁית כֹּא, לֵג). אָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ, אֵל  
 תִּיקְרִי וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָא וַיִּקְרִיא; מִלְמַד שֶׁהִקְרִיא אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ לְשֵׁמוֹ שֶׁל  
 הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּפֶה כָּל עוֹבֵר וְשׁוֹב. כִּי צָד? לְאַחַר שֶׁאָכְלוּ וְשָׁתוּ, עָמְדוּ  
 לְבָרְכוֹ. אָמַר לָהֶם, וְכִי מִשְׁלִי אַכְלַתֶּם? מִשְׁלֵךְ אֱלֹקֵי עוֹלָם אַכְלַתֶּם! הוֹדוּ  
 וְשַׁבְּחוּ וּבְרַכּוּ לְמִי שֶׁאָמַר וְהָיָה הָעוֹלָם.

“And he called there [*vayikra*] on the name of the L-rd, G-d of the universe” (GENESIS 21:33). Reish Lakish said, “Do not read this word literally as ‘*vayikra*—and he called’ but rather as ‘*vayakri*—and he caused others to call.’ This teaches that Abraham, our forefather, caused the name of G-d to be called out in the mouths of all passersby. How so? After his guests ate and drank, they arose to bless him. He said to them, ‘But did you eat from what is mine? Rather, you ate from the food belonging to the G-d of the world. Give thanks, praise, and bless the One Who spoke and the world came into being!’”







