

My Elevator Pitch *for* God

IN 500 WORDS OR LESS,
THOUGHT LEADERS
FROM AROUND THE
WORLD EXPLAIN WHY
THEY BELIEVE

BOOK CLUB COLLECTION #4

CLOSING REMARKS BY RABBI YAAKOV WOLBE
AND RABBI LAWRENCE KELEMEN

ARTWORK BY ANDI ARNOVITZ



My Elevator Pitch *for* God: In 500 Words Or Less, Thought Leaders From Around The World Explain Why They Believe
This Book Club Collection #4 was compiled by Bruce Licht

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Table of Contents

Foreword	7
----------------	---

JEFF ASTROF

TV Producer, Showrunner, Writer of “Friends”	8
---	---

CHANA MARGULIES

Author, Relationship Counselor, Kabbalist ..	10
--	----

RABBI YITZCHOK CAPLAN

Author, Educator, ‘Ambassador for God’ in Jerusalem	12
--	----

RABBI DAVID AARON

Visionary, Author, Paradigm Shifter	14
---	----

PATRICIA CULLIGAN, Ph.D.

Dean of the University of Notre Dame’s College of Engineering	16
--	----

SARA BLAU

Artist, Educator, Prolific Author of Children’s Books	20
--	----

RABBI ELIE FEDER, Ph.D.

Mathematics Ph.D., Ordained Rabbi, Cohost of “Physics to God” podcast	22
--	----

CHAYA RIVKA ZWOLINSKI

Author, Teacher of Joy and Optimism	24
---	----

RABBI KEN SPIRO

World Historian with Humor and Heart.	26
--	----

FRED AMOROSO

Captain of Industry, Chairman of Yahoo, Senior Executive at IBM (Retired)	28
--	----

Closing Remarks

RABBI YAAKOV WOLBE

Prolific, Innovative, Dynamic Torah Educator, Podcaster, Author	32
--	----

RABBI LAWRENCE KELEMEN

Philosopher, writer, Jewish continuity activist	38
--	----

Endnotes	43
----------------	----

About the Artist

ANDI ARNOVITZ

World-Renowned Multi-Media Conceptual Artist	45
---	----

About the Compiler

BRUCE LICHT

Entrepreneur, Author, Founder of My Elevator Pitch For God™	46
--	----



ARTWORK BY ANDI ARNOVITZ

Foreword

Elevator Pitch [el-uh-vey-ter pich] *noun*

A brief talk intended to win approval for something, as a product, a business proposal, or a compelling idea.

WHY THIS TOPIC and why now? Because there is unquestionably a groundswell of interest and a real need for a non-religious conversation about God. The world is desperate for meaning, purpose, and wisdom; a glance at social media will show you that the struggle is real. Humans are by nature religious. We have an innate need to worship something. That might be health, politics, beauty, or money, but it might be something deeper and more meaningful.

Hoping to guide people in that search, the journey began by first talking about the project with friends, and brainstorming about whom to ask to participate. After composing an invitation explaining the mission, interesting, thoughtful people with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences were sought out.

Were the authors given any direction about what to address? Not at all. They all had their own ideas about how to approach the subject. The “Submission Package Information Sheet” that was provided to all the authors stated that the essays should not be written as a proof of one religion over another. These essays are not about “Proof of Christianity,” “Proof of Judaism,” or “Proof of Islam.” There is no theology in this collection.

What differentiates these essays one from the other is their reasoning, their analogies, their proof, if you will. What unifies them is their unshakable belief – hard-won, ingrained from birth, and everything in between – that God exists, that God created the world, and that God continues to take an active interest in what happens here. Is every essay in this book club collection a stand-alone proof of God’s existence? No, it is not. But every essay adds to the overall conversation. One of them might have a sentence, an example, or an analogy that will resonate with you. Each one comes from its author’s heart and aims to speak directly to yours. So open your heart, and your mind, take a deep breath, and dive in. You have nothing to lose and potentially, much to gain.

The aspiration in this book club collection is (in a non-religious way) to introduce more people to God and strengthen the faith of those who already believe. In doing so, the goals are to find common ground, bring people together, provide greater meaning to their lives, and start to transform the world in a positive direction.

Visit mepfg.com (*My Elevator Pitch for God*) and read many more wonderful, inspirational, thought provoking essays from additional Thought Leaders from around the world.



JEFF ASTROF

TV PRODUCER, SHOWRUNNER, WRITER OF “FRIENDS”

Jeff Astrof is a television writer/producer/showrunner who, over a 30-year career, has worked on many shows, the most famous of which was “Friends.” Other shows for which he has written include “Grounded for Life,” “The New Adventures of Old Christine,” “Ground Floor,” and “Angie Tribeca” (and he knows you’ve only heard of “Friends”). He co-created a show called “Trial and Error,” which is available for streaming on Amazon Prime. His current show is “Shining Vale,” starring Courteney Cox, which airs on Starz.

He is blessed to be one of a small group of shomer Shabbat sitcom writers (we need one more for a minyan), and was the first producer to have Warner Brothers shut down a show for Sukkot. To the best of his knowledge, he is also the only sitcom writer to be doing daf yomi.

The God Gene

BY JEFF ASTROF

I'VE NEVER DOUBTED the existence of God. It wasn't because of my religious upbringing. Growing up, my point of reference for the Almighty was the off-screen character who gave Charlton Heston the Ten Commandments in the movie of the same name. Nor was my belief forged by deep intellectual curiosity. I was content not questioning how trees made apples, where ideas came from, and why people in Australia don't fall off the planet (yes, "gravity" — but why does gravity work?). I was told I had "*The God Gene*." I guess like detached earlobes and being able to curl my tongue, I was born with a predisposition to believe in a Higher Power. Since I wasn't born with the "tall gene" or the "athletic gene," I was happy that my DNA at least had *this*.

One would think having a genetic predisposition to believe in God would lead me to explore my deeper purpose. But one would be wrong. I saw the Creator of the Universe like the Wizard of Oz — to be approached with fear and trepidation and only for my most important needs. In fifth grade, I asked God to make the new girl like me. Some 13 years later, I returned to ask to get hired as a writer for a TV show called "Blue Skies." For the record, I went one for two — it was rumored Becky Goldberg *did* in fact think I was cute, but I did not get an offer on "Blue Skies." In God's infinite wisdom, the Almighty instead put me on a new show called "Friends."

Then I met my wife. Unlike me, Shawni was spiritual and saw God not as a rich, fickle uncle, but as a Loving Father. (My wife choosing to marry me is reason enough to believe in God, but I digress.) One weekend, we went to a seminar by an organization called *Arachim*, which offered "proof" of God. Over the course of three days, we heard lectures from rabbis, scientists, and various experts showing countless examples of God's handiwork, from the miracle of two cells merging to create a person, to, yes, how a seemingly dead sliver of wood is pre-programmed to decompose and be reborn into a tree that makes apples. Perhaps the One who programmed the seed gave me this God gene? Perhaps, behind it all, God has a Larger Plan.

On the other hand, in an infinite universe, couldn't there be one planet where people and apples can evolve without being part of a Larger Plan? Is there a role for randomness? I think not. As the Watchmaker Analogy goes, if you found a pocket watch in the desert, you wouldn't assume it was formed by millennia of randomly blowing sands — you'd assume it was created. How much more so for beings as complicated as people?

So how do I find my deeper purpose? Turns out, God put it in a Book and gave it to Moses — in front of three million people so no one would question God's existence. In fact, they made a movie about it... starring Charlton Heston.



CHANA MARGULIES

AUTHOR, RELATIONSHIP COUNSELOR, KABBALIST

Raised on an organic farm in Canada, Chana now lives in the mystical city of Tzfat with her husband, Rabbi Ariel Margulies. She is a shlucha of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Chana is a sought-after international motivational speaker. Her words touch every heart, regardless of background, religious affiliation, age, or gender. She is available to speak for Shabbatons, events, travel programs, summer camps, conferences, and corporate events.

She gives life-changing interactive online dating and marriage courses and provides individual coaching.

Chana is a prolific writer, with articles featured on Chabad.org and in various magazines. Her memoir, *Jumping in Puddles*, is available on Amazon.

Chana runs GeulaWives, a program that helps women transform their marriages. Be in touch to learn how to join a circle in your community, for online support, to become a facilitator.

Feel free to reach out with any personal question you may have, or to join the Margulies family for a Shabbat meal in Tzfat. For Chana's latest courses, books, and videos, be in touch via chanamargulies.org; chana@chanamargulies.org; or [@chanamargulies](https://www.instagram.com/chanamargulies).

You are the Gatekeeper

BY CHANA MARGULIES

DOES GOD EXIST? That depends on you. God is reality. Life occurs within a reality called “God.” God is infinite, which means God can express all possible realities, including both revelation and concealment.

If you are an all-pervading, omnipresent being, where can you hide, where can you express your ability to conceal? God created infinite worlds; every person is a small world, each living in a private universe. If you are aware of God, God exists in your World. If not, God is expressing God’s ability to hide, while simultaneously bringing you into existence.

Imagine a person being breathed into existence *ex nihilo*, something from nothing, and yet believes itself to be independent. Like a cartoon being drawn and believing that it drew itself.

What is God’s greatest magic trick? Two people discussing whether God exists. You can almost hear the silent echo of a cosmic laugh at the irony of God hiding himself within himself, like a turtle within its shell.

What sparked God’s desire to create a world? Kabbalah teaches that it started when God perceived the delight God would have of sharing a home with you. God’s ever-present vulnerable desire is for you to invite God into your home, that home being your mind and heart, your subjective reality. God could barge in with a miracle, but it is intimacy, not power that God is craving. For intimacy, you must be wanted and sought after. The most vulnerable act in history was the Ten Commandments,

where God told us his love language and simultaneously gave us free will, to choose God, or not.

God’s greatest delight is to be found in the places where God’s light is the most hidden. When we find God there, we have won at this cosmic hide and seek, and God couldn’t be happier. God is revealed the same way God is hidden - within our consciousness. For example, take a crispy fry, raise it heavenward, and say a blessing thanking God, thereby putting it into the context of existing in God, and “presto,” God is revealed. God is everything, so how can God be revealed or concealed? The answer is in your own life and world. Your world went from a black “whole” to endless light. The truth of God’s all-pervading existence was revealed for you.

Does God exist? Yes. But for God, that’s not a big deal. God wants to exist in your world. You are the gatekeeper. You can allow God to exist in your inner world of thoughts, speech, and actions. For example, we can say, “Thank God” when things go well, instead of solely crediting our own efforts.

The most powerful expression of God existing in your world is in your actions. When you do a good deed, channeling the Almighty’s wishes into action, then God becomes a physical, tangible reality for everyone to experience and see.

And that is our mission; to open the gates and become partners with God.



RABBI YITZCHOK CAPLAN

AUTHOR, EDUCATOR, 'AMBASSADOR FOR GOD' IN JERUSALEM

Rabbi Caplan grew up in Philadelphia, attended the Long Beach Yeshiva, and after his marriage, settled in Israel. For the past twenty years he has been studying and teaching at the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem, the largest academy of advanced study of Jewish texts in the world. Since the passing in 2005 of his wife's grandfather, the venerated Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Rabbi Caplan has sent out a short weekly ethical email based primarily on Rav Wolbe's magnum opus, *Alei Shur*. Artscroll has published these as *Rav Wolbe on Chumash*. To receive the weekly email or to contact Rabbi Caplan, please email baishamussar@gmail.com.

Spilled Inkwell or Supreme Text?

BY YITZCHOK CAPLAN

IMAGINE THAT YOU chance upon a book and you ask the guy next to you who authored it. He responds, “No one; an inkwell spilled and formed the words.” Of course, you would think his response is ludicrous, absurd, and impossible. Nothing that coherent or methodical could have been created randomly.

Our universe extends for billions of light years, and the sole known inhabited orb is the relatively miniscule planet Earth. Yet it contains *everything* necessary, and in the perfect proportions, to sustain an incalculable number of living creatures.

The sun is positioned at exactly the right distance to ensure that earth doesn’t freeze or burn. It evaporates water into clouds and the wind transports these mobile sprinkler systems to irrigate the ground. Fruits grow. Each fruit is equipped with a security box containing seeds that ensure its continued existence. The human species enjoys the same guarantee, as each man is equipped with seeds and the urge to propagate. The mother’s body transforms into a cocoon that provides for the fetus’ needs for nine months until the baby is fully formed. At the perfect time, the body contracts and forces the baby out, and in tandem, begins preparing the mother’s body to produce food.

Humans are typically outfitted with perfectly-fashioned hands, feet, heart, eyes, ears and nose, fabulously intricate digestive and nervous systems, a miniscule dialysis machine, and a lightning speed computer. The body

extracts essential nutrients from the food it eats and distributes them with precision to its trillions of cells, via its thousands of miles of blood vessels. Did this all evolve by itself?

Additionally, how could the entire universe have evolved if there’s absolutely nothing recognizable that’s still evolving? If things are evolving but simply at an ever so slow rate, how did the human body digest food as the stomach evolved over 10 million years?

So, if it’s blatantly obvious that the world hasn’t evolved, and one has to be blind not to realize that there’s a Creator of our awe-inspiring world, how come most of even the world’s greatest thinkers didn’t reach this conclusion? The answer is that indeed they were blinded by their desires. Understandably, if there’s a Creator, then there must be some reason why that Creator created the world – and no one wants to be told how to live.

Yet, even if evolution were a historical fact, we would still be left with the most glaring issue: How did the primordial substance that ultimately evolved into our universe come into existence?

And here’s more food for thought: Although a five- or ten-day week would be logical, the world follows a seven-day week. Is there any plausible source for this indivisible and unlikely number of days aside from the bestselling book of all-time, which relates God’s creation of the world in seven days? Google these questions. Now you might not be surprised to find that even Google doesn’t have the answers!



RABBI DAVID AARON

VISIONARY, AUTHOR, PARADIGM SHIFTER

Rabbi David Aaron is a spiritual visionary and master educator who has invested over four decades delving into life's biggest questions and sharing the Torah's transformational wisdom with adults and young adults, while exploring the most difficult questions that people have about God's existence and their own.

As a child of a Holocaust survivor, Rabbi Aaron struggled to erase his childhood image of God as a punishing old man in the clouds, waiting for us to fail.

Learning with Rabbi Aaron is both profoundly moving and entertaining. People at every level of spiritual knowledge enjoy the adventure of peeking around the corners of mystical ideas. Finding answers to our big questions begins a process that is life-changing.

Beneath Rabbi Aaron's light-hearted playfulness is a mature, sophisticated, and holistic understanding of Torah, well-grounded in classic and Chassidic sources.

Rabbi Aaron received his rabbinic ordination from Yeshivat ITRI. He is the Dean and Founder of Israelight. He runs Jewish educational programs in Israel and abroad, and has developed educational curricula for Jewish high schools.

Rabbi Aaron is the author of eight paradigm-shifting books, including *Endless Light*; *Seeing G-d*; *Love is My Religion*; *The Secret Life of G-d*; *Inviting G-d In*; *Living a Joyous Life*; and *The God Powered Life*, many of which have been translated into other languages. Rabbi Aaron lives in Jerusalem with his wife, Chana, and their seven children and grandchildren.

Is God Good?

BY DAVID AARON

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK, “How do you know that God is good, maybe God is also bad?”

This question is based on a false premise. The people who ask it assume that God is a particular being, perhaps even an infinite/eternal being, who is out there somewhere in heaven. Based on this assumption, they struggle to understand whether this being has only good attributes and does only good, since they see so much bad in the world. But the sages teach that God is not a being who *has* good attributes, God *is* those good attributes and is infinitely more than those attributes. If God had attributes, that would mean that God was not absolutely *one*, but a composite of multiple parts, and that is not true. The best way we can put it is that God is not good, rather good is what we call God. The word God is probably the derivative of the word “good” and that’s because “God” is the personification of all good. So, when we say God, we mean the *absolute* good.

The sages teach us that “God” created and runs the world, which is synonymous with saying that “Good” created and runs the world. In other words, Good Almighty is our Creator and guide. Good loves us, Good speaks to us,

and Good also judges us. And when Good does, it is always and only for our own good. In fact, everything that happens to us comes from Good and is always and only for our own good.

Believing in God means believing in Good. Acknowledging God as the King of the Universe means pledging allegiance to the supreme and exclusive rule of Good. Praising God means praising Good; it means asserting that there is nothing we value and admire more than the Supreme Good. Loving God means loving Good. Fearing God means fearing that we might betray our love of Good or lapse in our devotion to Good; it means fearing that our behavior might block the manifest presence of Good in our lives. Serving God means serving Good by being a channel for Good in the world. Praying to God means asking God, the Supreme Good, to guide us in living a good life – by seeing good and doing good – as well as asking Good to instruct us how to help others in a good way.

In other words, when we speak of God, we are referring to the personification of the all good. The Supreme Good is our God. Thank God. Thank goodness.



PATRICIA CULLIGAN, Ph.D.

DEAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME'S COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Patricia Culligan is the Matthew H. McCloskey Dean of the University of Notre Dame's College of Engineering. Since her appointment on August 1, 2020, she has overseen and supported its 200 faculty, 100 staff, and 2,500 students, undergraduate, graduate, and postdoc. Culligan previously was Department Chair and Carleton Professor of Civil Engineering and Engineering Mechanics at Columbia University. While at Columbia, she was the founding associate director of Columbia's Data Science Institute; a member of the Executive Committee of the Earth Institute; and Co-Founder of the Collaboratory @Columbia, which supports the development of cross-cutting curricula for a data-rich world. She also served as Columbia Engineering's vice dean of academic affairs.

Culligan is a Chartered Engineer, registered with the UK Engineering Council, and a Fellow of both the American Society of Civil Engineers and the British Institution of Civil Engineers. She is internationally recognized for her expertise in water resources and environmental engineering. Her research focuses on sustainable urban infrastructure, and the application of advanced measurement, sensing, and modeling techniques to improve water, energy, and environmental management. Some of her recent work examines the role of green infrastructure in supporting urban sustainability, and human health and well-being in the face of environmental stressors.

Culligan earned her doctorate and master's degrees in Engineering from the University of Cambridge. She holds a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Leeds. She also earned a diploma in Language, Literature, and Civilization from the Université d'Aix-Marseille III. She is the author or co-author of seven books, seven book chapters, and more than 175 technical articles. In 2021, the American Society of Civil Engineers awarded her the H. Bolton Seed Medal for expanding the boundaries of geo-environmental and sustainability engineering.

The Wonder of Nature

BY PATRICIA CULLIGAN

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils.*

William Wordsworth's poem beautifully conjures the wonder and delight that nature can evoke in the midst of everyday human activity, uplifting spirits, alleviating angst, and inspiring moments of pure joy.

The connections between nature, human health and well-being, and happiness are strong and well-studied. In several recent collaborative research projects in which I was privileged to engage, we identified clear relationships between connectedness to nature and subjective well-being. Participants interviewed in a New York City park reported high levels of happiness strongly correlated to feeling a breeze, seeing trees, and gazing at an open sky.¹

We also found that people's access to nature, and especially green spaces, correlated with higher levels of subjective well-being during the early stages of the global COVID-19 pandemic, when many found themselves isolated and deprived of activities that they value.²

Furthermore, our study into the linkages between green infrastructure and perceptions of urban greening strategies demonstrated that vegetation ranks highly among the benefits that people most frequently identify with urban green infrastructure programs.³

While the scientific data that my collaborators and I collected can confirm the beneficial effects of human connectedness to nature, our data cannot explain the origins or details of this connection.

Theories regarding the evolutionary origins of human affiliation with nature have, however, been put forward.

For example, the Biophilia Hypothesis proposes the existence of an ancestral adaptation that drives humans to appreciate natural environmental conditions, because such an emotional attachment is beneficial for survival. The more recent Topophilia Hypothesis suggests that human connectedness with nature is better characterized as a developmental behavioral system that is based on gene adaptation, as well as on local environment interactions that promote cultural learning.⁴

In addition, a study by Yang et al.⁵ points to a relationship between one's experiencing awe, a self-transcendent emotion, and one's connectedness to nature. Steller et al.⁶ describe awe as an emotion that promotes prosocial behavior and collaboration, because it is characterized as a response to *being in the presence of something vast that the individual does not immediately understand*. Evolutionary claims about the function of awe are founded on the importance of reducing self-interest in order to achieve group goals necessary for survival.

When connecting to nature, people report sensing a greater presence and a wonder at the *existence* of the world. This kind of wonder is separate from curiosity about how our world evolved and how it functions. Understanding the origins and details of our connectedness to nature is not enough to explain our wonder at *existence*.

Quoting the Papal Encyclical *Laudato si'*: "*From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine.*" (LS85)



ARTWORK BY ANDI ARNOVITZ

“I believe that God
is in me as the sun
is in the color and
fragrance of a flower —
the Light in my darkness,
the Voice in my silence.”¹

HELEN KELLER

AMERICAN DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCATE (1880-1968)



SARA BLAU

ARTIST, EDUCATOR, PROLIFIC AUTHOR OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Sara Blau is a wife, mother, and educator. She is the Extracurricular Director at Bais Rivkah High School, and is an artist, author, and public speaker. Sara has spoken in cities all over the U.S., as well as in Canada and abroad.

Sara is a prolific author, with over 150 articles on www.thejewishwoman.org. She has written 26 children's books and two books for women, *Close To You* and *Thought Streams: Meditations for Jewish Women*.

Through it all, she aims to utilize creativity to impart authentic Torah and Chassidic values. You can find more of her work at www.Sarablau.com.

Who?

BY SARA BLAU

SOMETIMES I'M GRATEFUL for the algorithm. I can google "Northern Lights" and suddenly my Facebook feed provides me with a steady stream of breathtaking photos of the Aurora Borealis, as she dances across and astounds the Northern parts of the world.

Watching the stunning streaks and designs that appear across the vast expanse of the sky, I find that it does not feel like an exaggeration to say that the Northern Lights are my proof of God's existence.

I am an artist. When I see a complex painting with intricate details, my first question is, Who is the artist? I would find it ludicrous to hear that the paint just spilled itself and created a masterpiece on its own. And even with the introduction of art created by AI, I want to know, Who programmed AI? How did this come to be?

So the logical question for me is, Who created the Northern Lights? Who is orchestrating them? And after following this question again and again, I always end up at the same place - an Energy, an Outside Force, a Supreme Being is behind it all. I once heard a rabbi say, *"It takes more faith to believe that the world came from nothing, than to believe that some sort of Powerful Force caused it to be."* I concur, and I call that force God.

It's almost like there are two approaches. One is that the existence of the world is a given, while God's existence is questionable.

But if one concludes that at the core of every created being is an energy, the one energy of the Supreme Being, one realizes that the world only exists as long as the Supreme Being wills it into existence. Which is the second approach - that God's existence is a given, and the world's existence is questionable.

I don't believe that believing in God comes from a purely intellectual standpoint. I believe that it is an emotional experience too, one that I can feel viscerally. When the sun's bright rays are shining on my face, I again feel that magical question, "Who made all this?" I know God from Godliness, and I know it not only in a cerebral fashion but as I experience it with every fiber of my being.

I know it from the sense that there's Something greater than I am. I know it from my personality flaws and imperfections. I know it from the miracles I have seen in my life when I surrender to God and stop trying to control it all. Admitting that there's a God, and that I am not that God, has brought me so much peace and tranquility that I am convinced that men and women of faith are stronger, not weaker.

For just as the algorithm has someone who programmed it, and the Northern Lights have a Supreme Being orchestrating them, every created being is united at its core by the energy behind it all.

Who? God. That's Who.



RABBI ELIE FEDER, Ph.D.

MATHEMATICS Ph.D., ORDAINED RABBI, COHOST OF “PHYSICS TO GOD” PODCAST

Elie Feder received rabbinic ordination from Rabbi Yisrael Chait. He also earned a Ph.D. in Mathematics from CUNY Graduate Center. Since 2004, Elie has been serving as a maggid shiur at Yeshiva Bnei Torah and as a mathematics professor at Kingsborough Community College. He has published many papers and delivered numerous talks on graph theory, his field of mathematical research. Recently, Elie authored a book entitled *Gematria Refigured*, which explores the significance of quantity and fine tuning in Torah, life, and the universe. He has a passion for simplifying complex topics for his students.

After researching and investigating physics and fine tuning for many years, Elie collaborated with Aaron Zimmer to produce the podcast, "Physics to God," a guided journey through modern physics to discover God. The first of its component miniseries elaborates on the fine tuning argument that he presents here. Another miniseries discusses the concept of God – one simple, uncaused existence – in a clear, coherent, and intuitive manner. Through analogies, the podcast ensures accessibility for both experts and laymen. Elie and Aaron are currently working on a book on these topics.

For more information, visit their website, PhysicsToGod.com. Also, see Elie’s website, GematriaRefigured.com, and his podcast, “Gematria Refigured +.”

Elie and his wife live in Far Rockaway, New York, with their four children.

Physics to God: Unraveling the Mystery of the Constants

BY ELIE FEDER

MUCH INK HAS been spilled over whether the diversity of life on Earth truly points to an intelligent designer or whether it can be explained by the slow process of Darwinian Evolution. While the argument from biology might not be convincing, the recent discovery of fine-tuning in physics changes everything. We now know that our complex universe depends on very precise and unchanging constants of nature that ultimately point toward a unique intelligent cause for our universe.

For years, the mysterious constants of nature – the enigmatic fundamental quantities of our universe, like the mass of an electron or the strength of the electromagnetic force – remained unexplained, posing a significant challenge to the pursuit of a theory of everything. Physicists had made significant strides toward understanding the universe, but the nature of constants like 137.035999139 eluded explanation. As physicists sought a final theory, they confronted the immense challenge of explaining the values of approximately twenty-five constants that underpin the laws governing our universe. Renowned physicist Richard Feynman called this “one of the greatest damn mysteries of physics.”¹

Then, in the late 20th century, physicists uncovered a clue that altered their perspective – the concept of fine-tuning. While the values of the constants seemed arbitrary in terms of fundamental physics, it became apparent that their precise values played a critical role in the emergence of chemistry, astronomy, cosmology, biology, and other fields. Without the values being within narrow ranges, our universe would be a chaotic sea of fundamental particles that would never combine to form atoms,

molecules, planets, stars, life, or galaxies.

Since we couldn't dismiss the discovery of incredibly precise fine-tuning as mere chance, explaining the cause behind these finely tuned values became an imperative. However, a new challenge emerged — how could the future result of a complex universe inform the past value of the constants?

Enter teleological causes – a framework of causation in which future purposes influence the past. The realization that fine-tuning points toward a teleological explanation unveils an astonishing revelation. Namely, that the values of constants have a purpose, the creation of an ordered, structured, and complex universe.

In light of this realization, an intelligent cause, capable of precisely fine-tuning the constants, emerges as the most plausible explanation. This follows from the fact that intelligence, by definition, involves the ability to choose one possibility among many to achieve a specific goal. The selection of values for the constants, meticulously fine-tuned to give rise to a universe far greater than the sum of its parts, serves as a direct indication of intelligence.

The discovery of fine tuning, which highlights the purpose-driven nature of these constants, ultimately points toward one intelligent cause for our complex universe (a cause whose simplicity makes it intrinsically not subject to that same fine tuning). While it is essential that we elaborate further on what can be known about the intelligent cause, the strong evidence for intelligent fine-tuning compels us to recognize the significant implications it holds for our understanding of the ultimate cause of the cosmos – God.



CHAYA RIVKA ZWOLINSKI

AUTHOR, TEACHER OF JOY AND OPTIMISM

“Joy isn’t incidental to your spiritual journey – it’s essential.”

Chaya Rivka Zwolinski is the leading teacher of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov’s wisdom for women in North America. She brings compassion and a deep understanding of psychospiritual trauma, transition, and growth to her lectures and multi-modal workshops. She teaches in community centers, synagogues, schools, and other venues, as well as online to students on six continents. She has led women’s tours to Jewish Ukraine and hopes to do so again as soon as peace breaks out.

Chaya Rivka is the founding director of BreslovWoman.org and the Breslov Research Institute’s women’s program. Her articles have appeared in many publications and she’s published several books including *May You Have a Day: Making Every Day Better with the Teachings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*; *Mashiach: Hope for Turbulent Times*; *The Three-Cornered Shoe*, an anthology of creative work by students in her Breslov writing workshops; and *Therapy Revolution: Find Help, Get Better, and Move On*. She is currently working on the second book in her *May You Have a Day* series, which offers accessible inspiration for daily living. She’s also preparing *Azamra: The Holy Self-Esteem Workbook*.

For speaking engagements, classes and workshops, women’s tours of Jewish Ukraine, and inspiring daily audio lessons, message her at 914-758-9968 or email her at crzbreslov@gmail.com.

What Does God Want?

BY CHAYA RIVKA ZWOLINSKI

IF YOU'RE READING this, you might vaguely believe in a Creator. You might believe that an incomprehensible force exploded creation into being. Or you might believe that Armillaria ostoyae (the world's largest organism), D.N.A., and the Milky Way are clear proof of design. You might even believe that God created souls.

Wherever you find yourself on the belief-in-God spectrum, you probably struggle with the idea of a personal God. You doubt that a relationship with God is possible. Yet, the possibility of a human-God relationship is one of the most awe-inspiring things about the Creator. People with faith believe that God is intimately involved in your life and wants you to know that you are cared for. If you find this hard to believe, you're not alone.

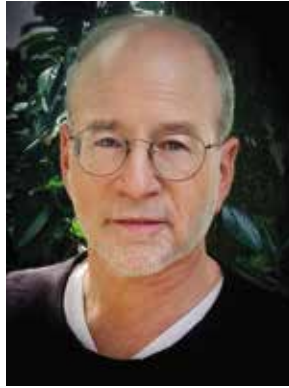
The ancient Greeks believed in a God but not a God they could turn to. They had no problem believing in both a profane pantheon of human-like gods as well as an unknowable Creator. The Greeks believed that after creating everything, God sat back (conveniently), in order to allow people the space to do whatever felt good to them, which in ancient Greece meant inventing democracy, developing geometric equations, killing disabled infants, and throwing hedonistic feasts. In many ways, the Greeks set the foundation for Western civilization's notion that God is there – but only up to a point.

This is akin to what I was taught. As a small

child, I would walk in the woods feeling very close to God. I'd ask God why I was born and beg to be shown the meaning of life. But the adults in my life said this was foolish. They explained to me that God created everything and now was taking a well-deserved vacation. Their message: God's not available for a relationship; if I believed, I'd be on the road to rack and ruin. Eventually I gave in and abandoned my quest. I later explored Jungian synchronicities, pop-physics, Eastern religions, etc., until a powerful certainty blossomed that the Creator was there for me, up close and personal.

Now I wanted to know: *What does God want from me?*

The answer came from an 18th century Chassidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov: *God wants the heart.*¹ As intellectual beings, we see evidence of God's hand in nature. But inside us rages a battle: intellect vs. love, awe, and joy. God wants us to love. God wants us to be in awe of what has been given us, and wants us to live life with joy. This requires faith. But faith isn't a function of the mind. Rebbe Nachman teaches that at times we bump up against the walls of our intellect and there's nowhere to go but to our heart. This doesn't come naturally. When ideas about God, spirituality, and the soul transcend intellect, you can either surrender to your mind or you can take a leap of faith, put unanswered questions aside, and jump into the heart, where faith lives. God wants the heart.



RABBI KEN SPIRO

WORLD HISTORIAN WITH HUMOR AND HEART

Rabbi Ken Spiro's quick-paced, humorous style catches and keeps an audience's interest; his ability to explain deep concepts clearly makes an impact that lasts long after his presentations.

Rabbi Spiro is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher for Aish HaTorah, Jerusalem. He is also a licensed tour guide from the Israel Ministry of Tourism.

Rabbi Spiro graduated from Vassar College with a BA in Russian Language and Literature, and did graduate studies at the Pushkin Institute in Moscow. He has an MA in History from the Vermont College of Norwich University, and Rabbinic Ordination from Yeshiva Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem.

He has appeared on numerous radio and television programs, including B.B.C. Radio and TV, The National Geographic Channel, The Discovery Channel, The History Channel, Channel 4 England, and Arutz Sheva-Israel National Radio. He is the author of *WorldPerfect – The Jewish Impact on Civilization* (HCI books); *Crash Course in Jewish History* (Targum Press); and *Destiny – Why a Tiny Nation Plays Such a Huge Role in History* (Geffen Publishing House).

Born and raised in the U.S., Rabbi Spiro has lived in Israel since 1982. He served in a combat infantry unit in the IDF. A father of five children, he currently lives in Jerusalem.

Defying History's Logic

BY KEN SPIRO

THE FIRST PRIME minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion once quipped, “In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles.” Ben Gurion was far from being religious, but he knew his Jewish history. As the first leader of a Jewish state in two thousand years and with his profound understanding of both the Bible and four thousand years of Jewish history, he saw something that is hiding in plain sight: The survival and flourishing of the Jews violates all the laws of reason. From the beginning to the present, it is full of contradictory, seemingly impossible, and even miraculous events. There should be no Jewish people and no Jewish state. They are objectively inexplicable without a belief in a higher power involved in guiding human affairs.

Twice in ancient history Jews were exiled from their homeland and were scattered to foreign lands. They suffered slavery, dispersion, forced conversion, execution, ethnic cleansing, and antisemitism – the most persistent, irrational, and violent hatred in history. This should have finished them off long ago. Not only did they survive, they outlasted all the oppressors, enemies, and empires that tried to destroy them: the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Spanish, Ottomans, Nazis, and the Soviet Union.

If their survival weren't miraculous enough, the impact of Jews and Jewish ideas in such a hostile environment is even more inexplicable. Outstanding Jewish personalities such as

Einstein and Freud have transformed the world. The 0.2% of the population that is Jewish has won 22% of all the Nobel Prizes since 1901!

For 2,000 years, from the birth of Abraham to the birth of Christianity, the Hebrews were the only people who believed in one God and one absolute standard of morality. Against all odds and millennia of hostility, ethical monotheism transformed the world spiritually, morally, and politically. The Jews' dauntless idea of one God became the foundation for Christianity, Islam, and modern liberal democracy.

In 1948, three years after one-third of world Jewry had been murdered in the Holocaust, this miniscule remnant returned and re-established a state in its ancestral homeland. This was unprecedented. Born in a desert wasteland, with no natural resources, Israel was surrounded by hostile nations who attacked it the moment it was born. For more than 75 years, it has been trapped in an endless cycle of war, terrorism, and existential threats. Yet it has prospered to become the home of half the Jews in the world. Israel, the modern nation, is the most supernatural “cherry” on the “miraculous cake” of Jewish history.

Perhaps Alexander Hamilton said it best:

“Progress of the Jews... from their earliest history to the present time has been and is entirely out of the ordinary course of human affairs. Is it not then a fair conclusion that the cause also is an extraordinary one – in other words, that it is the effect of some great providential plan?”



FRED AMOROSO

**CAPTAIN OF INDUSTRY, CHAIRMAN OF YAHOO,
SENIOR EXECUTIVE AT IBM (RETIRED)**

Fred Amoroso started his career at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, joined Electronic Data Systems, then, with a couple of friends, founded a software and consulting company that was in the first issue of the Inc. 500. After selling his first company to Price Waterhouse, he became one of its lead technology partners. IBM recruited him to be a senior executive during its turnaround in the 1990's. There he participated in the company's repositioning and served on its World Management Committee. He has been the CEO of a number of public technology companies and a member of the boards of several private and public technology companies. He was the chairman of Foundry Networks and the chairman of Yahoo.

Currently, he sits on the Board of the Bridge Restoration Ministry in Pacific Grove, CA, and is the Board President of the Bridge Restoration Ministry in Napa, CA. Both organizations offer a year-long, faith-based recovery program to serve those who suffer from addiction. Spiritually, he and his wife Regina became born again during a Bible study session, when friends described their personal relationship with God. They believe that He revealed Himself to them through the Bible, and provides directions about how they should live their lives and attain eternal life. He and Regina have been blessed with four wonderful children and seven grandchildren.

Hidden Sense of a Divine Being

BY FRED AMOROSO

IS THERE A God? I certainly think so. In fact, I believe that everyone, somewhere inside themselves, thinks so too. I believe that within each human being, there's something nestled deep down in our psyche that God has placed within us; a hidden sense of a Divine being, a Creator, something that ultimately helps us in our daily lives and helps us to discern right from wrong, good from evil. As humans with free will, we can decide to purposefully ignore those "feelings," "thoughts," and "intuitions," or even convince ourselves that they don't exist. I believe however that if we are truly honest with ourselves, we all in some way have to admit that they are there.

Looking back at human history, most civilizations, and maybe all, have believed in, and even worshiped, a spirit being. I am not just talking about the religions in the world today, but about every civilization and culture in our recent and distant past. The Egyptians worshiped a number of gods including Ra, the sun God, head of all of their deities and the father of all creation. The Greek pantheon consisted of 12 deities who were said to reside at Mount Olympus, with Zeus as their main one. The Romans believed in a number of gods, including Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. The Aztecs and Mayans were so beholden to their gods' providence that they offered sacrifices to them, in some cases, even human sacrifice. The Vikings had Thor. The list goes on. Some, like

the Emperors of Rome and the Pharaohs of Egypt, thought so highly of their gods, that they wanted to take on their power by claiming their own divinity. The Native Americans believe in various "spirits" that they seek help and guidance from. First Nations people and Aborigines have similar beliefs. These are peoples who have had no missionaries to "indoctrinate" them with modern religious beliefs.

Where did these civilizations get the notion of their gods? Just like Abraham, the first monotheist, they looked at the world around them and realized that all this could not exist or be continually perpetuated on its own. They realized that somehow, and for some reason, there had to be a higher being, a spirit realm, something to "pray" to and "seek help" from, a Creator – a God.

If God has placed an awareness in our consciousness, then throughout history, humankind has thought about, perhaps meditated on, or even talked to this powerful and capable God. We ask for things that we, our families, friends, community, or humankind may need. We thank God for the things that we have received and ask for guidance in how we should live our lives. Over time, isn't all this thinking, meditating, and talking what we call "praying"?

And ultimately, what we all strive for is to develop a deeper, more personal relationship with our God. Isn't this the essence of every religion?

Closing Remarks



RABBI YAAKOV WOLBE

**PROLIFIC, INNOVATIVE, DYNAMIC TORAH EDUCATOR,
PODCASTER, AUTHOR**

As the Director of Outreach at TORCH (torchweb.org), Rabbi Wolbe has delivered thousands of classes, lectures, and workshops on a wide range of subjects, including Jewish history, Jewish life, parsha, Jewish philosophy, relationships, and ethics. Rabbi Wolbe launched his first Torah podcast show in 2013. Since then, he has expanded his production and currently hosts six Torah and Judaism podcasts: “The Jewish History Podcast,” “The Parsha Podcast,” “This Jewish Life,” “The Ethics Podcast,” “The Mitzvah Podcast,” and “TORAH 101.” Rabbi Wolbe has published more than 1,400 podcast episodes with more than 3 million downloads (as of September 2023), and growing.

Rabbi Wolbe is the author of *Upon A Ten-Stringed Harp: How Torah and Mitzvos prepare the Soul for Eternity*, published in 2022. He is currently writing a book about the Torah’s guidance on how to identify, develop, and actualize your potential. Rabbi Wolbe lives in Houston with his wife and children.

Reach him at rabbiwolbe@gmail.com.

Closing Remarks

BY YAAKOV WOLBE

DOES GOD EXIST or not?

That is the most consequential question of our lives. If God does, in fact, exist, then existence is purposeful. Life must have meaning. The world, the universe, humanity, everything that exists does so for a reason. A believer understands that the existence of God mandates that we behave accordingly. A believer lives with a sense of existential and absolute morality. Believers know that there is a concurrent reality hiding behind the veneer of what we can see and measure. Believers understand that our soul, our consciousness, and our choices outlive our relatively short tenure here. A believer recognizes that God will extend the ultimate reward and mete out punishment. Faith governs every aspect of a believer's life.

Non-believers live very differently. If you are under the impression that the world is a cosmic, if fortuitous, accident, life has no ultimate purpose. For a non-believer, this is the only world that exists, and every moment you are inching closer to the end, when it all ceases and cuts to black.

The differences between the believer and non-believer make themselves manifest in every area of life.

A thinking person must determine the veracity of the claim that our universe and everything in it was the handiwork of an all-powerful Creator. But how can we prove it? How can we make a rational and logical decision about this all-important question? Perhaps this is a journey that each person must undertake on his or her own. But I think that with simple arguments that are accessible to everyone, reasonable, open-minded people can come to the realization that the world has a Creator.

Simplifying the question is key. Faith is not the product of the advanced study of theology, divinity, or astronomy. To arrive at faith, you don't need to understand string theory, black holes, or what happened a trillionth of a millisecond after the Big Bang. You don't need to be a philosopher schooled in the arguments of the ancients. Without advanced degrees, without relying on arcane jargon (epistemology, teleology, punctuated equilibrium, etc.), simply by examining simple, incontrovertible proofs, we can all come to the conclusion that the world has a Creator.

Belief does not rely on complex arguments. The opposite is, in fact, true: Non-belief is wholly reliant on muddling the subject with needless complexity. The existence of a Creator is so obvious and incontrovertible to the objective-minded, that the only way non-belief can endure is if there are sufficient layers of complexity surrounding the question of the existence of God. Wrapping the question with esoteric complications creates sufficient confusion to mask the hollow arguments of non-believers.

Simply put, the fingerprints of the Creator are visible everywhere we turn. The entire universe is screaming that it was designed by the Master Designer, that it was created by the Almighty Creator. One can only deny this obvious truth by shifting the subject in a way that adds complexity and confusion to it. Heresy might always exist (the principle of free-will demands that there must always be room for lack of belief), but only if the subject is unnecessarily complexified.

Consider the following line of questioning: Where did matter come from? Matter cannot create itself. Who or what created matter? This is

a simple question, but a deadly one for someone whose worldview obviates the need for a Creator.

Another simple challenge: Describe a process by which an amoeba can come into existence absent a Creator? How does inanimate matter come to life?

It doesn't end there. According to the doctrine of non-believers, speciation should grow exponentially, yet since humanity has begun to chronicle the world around it, there has not been a single documented instance of speciation. How do you explain the absolute dearth of any such proof? Why did speciation mysteriously stop as soon as we started keeping records?

These are just a few of the endless, maddening questions for non-believers. Non-belief demands mental gymnastics and a suspension of logic. It is not easy to be a heretic. And as we discover more about the universe, it is getting progressively harder.

Let's examine this simple argument: You have been reading this essay for two minutes. In that time, entirely invisible to you, the bone marrow in your body produced more than 100,000,000 blood cells. That is not a typo. Over a hundred million cells were created within you in the last two minutes. Each one of those cells is composed of billions of different, infinitesimally microscopic parts – an unfathomably complex network of intricate machinery making your body work.

If we combine the collected intellectual and technological prowess of all of humanity, deploying the most advanced microchip fabrication techniques, we cannot recreate a single cell. Who made the cell? Who made the system that creates millions of them every minute? Using a straightforward example – a single cell of stunning utility and masterful, intricate design – is sufficient evidence that there is a Creator whose creative prowess infinitely exceeds ours. It is that simple.

The non-believers argue otherwise. But stripping their argument down to its core exposes it as weak and illogical; they would have you believe that the intricate systems of fantastic utility that we harbor within our bodies – systems and functionalities that we could never replicate – were more likely created by a happy accident than by an all-powerful Creator.

If we bar complexity and jargon from the discussion, it would be obvious to everyone besides the stubborn that Almighty God created the universe and everything in it.

Job (19:26) tells us “From my flesh I can see God.” Simply by examining our body, we can arrive at the conclusion that it was designed by God.

I challenge believers and non-believers alike to undertake the following exercise:

Ask a physician to explain to you, in layman's terms, some of the absolutely incredible and awe-inspiring systems and functions of our body. Speak to an eye doctor and ask him to explain how vision works. How do we see? Ask an audiologist to explain the process by which audio waves get transmitted to and decoded by the brain. Ask a nephrologist why we cannot simply make synthetic kidneys to solve kidney failure. Get a neurologist to estimate just how little we know about how the brain works. Each one of these conversations should convince you that Job was spot on – through your own flesh you can see God. We are not the product of a series of accidents.

Jewish law codifies a blessing of gratitude to God to be said after using the restroom. It focuses on the vast network of transportation pipes (arteries, veins, capillaries, nerves, etc.) that crisscross the body free of blockages. Lying end to end, the pipes inside your body are longer than all the roads, rivers, canals, and subways in the United States. Even minor blockages can be fatal. Yet for most people, most of the time, everything works

seamlessly for years and decades. Your body is an engineering marvel.

Ingenious design that humans cannot replicate is everywhere: The miracle of digestion – filtering out harmful toxins and mining food for vital resources; the miracle of conception and the birth of a baby; how wounds self-repair, just to name a few.

Who created these systems? How did they come into being?

In no other context would theories such as the one that everything “evolved” over millions of years, be remotely viable. Arguing otherwise in any other setting would be laughable. No one would be persuaded that a wristwatch, laptop, or a basketball hoop was the byproduct of a series of fortunate accidents.

Using simple logic we know that the existence of design and purpose in anything are evidence of a creator for said thing.

As a species, we can indeed make a wristwatch. We cannot, however, make a cell, or a strand of DNA; we don’t even have sufficient computing power to calculate the folds of a protein (every cell has billions of them); we cannot make a lowly gnat; we cannot even make an atom with a nucleus in the middle and spinning particles revolving around it at breakneck speed.

If all would agree that a wristwatch must have a creator, it is illogical to argue that something infinitely harder to make does not.

These arguments are sufficient to prove that the world has a Creator.

Non-believers, terrified of the consequences of an Almighty God, respond in a variety of ways: dismissal (“It’s settled science” or “It’s beyond the scope of science”), derisive ad hominem attacks (“Are you really a young-Earth creationist?”), changing the subject (“Wars of religion killed more people than anything else” and “Why do bad

things happen to good people?”), and a relentless effort to add complexity to the discussion. Others engage in intellectual outsourcing (“One of the genius professors must understand how this all works. It doesn’t make any sense to me, but I am sure that they have the answers”). That is the only way that non-believers can advance their arguments.

Believers find comfort in the knowledge that simple logic dictates that design was designed, that engineering was engineered, that purpose was created purposefully.

Believers can rest assured that the absolute, overwhelming, preponderance of evidence points to the existence of God. Believers rely on the knowledge that disbelief is completely illogical and entirely devoid of evidence (and no, adding billions of years to the equation does not remedy the sheer lack of logic and evidence).

This is, however, unlikely to win believers any debates. When non-believers encounter these airtight arguments, they rarely enthusiastically embrace faith. Instead, they keep grasping at straws until they realize that the notion of God is much less terrifying than the alternative.

The true deterrent that keeps reasonable people from accepting the obvious fact that our universe and everything in it was created is not the lack of simple logic and evidence. What inhibits faith is the existential angst that comes with it. Even believers recognize the implications of a Creator. If God exists, then existence must have purpose, and it is incumbent on everyone to try to effectuate that purpose. Faith in God naturally extends to living a life that is congruent with God’s will. That requires us to govern our behavior according to God’s will, something that many are reluctant to do.

We are all subject to the dissonance of faith.

But regarding the question of whether God

exists or not, with simple logic and avoiding unnecessary complexity, it can become clear to all that our world did not emerge accidentally.

It is important to emphasize that believers do not reject science. Quite the contrary, a believer sees science as the study of God's handiwork. The great Medieval Jewish sage and philosopher, Maimonides, wrote that the study of science can be a means through which man deepens his faith. Provided that science is viewed as the study of God's creation, it reinforces rather than repels faith. Science is only problematic when one studies it as an alternative to faith.

Faithless science is also incomplete; it can never tell the full story. Decoupled from faith, the study of science is akin to the study of the locomotive that the Elders of Chelm conducted.

In Jewish folklore, a cadre of Elders who considered themselves to be wise and sagacious, but were actually bumbling dimwits, governed the city of Chelm.

In one classic tale, the Elders sent a delegation of wise men to the recently constructed train station to determine how trains move. They studied the train from every conceivable angle beginning with the 10th and final car. After several days of intensive analysis, they determined that the final car in the train is connected to the 9th car and that when the ninth car moves, it pulls the 10th car with it. But why does the 9th car move? After some time, they discovered that the ninth car moves because it is connected to the 8th car and when the eighth car moves, it pulls the ninth car with it. And so on until they got to the first car. When they studied the first car they

were completely mystified: How does it move? After weeks of fruitless study, they returned to the Elders and announced, "we discovered 90% of how trains move."

This is an apt analogy for the study of science without an acknowledgement of the one force animating the entire process, the Creator. The study of science without factoring in God ignores the force, the power, the first-cause that propels all of existence. Science without faith invariably encounters a *"first-car-problem,"* a point at which science cannot explain what, how, or why. The scope of science does not extend to the first car.

The question of the existence of God is one that we cannot ignore. If we avoid the unnecessary complexity that clouds the subject, it should be clear to most people that the universe and everything in it was created. We don't need to look that far. From my flesh I can see God. For the believer, science complements and even enhances faith. Every new development, every new discovery, every new revelation shows the believer more of God's unfathomable mastery.

Faith is not the endpoint in the life of a believer. Faith places great responsibility upon her shoulders. A believer is not free to act as she pleases. A believer must rein in her worst impulses. A believer must work assiduously to ensure that her behavior is compliant with the will of God. Acknowledging the existence of God is only the beginning of the believer's journey, but in this most consequential question of our lives, the answer is clear: The universe and everything in it was created by Almighty God.

“To look out at this kind
of creation and not believe
in God is to me impossible.
It just strengthens my faith.
I wish there were words
to describe what it’s like.”²

JOHN GLENN

AMERICAN ASTRONAUT (1921-2016)



RABBI LAWRENCE KELEMEN

PHILOSOPHER, WRITER, JEWISH CONTINUITY ACTIVIST

Lawrence Kelemen is the founder of the Center for Kehillah Development, a leadership development project devoted to the growth and wellbeing of Jewish communities worldwide. He is also the Rosh Kollel of the Center's Rabbinical Training program, Ohr Chodosh. He created the International Organization of Mussar Vaadim, a network of dozens of self-development groups in North America and Israel. He has been honored as a visiting scholar at universities and communal organizations around the world.

During his decade-long tenure at Neve Yerushalayim College of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, Rabbi Kelemen influenced thousands of students. He is also the author of many journal articles and books, among them: *Permission to Believe*; *Permission to Receive*; *Planting and Building*; and *To Kindle a Soul*.

His audio and video presentations are available on many websites, and at LawrenceKelemen.com.

Closing Remarks

BY LAWRENCE KELEMEN

IT IS DIFFICULT to talk about monotheism (belief in one God) without talking about God's revelation at Mount Sinai in 1312 BCE. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahai Faith all teach that God appeared there. If that story is not true, we can't put much stock in these religions' affirmation that there is One God, or in any of their other claims. The astute reader will have detected this reality between the lines of almost every essay in this volume. Most if not all of the contributors to this volume believe that God first publicly introduced God's self at Sinai.

It is important to understand that I am not trying to prove the validity of any religion or its Holy books here – my argument is that this unprecedented, unrivaled, and never-repeated historical event did in fact occur.

Therefore, let me analyze a fundamental question: Is there any logical reason to accept the Sinai account? I have spent thousands of hours discussing this query with believers and non-believers, theologians and professors, with my teachers and with my students, and have developed what I believe is a complex and compelling argument. At the risk of losing some of its depth and subtlety, I would like to present a summary of my answer to this question. Consider this:

Throughout recorded history, Jews who were observant of Torah law claimed that their ancestors – every man, woman, and child alive at the time – received that law from God during a national revelation at Mt. Sinai, an event that they say took place more than 3,300 years ago. Even most non-Orthodox Jews can trace their

lineage within three to four generations to an Orthodox ancestor who believed in the Sinai national revelation. How did such a story start?

One possibility is that God indeed spoke to the Jewish nation at Mt. Sinai 3,300 years ago. This is what Orthodox Jews, religious Christians and Muslims, and a handful of smaller sects believe.

Another possibility is that at some point in history, a person or group of people fabricated and spread the myth that there had been a national revelation at Mt. Sinai. This is the most popular belief among non-Orthodox Jews and the secular.

Assuming that the story about the national revelation at Mt. Sinai is indeed a lie, whoever spread that lie also would have had to place the event temporally. People would naturally ask the cult leader(s), "Really, God spoke to the Israelites? When did this happen?"

What could the cult leader(s) say to the cult members? There are only three "periods" available. They could say that: (1) it happened to a previous generation of Jews; (2) it happened to you, the current generation of Jews; or (3) it hasn't yet happened, but it will happen to a future generation of Jews. In short, the initial lie had to take the form of "Past" (your ancestors heard God speak), "Present" (you heard God speak), or "Future" (your descendants will hear God speak).

It is difficult to assert that the "Future" lie was the origin of Jewry's historical belief in the Sinai revelation. That is because a widely accepted mythology should leave some trace in the historical record. If the fabricator(s)

of the myth claimed that “God has not yet spoken to us, but someday God will,” someone should have recorded that claim in the last few thousand years. We should find someone saying, “God hasn’t spoken yet, but God will.” Yet, no matter what Jewish community we study, regardless of its period and location, no one ever says this. In every community, the Jews believed that long ago God spoke to their ancestors.

In contrast, had the fabricator(s)’ initial claim been the “Present” lie (“You, all Jews alive in this generation, heard God speak”), it could have evolved to match what we find in the historical record. If someone could convince people in the first generation that they had heard God speak, then they would have told their children that lie, and the children would have told their children that “your grandparents heard God speak.” Generation after generation would pass along this story, generating exactly the sort of evidence we face: Thousands of years of consistent belief that “long ago our ancestors heard God speak.” *Prima facie*, it seems that a national revelation mythology could have been created by a cult leader or group of leaders telling the “Present” lie.

However, while it might be possible for a liar, call him Jack, to persuade his friend, Norman, that Jack was once a millionaire or an astronaut, it is very difficult for Jack to persuade Norman that Norman himself was recently a millionaire or an astronaut, etc. People might be gullible, but they have ample clarity about their own lives, and they will reject claims that are inconsistent with that clarity. No matter what Jack says or how he says it, and no matter how many people he gets to join him in swearing to Norman that during his adult life Norman was actually a millionaire or an astronaut (both of which wouldn’t even require believing in

the supernatural), Norman isn’t going to buy it. And if Jack and his friends had to persuade a few dozen or a few hundred people that they were recently millionaires or astronauts, the proposition becomes ludicrous. People are sometimes gullible, but they are not that stupid.

According to the “Present” lie theory, the fabricator(s) persuaded an entire generation – more than three million people – that they weren’t just millionaires and astronauts, but that they achieved the supernatural – prophecy. They heard God’s voice, “I am the Lord thy God... You should have no other gods before Me,” and they were so terrified that they begged God to speak to Moses instead because they felt they couldn’t survive more prophecy. Just as people would know that they weren’t millionaires or astronauts, and would have difficulty accepting a claim to the contrary from even the most charismatic cult leader, how much more so would a large group of people have difficulty accepting that they and everyone else they know had heard God speak. It takes a huge leap of faith to believe that the “Present” lie is what launched belief in the Sinai revelation.

In contrast, had the fabricator(s)’ initial claim been the “Past” lie (“God never spoke to this generation, but God did speak to your ancestors long ago”), people might have believed it. It’s hard to persuade someone that he was a millionaire or astronaut, since he feels confident about his own life experience; but he might believe that his great-great... grandfather was one, and that the story was just forgotten. It’s still not going to be an easy sell, since extraordinary events or accomplishments tend to be remembered (and since it would have required a miracle for someone to have been an astronaut generations before modern space travel). But the further back in history

the liar places the extraordinary event or accomplishment, the more reasonable it might seem. Of the three possible theories, explaining how people could create and spread a Sinai revelation mythology, the “Past” lie seems the most plausible.

However, there is another reason why it is difficult to assert with confidence that the “Past” lie was the origin of Jewry’s historical belief in the Sinai revelation:

How does the cult leader explain to his followers why no one heard about their parents or grandparents experiencing prophecy? After all, that would have been a big enough deal that some percentage of the population would have remembered it for a generation or two. To be credible, the liar needs to create lots of reasonable opportunities for the story to have been forgotten. The “Past” lie only works if it is cast as, “Hundreds (or thousands) of years ago, all of your ancestors heard God speak, but then there was a terrible (*insert disaster of choice*: flood, war, disease, assimilation, etc.), and the national revelation was forgotten. No one in your family has known about it for eons, until I, Fred, just reminded you.” The claim of this hero, whom we are calling “Fred” is believable because it is uncheckable; no existing evidence can contradict it. Even if every parent and grandparent alive tells their kids that they have never heard anything like Fred’s claim, their insistence doesn’t throw Fred’s claim into question; it matches exactly what he is saying – that the event happened long ago and was forgotten. To be believable, the “Past” lie must be cast as, “There was Moses; then at some point there was a very long gap with no memory of the Sinai revelation; and then there was a great leader (“Fred”) who reminded Jewry of their glorious Sinai experience.” Without

the very long gap, no one would accept the lie.

And here’s the problem with the “Past” lie theory:

Jewish scholars in every generation spoke and wrote about their teachers, providing details not only about their beliefs, but also about their religious and national accomplishments. These traditions appear conspicuously throughout Jewish religious literature over the millennia, providing a comprehensive map of Jewry’s religious leadership from before Moses through modern scholars, detailing who taught whom, and what each leader was most famous for.

We know the name of the person who the tradition says ascended Mount Sinai to meet God and led Jewry through the desert for 40 years. That was Moses. We know who took over Moses’ role and led Jewry into the Land of Israel. That was Joshua. We know who led Jewry back to Israel from Babylonian exile (Ezra), who redacted the Mishna (Yehuda HaNasi), and who redacted the Talmud (Ravina and Rav Ashi). Etcetera. In any year between Mt. Sinai and today, we can identify Jewry’s greatest leaders and their most famous accomplishments.

There is only one unrecorded and forgotten disaster, name, and accomplishment that is very obviously missing from the historical record. Nowhere do we find a story of Jewry forgetting about the Sinai event for hundreds or thousands of years, and a leader who, after Jewry forgot, reminded them that their ancestors were all prophets and heard God speak at Sinai. That leader would have contributed more to Jewish identity and theology than anyone else other than Moses himself. Yet there isn’t a single paragraph in the 24 books of the Bible that mentions this disaster, this savior, and this contribution. In 60 volumes of Talmud, which

discuss the lives of thousands of Jewish religious leaders in detail, there isn't a word about the many generations who didn't know anything about Mt. Sinai, or the prophet who gave that tradition back to God's chosen people.

Indeed, the first discussions of the possible existence of a "Fred"-type character appear in the literature of modern, secular Biblical critics who are aware that without a "Fred," their best theory (the "Past" lie) crumbles. These secular scholars themselves disagree over what the disaster was, when it happened, and who could be Fred, since there is no mention of such events or such a person in any historical text. There are dozens of proposed candidates, each rejected by other secular scholars. It's a mad scramble to find the solution to a major problem which is:

Either God indeed spoke to the Jewish

nation at Mt. Sinai 3,300 years ago, or at some point in history, a person or group of people fabricated and spread the myth that there had been such a national revelation. If there are only three possible lies – Past, Present, and Future – each of which fails to produce the Jewish belief in a mass revelation, that leaves only the possibility that God actually spoke to the ancient Israelites at Mt. Sinai. That is a serious problem for someone reluctant to consider such a possibility.

This argument should solidify the context for the essays that you have read, allowing them to form a cohesive body of thought. Although each one describes a very personal point of view, they are all translating a singular, ancient perspective. They are all tapping into the same fountainhead from which flows the human faith in the existence of One God.

Endnotes

“SAGES THROUGH THE AGES” QUOTES

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PATRICIA CULLIGAN

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ELIE FEDER

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CHAYA RIVKA ZWOLINSKI

1. “God wants the heart.” (See Likutey Moharan II, 44). Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, sometimes referred to as the “Doctor of the Soul,” is uniquely able to speak to this generation about what’s going on in our minds and hearts, what I call psychospiritual issues. His Breslov Chassidic movement is named after a small town in Ukraine where he lived for a time. The Hebrew letters of BReSLoV can be transposed to “LeV BaSaR,” a “heart of flesh.” What is a heart of flesh? It’s living a life that is truly alive, a life rich in faith and joy. (See Ezekiel 36:26: “And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh.”) Rebbe Nachman expands on this idea: “Do not read BaSaR, ‘flesh’, but BoSeR, ‘glad.’ [That is, a glad heart.] “In [the times of *Moshiach*], everyone will be glad at the good fortune of his friend.” (See Tzaddik - Chayey Moharan 339)

About The Artist



ANDI ARNOVITZ

WORLD-RENOWNED MULTI-MEDIA CONCEPTUAL ARTIST

Andi Arnovitz is a conceptual artist living and working in Jerusalem, Israel. Her work is in the permanent collections of the United States Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Museum, the Israel National library, Yale University Library, the Magnes Collection, the Yeshiva University Museum, the Museum of the Diaspora, Tel Aviv, the Ein Harod Museum of Art, and the Gottesman Israel National Aquarium. She has exhibited her pieces all over the world.

Her artistic practice focuses on the flashpoints where gender, religion, and politics meet and hinder personal agency. Her art has explored issues of domestic violence, reproductive freedom, abuses of power where church and state are entwined, and nuclear proliferation. Currently she is focusing on problems of climate change, displaced populations, and the impact of Covid on women.

Her art highlights these places of friction, the territory where things are not all black and white, and where we, as human beings, have the potential to create change, or to find common ground. Her work examines symbols, images, and archetypes that transcend tightly defined definitions and create a broad human platform for shared experiences.

Arnovitz works in a variety of media, with fabrics, printmaking processes, paper, and porcelain. As a conceptual artist, she often uses printmaking and digital information to create print series, artist books, and large-scale installations. Much of her artistic practice is focused on creating statements through the use of multiples: thousands of prayers, thousands of paper scrolls, thousands of rods of clay, thousands of pieces of paper, hundreds of pieces of resin or porcelain all painstakingly assembled.

Arnovitz's work has been exhibited all over the world, including solo and group shows in England, China, the United States, Israel, Spain, Poland, Germany, Finland, France, Lithuania, Canada, Italy, Mallorca, and Bulgaria. Her work is in private collections in both the United States and in Europe, as well as universities, museums, and institutions.

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Bruce grew up in Lafayette, California and received a BA in Political Science from UCLA as well as a Graduate Gemologist degree from the Gemological Institute of America. After graduating, Bruce operated his family's 100 year-old retail fine jewelry business for twenty-two years. Bruce had a passion for computers and graphic arts, so he changed careers and joined his best friend at a national technical publishing company for seventeen-years as the company's Publisher, where they invented the modern labor law poster industry, including the first "All-On-One Labor Law Poster" and "Labor Law Poster Compliance Plan."

Aside from being the Founder of the website, "My Elevator Pitch for God," Bruce was the co-editor of the book, *Elevator Pitches For God: Volume 1*, and author of the cookbook titled, *Immediate Chef: No Previous Experience Required*.

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