

# Lesson 2

## G-D STUFF

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# I DOLATRY

“Know this day and take into your heart that the L-rd is G-d; in the heaven above and upon the earth below, there is nothing else.”  
Deuteronomy 4:39

## can't I be moral without G-d?

... it is *not* wise to follow these moral principles independent of their Giver. Such a moral system may work for most of the people most of the time, but inevitably it will fail -- either society-wide, or in the individual lives of citizens in certain situations. Absolute morality can only be a product of the unchanging realization that there is an absolute Divine "eye that sees, ear that hears, and all your actions are chronicled in a ledger."

*(taken from "Morality without G-d" by Naftali Silberberg)*

We must realize that we aren't the center of the universe. As important as we are; we must not forget who bestowed this value upon us. When ethics are determined by people, who's to say which ideas are correct? We are all part of a world community and cannot be our own judges, there must be a common code for all people at all times. Once G-d is removed from the picture, the "moral structure" will soon collapse because of lack of foundation. Our first stronghold is to recognize the Creator, and look to Him alone. Looking to "other gods" fiddles with the remaining precepts in our moral compass. Idols in our time have gone from stone statues to other things that people crave. How many times has moral decision been hindered because of bribery? All idolatry begins when the things that are meant to be a "means to an end," become "ends" in and of themselves.

There is only one G-d

**“I am, and there is nothing  
else besides Me.”**

**Isaiah 47:8**

G-d is beyond his manifestations

**As Creator, G-d's existence cannot depend  
on His handiwork; therefore, G-d is not  
a conceptual force like “love” or “truth,”  
these are some of His attributes.**

**Zohar 1:22a, Pardes Rimonim 3:1**

Denial of G-d= Denying everything

**“Whosoever recognizes idols  
has denied the entire Torah;  
and whosoever denies idols  
has recognized the entire Torah”**

**Midrash Sifre, Deut. 54**

## WHERE DID IDOLATRY COME FROM?

Two generations after Adam mankind was already on its way to depravity. Why? G-d was dropped from the picture. How did that happen? The masses were not as silly as one might think. Many understood that the sun, moon, and stars had influence on the world. The sun provided warmth, and enabled the crops to grow; the moon manipulated the tides, and so forth. The multitudes wanted to glorify G-d by praising the sun. They knew G-d formed the sun, but when requesting heat for their harvest, instead of directing their petition to the Al-mighty, they went to the sun direct. Soon after, G-d was put on hold, and the sun and the moon were the new replacements. As the generations spiraled downward the object their affection was reduced to silver, gold, and jewels. They built lavish temples and honed statues all to extol their newfound lords.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO FIX IT?

Everything in the universe was meant to be a means to an end, a vehicle to bring out good, and a tool to serve the Al-mighty. When the “means” becomes the “end” that is when the trouble ensues; and how idolatry came about. In our own lives we often make assorted objects our fixation. Our drive and our pleasure is dedicated primarily to them instead of G-d. Although, this form of 'idol worship' is much more refined than the barbaric practices that accompanied idol worship of days gone by, it is nevertheless, something we need to be aware of, and in control of.

### **bonus components**

- \*against entertaining the thought that there exists a deity
- \*against making or owning any graven image
- \*against making idols for use by others
- \*against making any forbidden statues (even for ornaments)
- \*against bowing to any idol
- \*against worshiping idols in any of their customary manners
- \*against causing our children to pass in the worship of Molech.
- \*against practicing divination, occult, witchcraft, etc.

prohibition of:

# BLASPHEMY

**“Whoever curses his G-d shall bear his sin. He that blasphemes the name of G-d shall be put to death.  
Leviticus 24:15-16**

## YOU ARE WHAT YOU SPEAK

Words say a lot about a person. One can assess intelligence, behavior traits, ethnic background, and emotions, just by listening to another's speech. Words are powerful; whether used for the positive, or for the opposite. Speech separates us from all other creatures, and is a medium for revealing the soul. This form of expression was given to us to convey positive ideas and channel them into action. G-d 'speaking' the world into existence, is the parallel for the faculty of speech as it exists in the world. The damage of negative speech is in some ways an affront on creation. Since G-d has no physical semblance, words are the only means we have to strike Him.

## SAY IT DON'T SPRAY IT

We are meant to use our words to praise G-d and His creations; to be grateful to Him for His providence rather than profane it. We owe Him our maximum awe and adoration at all times. Irreverence to the Almighty is similar to, and in some ways more severe than, idolatry. Idolatry denies the existence of G-d, blasphemy acknowledges His existence, but denies his omnipresence and majesty. The blasphemer denies that everything comes from G-d, and is ultimately good. Often the 'good' is not unveiled in a way we can relate to; nevertheless, our objective is to look past to the deeper reality.

**“Then I will praise the L-rd  
according to His righteousness,  
and sing to the name of the exalted L-rd.”  
Psalms 7:18**

## bonus components

- \*to acknowledge the presence of God
  - \*to fear God
  - \*to sanctify God's name
  - \*to study the Torah
  - \*to honor the scholars, and to revere one's teacher
  - \*to pray to Him
- 

## PRAYER, TIME TO CONNECT...

### WHAT IS PRAYER?

*(Pray\*er)*- The act of addressing supplication to a divinity, especially to the true God; the offering of adoration, confession, supplication, and thanksgiving to the Supreme Being  
**Webster's Dictionary 1913**

Prayer is the fusion of creation and Creator. The Hebrew, *tefillah*, hints at one of the main objectives in prayer.

Tofel = Joining, Uniting

Prayer is the backbone in the life of a human being; without it, one's spiritual life is a total void. G-d is the source of life, and through prayer, we bring out the idea that He is the base of *our* lives. It links us to our Maker and allows us to interact.

And he (Jacob) dreamed, and there was a ladder standing on earth and its top reached to the heaven. And G-d's angels were going up and down on it. And G-d was standing over him...  
**Genesis 28:12-13**

Prayer is compared to that “ladder standing on earth and its top reached to the heaven” (Genesis 28:12). This connection between heaven and earth serves two purposes: raising the earthly to heaven, and bringing heaven down to earth.

**Likkutei Dibburim 3, p. 497**

The union formed during prayer, not only confirms our belief in G-d, but attests to our trust and reliance in Him. Prayer affirms the idea that G-d cares for us, listens to us, and wants to assist us.

**Cast your burden on the Lord,  
and he will sustain you.**

**Psalm 55:22**

**From the depths I called upon you, O L-rd.  
Psalm 130**

**In desperate straits, I called to G-d; He  
answered me from His divine expanse.**

**Psalms 118**

In conjunction with being that tool which attaches us to the Al-mighty, it also is a time of self-assessment. The word, *tefilla*, also hints at this as well.

**Lehitpalel** = To pray; self-judgment

Prayer is hard work which takes much sincerity and painstaking effort.

**To love the L-rd your G-d and serve Him  
with all your heart” - which service is in the  
heart? This is prayer.  
Talmud, Taanit 2a**

Often times people have an inability to express the depths of their feelings in all of their detail. For this reason the sages compiled the siddur, prayer book, which compiles every feature of entreaty to G-d, and singing His praises. A Jew, when praying must pray by the format laid out in the siddur, in addition to any personal supplication he wishes to make in his own words. The construct of the three prayer services detailed, stand in place of the sacrifices that were offered throughout the day in the times that the Temple stood. Our utterances take the place of the bulls and rams.

A non-Jew must pray to G-d as well, being that it asserts a reliance on the Al-mighty. His day is filled with thanks, confession, and supplication, each in its proper time. A non-Jew prays essentially from the heart, but is free to use any of the Psalms or other Jewish texts in aiding his clarity. Heartfelt prayers for oneself or others are very powerful.

**"an enormous body of evidence: over one hundred experiments exhibiting the criteria of good science, many conducted under stringent laboratory conditions, over half of which showed that prayer brings about significant changes in a variety of living beings."**

**Larry Dossey MD,  
Healing Words: The Power of Prayer  
and the Practice of Medicine**



# Section #4-

## SUPPLIMENTARY ARTICLES

### **Existence of G-d** (letter by The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

B”H. 25 Iyar, 5719

Mr. Yitzchak Daniel,

Peace and blessing!

I have received your letter, with the enclosed question from the young men and women. Please apologize to them on my behalf for the delayed response. I was especially preoccupied throughout the days and weeks before and after Pesach.

As the question itself cannot be fully dealt with in a letter, I have to limit my response to a number of fundamental points, but I hope that you will be able to add your own explanation to these points in my letter, based on the teachings of our Torah and especially the teachings of Chassidut.

Needless to say, if there are any aspects of my letter which are not sufficiently clear, I am always ready to respond to further inquiries — and even challenges or refutations — which I will endeavor to answer to the best of my ability.

In response to the question:

“Is there a convincing proof for the existence of the Creator that could satisfy us as skeptics beyond the faintest shadow of a doubt?”

At first glance the question seems simple enough, especially since the concepts are straightforward and the terms familiar. But this apparent simplicity is deceptive, and to address the question properly requires clarity of language and careful definition of terms. In particular, what do we mean by “existence” and “proof” of existence? We must start here because these words mean very different things to different people. For example, that which constitutes complete proof for a young child may be totally inadequate for a meticulous scientist, and vice versa.

For instance, some say that for children, existence and proof of existence apply only to tangible objects — “seeing is believing.”

Included in this kind of proof is the general idea of a report. This too is a proof based on perception, except that it is someone else's perception. Consider, for example, a person born blind and who has never seen the shade of pink called magenta. Does he have convincing proof for the existence of that color? Surely he will rely on the perceptions of others who tell him that there is such a thing as light, that it comes in various colors, and that these colors come in different shades, one of which is magenta. Although magenta is totally beyond anything in his experience, he has absolutely no trouble believing in this entity because he trusts other people's reported perceptions.

At a more abstract level, another perfectly acceptable kind of proof is reasoning from effect to cause. Everyone acknowledges with complete certainty that everything that happens has a reason and cause for happening. Thus when one sees actions, these themselves are proof of an activating force, even though this is not direct proof and superficially there appears to be room for doubt. A classic example is the existence of electric power. Man is a sentient being; his sense of sight verifies the existence of colors, his sense of hearing verifies the existence of sound, etc. These are considered complete, direct proofs; yet, while we can sense current, man has no faculty to perceive electric potential, or voltage. We only see its effects, such as a filament glowing or a voltmeter's needle moving, etc. Still, we are certain of our conclusion that there exists some imperceptible force, which we term electricity, which is the reason behind what we do see. This is considered conclusive proof in the same way one proves the existence of magnetism and other forces. Electricity is a prime example because its existence is totally accepted beyond any shadow of a doubt.

The scientist's faith in cause and effect is so intense that he will accept as undisputed fact the existence of an activating force, even if it plainly contradicts rationality. A case in point is the force of gravity. We are so familiar with the idea of gravity from every science book throughout our school years, that no one would dream of questioning it, even though rationally it is far more difficult to accept than electricity. Electricity is only imperceptible when it is still, but when it flows it can be felt and measured. Not so with gravity; no one has ever seen, felt or measured a wave or particle of gravity. Our only proof that the force of gravity exists is that physical bodies move. But how can a force act from afar with no intermediary whatsoever between the masses? With a remote controlled garage door or toy, there is a flow of measurable infrared or radio waves, but with gravity there is nothing but the simple faith that every action has a cause.

At first scientists tried to explain the force of gravity by assuming the existence of a fine mediating substance called ether. But the idea had to be abandoned because the proposed medium would have necessarily had so many contradictory properties that it became even more implausible than the alternative absurdity of remote action without any connection.

Anyone in the exact sciences who wonders whether the existence of the Creator can be reliably proven should consider another “standard” concept, derived from the realm of physics. This idea is so intellectually challenging that after many decades of study, even the experts admit it is beyond their comprehension. Nonetheless it is accepted by all exact scientists as a reality, and it is a proven fact in the eyes of the public. The idea referred to is that matter is nothing but a particular form of energy, and that it is possible to transform matter into energy and energy to matter. Superficially it may be hard to see what is so difficult about this notion of relativity. However if one takes a moment to consider the degree of similarity between the light now emanating from his bulb, and the shoe on his foot, and then tries to imagine converting one into the other and back again, the problem becomes crystal clear. Everything in our experience leads us to think that matter and energy are as fundamentally different as two things can be. Therefore, to say that they are equivalent does not even sound, say, reasonable-but-difficult; it simply sounds ridiculous.

As with gravity, the only compelling proof for relativity is that we see events that have no apparent explanation and if we accept the theory – they are explained. This is considered a scientific proof and, on this basis alone, relativity is accepted virtually everywhere as conclusively demonstrated beyond the faintest doubt, even though from a strictly rational standpoint, the equivalence of matter and energy is not at all compelling.

People act in accordance with their beliefs, and skeptics are no different. Hence it is reasonable to expect that a skeptic will feel free to use as a basis for action any ideas that are shown to meet his criteria of legitimacy. On this basis, there is not only one, but several proofs for the existence of G-d and, as mentioned, there is no problem if one is forced to say that this existence is not grasped by the senses or the mind, or even if it contradicts rationality. As long as this existence accounts for observed reality and does so better than any other proposition, we have what is usually considered to be conclusive, scientific proof.

In this sense, proving the existence of the Creator is the same as proving anything else, whether in the realm of science or in the context of our daily lives.

Anyone who examines his daily conduct will admit that he doesn't perform a penetrating, thorough analysis assessing the reliability of the information on which he bases his daily activities. If the weather forecast calls for rain, he wears his boots even though he has never met the weatherman or studied meteorology, and furthermore he knows that the weatherman is often wrong. For another example, if Vitamin E is reported to cure baldness, he will take it without knowing for sure how it works or if it works. He'll take it without even knowing what it is. Rather he accepts the words of others who did look into the matter.

Only where there is some doubt that maybe the “information” was faked or that the observer was affected by internal or external factors, or that he wasn’t sure himself and took someone else’s view, etc... Then one would seek additional evidence. And with every increase in the number of observers, and with every type of variation in position, situation and context relative to the observers, the likelihood of deception becomes more remote and the evidence is strengthened in the form of a scientific and convincing proof. On this basis, the individual and society engage in all kinds of activities and projects, with complete trust that their conclusions are true and established.

So too in our case. The giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai was verified, generation after generation, as a fact proven by the presence of 600,000 adult males. If one includes women, children, Levites, men over sixty, etc., there were present millions of individuals, including Egyptian emigrants, who saw the events with their own eyes and experienced Divine communication personally and simultaneously.

This is not a testimony restricted to a single prophet, a dreamer or an elite group. This testimony was transmitted from parent to child, generation after generation, and everyone acknowledges that there was no interruption in the transmission from then until now. Moreover, there have never been less than 600,000 reporters in any generation, people whose characters were dissimilar and who were by no means afraid to disagree on basic issues, as is well documented from Sinai on. Yet, despite all their differences and arguments, and despite their being dispersed throughout the world for millennia, all the versions of the above historical event are similar in every detail. Is there more reliable and precise testimony than this?

There is a second manner of proof which is also based on the premise above – that everything that happens has a cause, that seeing any event or situation is proof positive that some guiding force exists, even if the event was apparently senseless or destructive. This proof is as follows:

Consider any object. Virtually anything that one can imagine is composed of various parts that are arranged and coordinated with remarkable precision. None of the parts has any inherent control over the others and yet we know that the harmonious and unified functioning of the entire system is itself a phenomenon and must be due to some cause. We conclude from this with complete confidence that there is an external power that binds and unifies all the parts. Moreover, the very fact that it binds and unifies the parts proves that it is stronger than they are since it controls them.

For example, if we were to enter a factory where everything was run automatically and we did not see anyone there, we would not doubt the existence and involvement of a great mechanic whose knowledge encompassed all the machinery and component parts and who controlled them – one who was in charge of their functioning among themselves and who maintained the connection between the parts and the control center. On the contrary – the more concealed the hand of man in such a factory, and the more

the operations are automated, the more impressed and convinced we are of the mechanic's remarkable skill.

And if this is the case with a factory, where we are speaking of hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of parts, how much more true is this for natural objects, e.g., a piece of wood or stone, a plant or an animal, and – needless to say – the structure of the human body, as Job states, "From my flesh I will envision..." This is especially so from the scientific perspective that every object is comprised of billions of atoms, with each atom containing even more minute parts. One would think, at first glance, that chaos would reign and yield incomparable disorder. But instead, we see an amazing orderliness and a marvelous fitting of the smaller parts to the larger, up to the very largest as well as the integration of microcosmic and macrocosmic patterns and processes, etc., etc. It is therefore clear beyond any shadow of a doubt that there exists a "Mechanic" responsible for all this.

One might say that all this is governed according to the "laws of nature" – but I think it is important to emphasize that such expressions have no explanatory content, but rather give a convenient summary or description of the existing situation. That is, it is true that natural phenomena are conducted according to definite patterns. But to say that a "Law of Nature" is a being in and of itself without dependence, and that this being rules throughout the cosmos, and that there are thousands of beings like it, according to the number of natural laws, is so absurd that there is not one scientist in the field who would say so. Rather it is the case that such laws are merely convenient, summary expressions for describing a situation, so that one should not be forced to duplicate at every turn a lengthy description of the "simple" facts. But however elegant and sophisticated a law of nature may be, it is clear and obvious that such an expression provides no explanation whatsoever.

Now to the heart of the matter. To put it plainly, everyone has criteria for what can be reliably considered true. If an idea meets those standards, it is fit to be believed and acted upon. If it does not, then it is not suitable for belief or as a basis for action. But one may not adopt certain truth criteria when it is convenient, and then drop them when it is not. Therefore, it is assumed that anyone who is seeking a proof is not merely doing so for the sake of intellectual exercise, but would indeed live by his conclusions.

In this regard it should be noted that the aforementioned proof is much stronger than all those proofs and evidence by which people conduct their daily lives. What simpler illustration is there than the fact that, when retiring at night, one arranges everything for the morning even though there is no logical proof that tomorrow morning the sun will rise yet again and that all natural systems will continue to function as they did yesterday and the day before. It is only that since the world has been working this way for so many days and years, one trusts that these "laws" will also rule tomorrow and the next day.

And on this basis alone, a person strives and troubles himself to prepare his affairs for

the following morning, even though he has no logically compelling reason to do so. On the contrary, if chance or random probabilities were running the show, it would be more reasonable to assume that tomorrow will be utterly unpredictable. The conviction that nature will continue to function as it did today is only logically compelling when it is based on the knowledge that there really is a Master of the world.

Although more could be said on everything that was discussed above and certain points could be explained further, this should suffice and provide enough material for consideration and conclusion. For it is incorrect to maintain that the Creator's existence requires proof, while His Creation itself exists beyond doubt, because in fact the opposite is true! Recent results of scientific research, regarding the existence of the universe and ways to "describe" it, contradict each other in numerous areas and indeed leave room for major doubts. But the most serious, significant and fundamental scientific doubt is as follows:

Who can establish whether the perceived impression of the eyes, of the ears, or of the brain generally, has any reality outside human sensation or thought? This argument poses an insurmountable challenge to the truth of the world's existence but in no way applies to the Creator, nor to the functional reality of event causation and universal order. For this, practically speaking, it doesn't matter whether there exists an independent reality or just the impression of such a reality. The primary consideration of the average person, and according to which he lives his whole life, is that for everything in his world there is a cause which acts, from within or without

A further note of importance is that often human nature is such that when one is given a simple proof, it is difficult to accept because of its very simplicity. Such irrational rejection is unfortunate because it precludes any effect on personal behavior, while one of the foundations of our faith in the universe's Creator and Director, as well as the stand at Sinai and the receiving of the Torah and its commandments, is that the quality of a person's deeds is what matters most.

I will be pleased to hear responses to all the above, and as mentioned in the enclosed letter, I hope they will feel completely free to present their opinions, even if they disagree with what is written above.

With Blessing

/signature

**conversation:**  
**Why Pray if G-d doesn't always answer?**  
**Askmoses.com**

tefillos: this girl in my school, her brother was diagnosed with cancer and had a few weeks to live and whatever so then today they found out that he's healthy and the tumor isn't cancer

Rabbi Wagner: thank G-d

tefillos: and my whole school is like "bla bla bla thats what prayer does bla bla bla"

tefillos: and i just got so jealous and so angry and i was so mad

tefillos: how can someone say "this is the power of prayer" when there are plenty of other people who die?

tefillos: see i lost my mother and uncle four years ago and i feel like my prayers aren't good and apparently this girl has amazing prayers because god helps her

Rabbi Wagner: I agree with you -- they should have been more considerate and realized the implication of the way they said it

Rabbi Wagner: but your question within itself is a very valid question

Rabbi Wagner: In other words you're asking:

Rabbi Wagner: How can we believe that G-d is in control and sometimes chooses to listen to our prayers if so many other times prayers seem to go unanswered

Rabbi Wagner: after all, we don't know for sure why G-d does what He does

Rabbi Wagner: but we do at the same time believe that prayer does play a role -- though not always the only role

Rabbi Wagner: Let's put it in context

Rabbi Wagner: When we Daven to G-d , obviously we want Him to do what we're asking Him to do, right?

tefillos: yes

Rabbi Wagner: Does that mean He has to do it?

tefillos: no

Rabbi Wagner: Does the result -- whether He gives me what I'm asking for or not -- always depend on the nature of the prayer only, or can there be other things involved

tefillos: other things

Rabbi Wagner: But just because G-d chose not to listen to our prayers about one thing, and chose to listen about another, doesn't mean that the first prayers were better or stronger than the others

Rabbi Wagner: sometimes there's other considerations -- some reason why G-d feels a particular soul needs to leave the world at a particular time

tefillos: OK exactly so then what's the point of even Davening for people?

tefillos: if god wants them to die, then they will, if He doesn't then won't die.... i don't get it

Rabbi Wagner: because the prayers do have power

Rabbi Wagner: and sometimes they change a decree that has already been made

Rabbi Wagner: but sometimes they don't -- the prayers still aren't a waste

Rabbi Wagner: they still make things better and stronger for both the soul of the person praying and the one being prayed for



Rabbi Wagner: Let me put it a different way

Rabbi Wagner: Do you ever ask your father to give you something?

Rabbi Wagner: Does he always give it to you?

tefillos: of course not

Rabbi Wagner: is that a reason not to ask? -- After all, your asking helps. Sometimes he gives it to you because you really should have it. Sometimes he gives it to you because you asked nicely and properly. And sometimes he doesn't because he has his reasons why not

Rabbi Wagner: But the asking still helps, right?

tefillos: and sometimes it hurts...

Rabbi Wagner: There's no question about that

tefillos: really i just wanted to make sure that i wasn't being completely unreasonable

tefillos: when i got upset/angry/etc

tefillos: and you answered that, so you don't have to explain anything else really

Rabbi Wagner: Your feelings come from who you are and your life experiences

Rabbi Wagner: you have every right to feel hurt

Rabbi Wagner: but you should also learn to recognize that people aren't trying to hurt you

tefillos: right and i really need to work on that

Rabbi Wagner: we all do

## **Is There a Logical Proof that there's only One G-d?**

**By Aron Moss  
chabad.org**

Question:

I accept that some sort of "Higher Being" created the universe. But why couldn't there be many such beings? Is there any logical reason to say that there is only one god?

Answer:

The definition of G-d is: "a Being without definition." G-d cannot be defined, because if I define Him then I limit Him. And something limited is not G-d. By defining something, I give it borders. If for example I define an apple as a sweet, round fruit that is green or red, then when I find a long purple fruit, I know that it can't be an apple. An apple is limited to being round and red or green. That is its definition. G-d can't be defined, because by defining Him you are saying that there's something He can't be; but this could not be true, because G-d is unlimited.

That's why there can be only one G-d. Because if you don't have a definition, then there is nothing outside of you. There can be no "other".

An example: two neighboring countries can only be called two countries when there is a border in between them. But if a country has no borders, if there is no defined place where it ends and another country begins, how can you say that there are two countries?

G-d has no borders, so how can there be more than one god? Where would one god end and one begin if there is no dividing line between them?

The act of creation is the act of making borders and drawing definitions: this is an apple and not a banana, this is land and this sea. Creation has definitions. The Creator doesn't have a definition. That's what makes Him G-d. And that's why there can only be one.

**Can G-d Create a Rock That's Too Heavy for Him to Lift?**  
**The Omnipotence Paradox**  
**By Tzvi Freeman**  
**chabad.org**

This, in many different versions, is a very old question. It's a kind of paradox we face when dealing with the concept of an all-powerful being. Some attribute it to the Moslem thinker, Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

More than anyone, it was Maimonides who answered it with his "negative theology"—which was later adopted by Thomas D'Aquinas and became standard Roman Catholic theology, as well.

Negative theology is much easier to understand if you are familiar with Aristotelian logic—which gave birth to the question to begin with. But I'll try to describe it here in short.

In Aristotelian thought, everything is a duality. This was the way of thinking about things up until the time of Rene Descartes and the early rationalists who began to discuss matter as a measurable quality. Until then, there was (1) the thing itself and (2) its qualities, or predicates.

For example: Water flows. The wind blows. Rocks are heavy, etc. But flowing is not water, blowing is not wind and heaviness is not rocks. So there is water, and there is this quality that it has to flow. But the water itself is not the flowingness of the water. Neither is the wind its blowingness. Or the rock its heaviness. And the same with everything else that exists: The qualities of a thing are not the thing itself—rather, the thing itself has qualities.

Maimonides realized that this could not apply to G-d, since G-d is a perfect oneness. A perfect oneness can't have any dualities. So to say that G-d is kind, or G-d is wise, or G-d is strong—that's not going to work, since it implies dualities and multiplicities in G-d.

But nevertheless, all these things—kindness, wisdom, strength and more—all come from G-d, since He created all things. Like the psalmist rhetorically asks, "The one who implants the ear doesn't hear?" So if hearing exists in the creatures that He created, He must also have a quality of hearing. The same with wisdom and kindness—for us to have these qualities, they must first begin with G-d.

So Maimonides answered that G-d really has no attributes. When we attribute strength, kindness, wisdom, etc. to G-d, what we mean is that He does not lack these qualities, since, after all, they also extend from Him—as does everything extend from Him. But He cannot be described by any of them.

In fact, Maimonides went so far as to say that G-d cannot even be said to have existence. We cannot say that G-d exists—since that would imply that there are two things, G-d forbid, about G-d: That He is G-d and that He exists. Rather, G-d cannot be predicated with any quality, even that of existence.

Although Maimonides himself notes that this is a matter that the human mind can never truly fathom, nevertheless Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi ("The Alter Rebbe") provides two helpful metaphors: One from the relationship of the sun and its light, another from the relationship of speech to the human psyche.

Let's say you see a ray of light from the sun shining in through your window. So you ask this ray, "Where did you come from?" It answers, of course, that it came from the sun. So you ask it, "Let me see what you look like as you are in your source within the sun." So it takes you there (in your nuclear fusion resistant suit) and you look about and—hey, there's no ray here! But why? Doesn't the ray start here? Yet all there is here is one single source of light. The entity of the ray is entirely absorbed within that oneness.

Same thing (almost) with a word of speech. Where did that word you spoke come from? Well, it arose out of a feeling you had, or some perspective of things you had in your mind. But there, in that raw feeling or mental perspective, there are no words. Yet words arise from that place.

So too—but in an infinitely more perfect way—in G-d's perfect oneness there is no wisdom, no understanding, no knowledge, no kindness, no strength, no nothing. Just a perfect oneness. Yet from that oneness, all things arise. Go figure. Or don't. As Maimonides implies and the R. Schneur Zalman spells out, the human mind only understands things as they are within it. We are composites of many different qualities, so we cannot conceive a perfect oneness—just as we cannot conceive of something that has only one side but no back, so we cannot conceive of

that which neither is nor is not. Or that which is neither strong nor not strong, yet from which all strengths extend.

Which brings us back to your original question—which you should now see just does not apply to G-d: If we were talking about a human being, or an angel, or any sort of created being, we could ask, "So, how strong is it? Can it lift this? What about this?"—and we could measure that strength in those terms.

But when it comes to G-d, none of this applies. If something is strong, or heavy, that comes from Him. If it can be lifted or not lifted, that also comes from Him. But none of this in any way measures who He is or what He is—since He is not measured by any qualities whatsoever.

Just to note: Some thinkers have asserted that this paradox proves that an omnipotent being is impossible. Yet mathematicians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have come to accept that every system will of necessity contain some paradox. When your train of thought runs up against a paradox, it doesn't mean you're totally off track. It just means that there's a higher track, beyond your whole system of thought. That's the case here as well: This paradox is just a way of pointing out that the concept of G-d lies outside and beyond our systems of logic.

I've provided a long-winded answer for the inquisitive mind. Sometimes, however, it's not a philosopher asking the question, it's just some smart-aleck. But the smart-aleck also deserves an answer. So you can simply say, "Sure G-d can create a rock so heavy that even He cannot lift it. G-d can do anything. And He could even lift that rock that He cannot lift as well."

That'll send 'em flying. And it's not untrue. Because it's simply saying that G-d does not fit into any of our standard ways of thinking. G-d is not a thing—He is the source of all things. The tools of measurement of things simply do not apply to Him.

Everything we learn or think about has to have some practical application. Here too, as well: Every day we pray to G-d to heal the sick, feed the poor, knock sense into the politicians, and for all the other needs of humankind. Yet we preface all this by praising G-d for being the ultimate in kindness and mercy and for being in complete control of all things. So if He is so kind and has so much control, why is the world such a mess that we have to ask Him to fix it up?

The answer is that G-d created in the world a rock so heavy He cannot lift it. It's called our human free choice to make a mess of His world. And in our prayer, we ask that nevertheless, He should still pick it up. He should pick all of us up, and He will, as long as we pitch in just a little.

## were you paying attention...?

1. Why can't we rely on human morals?
2. Where did idolatry come from?
3. Besides believing in one G-d, what other conceptions must we have?
4. Why can blasphemy be even worse than idol worship?
5. What is the objective of prayer?
6. Discuss some practical times (like the beginning and end of the day) that you will implement prayer in your daily life.