

## Welcome to 10 Minute Topics

This week's topic is G-d.

G-d has many names such as El, El Shaddai, Adonai, Elohim, Almighty, L-rd, Hashem, King of the Universe. No matter what name we use, G-d is One and Indivisible. G-d has no human form and the use of terms such as "the hand of G-d" is a metaphor since the human mind cannot comprehend G-d on such a profound metaphysical level. There have been different views of G-d throughout the ages by various Jews:<sup>a</sup>

The Tanach (Hebrew Bible) view holds nine basic beliefs regarding G-d:

Monotheism (only One G-d);

G-d has a name;

Nobody knows what G-d looks like;

G-d acts in this world;

G-d has made a special relationship with Klal Yisrael (People of Israel – Jews);

Klal Yisrael has a special Covenant with G-d (People of Israel – Jews);

G-d requires ethical behavior of humans;

G-d is a personal G-d; and,

The suffering of the righteous is not understandable.

The Rabbinic view of G-d is similar to the Tanach view and includes:

G-d's existence;

Monotheism;

Angels act as G-d's messengers;

G-d judges this world;

G-d and Klal Yisrael have a special bond;

G-d is a personal G-d;

The suffering of the righteous cannot be explained; and,

There is an afterlife and a physical resurrection.

Philo Judaeus (20bce-40ce) was a Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria, Egypt.<sup>1</sup> His work was not accepted by contemporary Judaism. Philo's view of G-d includes:

Monotheism;

G-d cannot be described;

G-d cannot be named;

G-d's existence can be proven;

G-d does not have a physical body but He does control this world;

G-d operates in this world through "logos" (this "logos" is not a person);

G-d can be approached;

G-d has a special relationship with Klal Yisrael; and,

Evil does not come from G-d but from the world of matter.

Maimonides (1135-1204) was a Talmudist, philosopher, astronomer, and physician who spent parts of his life in Cordova, Spain and Cairo, Egypt.<sup>2</sup> The first five of Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith deal with the belief in G-d and His Nature. Maimonides' view of G-d includes:

G-d exists and has no physical body;  
The existence of G-d can be proven;  
The human mind cannot comprehend the totality of G-d so man uses euphemisms to describe G-d (i.e. the hand of G-d);  
G-d created the world out of nothingness;  
Angels are the messengers of G-d;  
Evil results from human actions and an imperfect world;  
Man has free will; and,  
Man's goal in life is spiritual and intellectual perfection.

The Kabbalah's (Jewish mystical tradition) view of G-d includes:  
G-d exists but is unknowable;  
The ten sefirot is how G-d manifests Himself in this world;  
The human body is a microcosm of the universe;  
G-d is Self-limiting;  
The world is imperfect; and,  
Man is partners with G-d to help repair the world.

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was a Dutch philosopher and Biblical critic who spent his life in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Spinoza's view of G-d includes:  
G-d and the universe are synonymous;  
G-d is not a personal G-d;  
G-d is beyond good and evil and is relative to human experience;  
Man has no free will; and,  
The human mind remains forever (man is immortal).

Martin Buber (1878-1965) was an essayist, translator, and editor who spent his life in Austria and Germany.<sup>4</sup> Buber's view of G-d includes:  
G-d cannot be defined and G-d's existence cannot be proven;  
Man enters into a relationship with G-d when man enters into a genuine dialogue with others in man's daily activities;  
Laws are given by G-d to individuals (there was no one-time revelation at Mount Sinai); and,  
Evil comes about either through G-d withdrawing from man or man's own lack of decision or direction.

Milton Steinberg (1903–1949) was a Reform rabbi who spent parts of his life in New York and Indiana.<sup>5</sup> Steinberg's Theistic view of G-d includes:  
Monotheism;  
G-d is a personal, spiritual being;  
G-d is all-powerful (some theists - including Steinberg - believe that G-d is all-good but not all-powerful), all-good, and all-knowing;  
G-d is supernatural and transnatural;  
G-d knows man and hears and answers prayers;  
G-d is the source of good and evil although some theists - including Steinberg - limit G-d's power by claiming that evil is part of the universe but does not come from G-d);

Human shortcomings limit our knowledge of G-d;  
The existence of G-d cannot be logically proven and must be taken on faith;  
G-d has a relationship with mankind; and, man works with G-d to repair the world.

Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983) was a rabbi and founder of Reconstructionist Judaism who spent parts of his life in Lithuania and the United States.<sup>6</sup> Kaplan's view of G-d includes:  
Naturalistic G-d concept (the world can be explained by scientifically verifiable ideas);  
Salvation for man is self-realization;  
G-d is manifested in the moral responsibility of man;  
G-d is a power not a being;  
Miracles are part of natural law and not a suspension of this law by G-d;  
Man does not pray to G-d - prayer is the first step to self-realization; and,  
Evil is the part of life that does not allow self-realization.

Erich Fromm (1900-1980) was a psychologist and philosopher who lived in Germany and Switzerland.<sup>7</sup> Fromm's view of G-d includes:  
G-d represents the ultimate goal for humanity;  
G-d symbolizes man's mind; and,  
G-d stands for man's inner experience and cannot be explained.

## **Nature of G-d**

### **G-d Exists**

The Torah begins by stating "In the beginning, G-d created..." It does not tell who G-d is or how He was created. The fact of G-d's existence is accepted almost without question. In general, Judaism views the existence of G-d as a necessary prerequisite for the existence of the universe. The existence of the universe is sufficient proof of the existence of G-d.

### **G-d is One**

One of the primary expressions of Jewish faith, recited twice daily in prayer, is the Shema, which begins שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד (Hear, O Israel: The L-rd is our G-d, The L-rd is one.) This single statement contains three central Jewish beliefs:  
There is only one G-d.  
G-d is a unity. He cannot be divided into parts or described by attributes.  
G-d is the only Being to whom we should offer praise. G-d is the Creator of everything.

Everything in the universe was created by G-d and only by G-d. As Isaiah said, "I am the L-rd, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil. I am the L-rd, that does all these things." (Isaiah 45:6-7).

### **G-d is Incorporeal**

Although many places in the Tanach and Talmud speak of various parts of G-d's body or speaks of G-d in anthropomorphic terms, Judaism firmly maintains that G-d has no body. Any reference to G-d's body is simply a means of making G-d's actions more comprehensible to beings living in a material world. We are forbidden to represent G-d in a physical form. That is considered idolatry. The sin of the Golden Calf incident was not that the people chose another deity, but that they tried to represent G-d in a physical form.

### **G-d is Neither Male nor Female**

G-d has no body, no genitalia, therefore the very idea that G-d is male or female is completely incorrect. We refer to G-d using masculine terms simply for convenience's sake, because Hebrew has no neutral gender; G-d is no more male than a book. There are times when we refer to G-d using feminine terms. The Shechinah (a feminine word) is the manifestation of G-d's presence that fills the universe and is conceived of in feminine terms.

### **G-d is Omnipresent**

G-d is in all places at all times. He fills the universe and exceeds its scope. Closely tied in with this idea is the fact that G-d is universal. He is not just the G-d of the Jews; He is the G-d of all nations.

### **G-d is Omnipotent**

G-d can do anything. The belief in G-d's omnipotence has been tested during the many persecutions of Jews, but Jews have always maintained that G-d has a reason for allowing these things, even if we cannot see the reason.

### **G-d is Omniscient**

G-d knows all things, past, present and future.

### **G-d is Eternal**

G-d has no beginning and no end. He will always be there to fulfill His promises. When Moses asked for G-d's name, He replied, "I am that I am," but the Hebrew word used, ehyeh, can be present or future tense, meaning "I am what I will be" or "I will be what I will be." The ambiguity of the phrase is often interpreted as a reference to G-d's eternal nature.

### **G-d is Both Just and Merciful**

Judaism has always maintained that G-d's justice is tempered by mercy, the two qualities perfectly balanced.

### **G-d is Holy and Perfect**

One of the most common names applied to G-d in the post-Biblical period is "Ha-Kadosh, Barukh Hu," The Holy One, Blessed be He.

### **G-d is our Father and our King**

Judaism maintains that we are all G-d's children. A well-known piece of Jewish liturgy repeatedly describes G-d as "Avinu Malkeinu," our Father, our King. It is said that one of G-d's greatest gifts to humanity is the knowledge that we are His children and created in G-d's image.

### **Names of G-d**

**יהוה** Ineffable Name, Unutterable Name (Tetragrammaton) - Holy Name used only by the Kohen Gadol in the Holy of Holies. This name is never spelled out or pronounced except by the Kohen Gadol. The use of the terms Yahweh or Jehovah are misnomers. In scripture, this Name is used when discussing God's relation with human beings, and when emphasizing his qualities of loving-kindness and mercy.

**Elohim** (The Lawmaker) (Misspelled intentionally--spelled with a k not h in siddur/Tanach). In scripture, this Name is used when emphasizing God's might, His creative power, and his attributes of justice and ruler-ship.

**El Shaddai** This Name is the one written on the mezuzah scroll. Shaddai is an acronym of Shomer Daltot Yisrael, Guardian of the Doors of Israel.

**Adonai** (My L-rd) This name is commonly used when studying Torah/Talmud or when in prayer.

**Hashem** (The Name) This name is commonly used in everyday speech as well as in scripture.

**Adonai Emet** (Truth)

**Tzur Yisrael** (The Rock of Israel)

**Elohei Avraham, Yitzchak v' Yakov** (G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)

**Ehyeh sh'Ehyeh** (I Am That I Am)

**Avinu Melkeinu** (Our Father, Our King)

**Ro'eh Yisrael** (Shepherd of Israel)

**Ha-Kodesh, Baruch Hu** (The Holy One, Praised be He)

**Melech ha-M'lachim** (The King of Kings)

**Makom** (The Place, The Omnipresent)

**Magen Avraham** (Shield of Abraham)

### **Writing G-d's Name**

Judaism does not forbid the writing out of the Names of G-d per se. However, Judaism does forbid taking the Names of G-d in vain and erasing or defacing the Names of G-d. Observant Jews do not write out the Names of G-d in order to protect the Names from later being erased or defaced. The commandment not to erase or deface the name of God comes from Deuteronomy 12:3-4.

You shall break apart their altars; you shall smash their pillars; and their sacred trees shall you burn in the fire; their carved images shall you cut down; and you shall obliterate their names from that place. You shall not do this to Hashem, your G-d.

The rabbis taught that we are commanded not to erase or deface a Name of G-d. This ruling is applicable only to a permanent form of writing a Name of G-d. Observant Jews will be careful when writing out the Names of G-d on a non-permanent medium such as the computer since the

Names may be printed out and erased or defaced. Any permanent writings of the Names of G-d that are old and/or unusable are to be buried in a Jewish cemetery inside a geniza (a box used to bury holy objects) according to Jewish Law.

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<sup>a</sup>Finding God: Ten Jewish Responses ([http://www.amazon.com/FINDING-GOD-TEN-JEWISH-RESPONSES/dp/B000L6P49K/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1222619548&sr=8-2](http://www.amazon.com/FINDING-GOD-TEN-JEWISH-RESPONSES/dp/B000L6P49K/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1222619548&sr=8-2))

<sup>1</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=281&letter=P>)

<sup>2</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=905&letter=M>)

<sup>3</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?letter=S&artid=1016>)

<sup>4</sup>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/>)

<sup>5</sup>Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milton\\_Steinberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milton_Steinberg))

<sup>6</sup>Jewish Virtual Library (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/kaplan.html>)

<sup>7</sup>Logos ([http://www.logosjournal.com/issue\\_6.3/funk.htm](http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_6.3/funk.htm))