

***2001: A Space Odyssey***

**Workshop**

***Olami Resources thanks the author and editor of the book, “The 2001 Principle,” Rabbi Mordechai Geduld and Rabbi Gershon Robinson, respectively, whose work and ongoing input inspired the creation and development of this workshop.***

**Executive Overview**

Welcome to an interactive workshop prepared for rabbis, mekarvim and educators based on the landmark book, *The 2001 Principle*, by Rabbi Mordechai Geduld. The author wrote *The 2001 Principle* in response to the sensational impact the film, *2001: A Space Odyssey,* made by raising central questions about the purpose of the universe and mankind. Educators should schedule approximately two hours for the workshop, including showing the abridged seventeen-minute trigger version of the movie.

The goal of this workshop is to tap into the global fascination that the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* touches in our modern human consciousness. The workshop was developed following the release of a new 70 mm version on the film’s fiftieth anniversary, combined with themysterious appearance of *2001*-like monoliths in the USA and UK. The workshop capitalizes on *2001’s* mass international appeal – it [has been called](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001:_A_Space_Odyssey_(film)) “one of the most influential of all sci-fi films.” Strategically, the workshop leverages *2001’s* presentation to the modern mind of a “safe” way to acknowledge the intuition of Design Theory as rational proof that there could actually be a Creator of our universe. The *2001* Workshop introduces participants to a larger underlying question: Why may the human mind reject that which it intuits as obvious, i.e. the possibility of a first cause and the existence of a Creator? What drives the modern intellect to go to such great lengths to present theories that argue against the existence of G-d?

Rather than attempt to prove G-d’s existence, the goal of our seminar is **to help participants overcome man's ingrained resistance to *consider* G-d’s existence.**

*The 2001 Principle* by Rabbi Mordechai Geduld is summarized in the accompanying document, *The 2001 Principle Consolidated* (found also [on his website](http://2001principle.com/guide.htm).) It is recommended that *The 2001 Principle* be utilized to complement the approach of the *2001: A Space Odyssey Workshop*.

This seminar is designed as a forum for Jewish *mekarvim* and educators to present to college students and young professionals, who identify themselves as *thinkers* and *intellectuals,* to broaden their definition of “intellectual” to honestly consider whether they are willing to “think about the existence of G-d.”

This workshop features an abridged trigger version of the 2001 film and addresses the principle of cognitive dissonance adapted from a Kahn Academy model: how methods that work with habitual smokers presented with the health consequences of smoking can be applied to secular Jews presented with the possible existence of a Creator.

Target Audience: University students and young professionals identifying as *thinkers* and *intellectuals*.

2001 Seminar Goal: Give each participant the freedom to honestly contemplate the possibility of G-d's existence and thereby discover one’s own relationship with G-d.

**Please note:**

In the introduction to the seminar, educators should not mention the film’s G-d metaphor until the script suggests such a discussion.

**Approach**

Many seminars present Proofs for G-d’s existence. The 2001 Workshop offers to **help participants overcome man's ingrained resistance to consider G-d’s existence**.

What makes us uniquely human is our ability to choose. Our primary choice is between truth and falsehood. Very often choosing falsehood means that we have an inner will that blocks us from seeing or choosing truth. Modern thinkers call this "cognitive dissonance." On this point we all agree. A human being can use his intellect to either deny truth or to embrace truth.

We will introduce participants to the idea that: "**Being *intellectual***" is not the same as "**being intellectually honest**." Deep down people want to be **intellectually honest** because we sense that otherwise **being intellectual** has little value.

**TAKE-AWAY GOAL**

By the end of the seminar our goal is to give each participant the freedom to honestly contemplate G-d's existence and thereby discover one’s own relationship with G-d. The key to each participant achieving this requires them to get a clear picture that being **truly intellectual** means **being intellectually honest**.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE WORKSHOP**

**The workshop is organized by going through the following steps to enable participants to draw their own conclusions:**

1. **Understand Shortcomings of the Mind**

There is no thought without prior interest or bias. There is a difference between being an Intellectual and being a Truth Seeker/ Honest Intellectual. What is the difference? An intellectual relies on his intellect, a truth seeker first ascertains whether or not the mind is a reliable tool. The first step of a true thinker or an **honest intellectual** is to realize that by default the mind focuses on whatever it is naturally inclined to focus on and gives minimum attention to everything else. This means that before anything comes up on our minds, our will is dictating to our minds whether or not it is worthwhile to process the information. In other words, the brain only thinks about what we let it think about, and is therefore not fully reliable as a means to reach the truth, unless we understand more about how our inner will leads our thought process.

1. **Chemical Warfare:**

Psychologist Drew Westen’s 2006 study at Emory University (The Political Brain) *(published in Scientific American July 1, 2006*) discovered how emotions shut down or interfere with our ability to be objective. The stronger our emotions are about any topic, the more untrustworthy is the Intellect to reach truth. Westen described how the brain produces chemical reactions that help to shut down our thinking process when a person’s ideologies are challenged. **“Essentially, it appears as if partisans twirl the cognitive kaleidoscope until they get the conclusions they want, and then they get massively reinforced for it, with the elimination of negative emotional states and activation of positive ones.”** In other words, *if my body can make me feel “alright” about what a decision—no matter how objectively incorrect the decision may be -- I will stop thinking about it, and convince myself that it is “OK.”*

1. **A Study in Cognitive Dissonance (CD):**

The reasoning process that shuts down our capacity to reason objectively and reach truthful conclusions is called CD. Based on a presentation by the [Kahn Academy](https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/mcat/processing-the-environment/cognition/v/cognitive-dissonance) we will introduce a character, Jacob, who role-plays the four tactics the emotions use to shut down our capacity to be intellectually honest about the hazards of smoking.

1. **Viewing and Discussion about *2001: A Space Odyssey***

Five decades of audience reactions to *2001: A Space Odyssey* helps us conduct an international controlled experiment in CD. Through this, we will understand how people can accept assumptions as intellectually compelling when they are not emotionally challenged, yet reject equally compelling assumptions when that information implies an emotional challenge. We observe that although viewers of *2001: A Space Odyssey* accept very compelling evidence as proof of an “alien intelligent designer” when not emotionally challenged, they may reject even greater evidence when we substitute the phrase “alien intelligent designer” with the word “G-d.” We observe that in order to be an objective truth seeker, one must develop an awareness of this potential emotional response undermining our ability to perceive truth.

1. **CD applied to the Existence of G-d**

In order to highlight the challenges of a “truth seeker,” we have chosen a very emotionally challenging topic for many: “the existence of G-d.” Our character Jacob will role-play the same four tactics the emotions use to shut down our capacity to be intellectually honest about smoking, may shut down our thinking process in order not to consider the existence of a Creator and Maintainer of the Universe.

1. **The Bravery of Honesty – Facing the CD**

Now that we have observed, in Parts One, Two and Three, how our inner will plays a major role in what thoughts the mind processes, focuses on, rejects and ignores, we introduce a new braver character Jacob who is now willing to face his emotional discomfort. He will courageously face each of the four emotional tactics that shut down his truth seeking capacity to honestly consider for the first time in his life the possibility of the existence of a Creator, Maintainer and Sustainer of the Universe.

1. **Freedom to Think Honestly**

We summarize the *2001 Seminar* by encouraging participants to give themselves **freedom to think honestly**. We explain that in order to overcome CD, a **truth seeker** must develop an emotional desire to face possibilities we may have never considered. This may open up for us vistas of new exhilarating possibilities of how to think and relate to life, which we may have never let ourselves imagine possible beforehand. We may even find ourselves reconsidering with a brave intellectual honesty the existence of G-d, the relationship with an Infinite Giver who cares and is interested in every detail of our life being perfect.

**Goals, Structure, and Methodology of Workshop**

In Short: What do we want every participant in the 2001 Seminar to TAKE AWAY:

The realization that being Intellectually Honest gives me the freedom to consider G-d.

**Methodology**

Due to declining attention spans, one of the best methods to engage participants to get a message across is to divide them into pairs or groups to “problem solve.”

The benefits are:

1.   They engage and think through the issues themselves.

2.   They reach their own conclusions.

3.   They feel ownership for their conclusions.

**Instructions**

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| 1. Instructions for the educator and other prompts will all be in boxes, like this box. 2. *ANY TEXT THAT IS MEANT FOR THE EDUCATOR TO READ WILL BE IN ITALICS, like this.* |

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3. Kahn Academy presentation on CD: Jacob role-plays the four ways CD can shut down our capacity to be intellectually honest.
4. View *2001: A Space Odyssey* as a case study of how millions may accept evidence of an “intelligent designer” when not feeling a challenge to their personal life and thinking, and yet may then reject it when CD is introduced.
5. Jacob role-plays 4 CD Tactics that keep him from considering G-d’s existence.
6. The Bravery of Honesty—Jacob role-plays confronting his CD in order to consider G-d’s existence.
7. Seminar Summary and Take Away: Freedom to think bravely and honestly.

**Part 1:** Using our “Intellect” to reach “Intellectually Honesty” means understanding the shortcoming of the mind: By and large the default thoughts our brains produce do not come without some prior interest.

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| Ask Participants:  Q: As you sit down with your coffee at the kitchen table, you notice in front of you a newspaper or online news. Which sections grab your attention, but won’t grab your father or mother’s attention. Which sections will you not even notice?  Q: Does the reason you notice some things and disregard other articles have more to do with your intelligence or your interests?  Example Answer: Interests  Q: How much of this has to do with actual intelligence?  Q: Is it a matter of intelligence that, even though you understand all the words and concepts equally on the same level, one newspaper article you disregard, whereas the other you read happily, register most of the details and share with friends.  A: The difference is not intelligence. The main difference is: Your level of interest.  Q: To understand this we have to ask another question. Every one of us here has a unique set of interests, natural inclinations, fears, concerns, ideals that speak individually to us. What do we call this part of ourselves that generates this?  A: To give us a common term we will name this part of us the “inner will.” Independent from our intelligence, each one of us has an “inner will.” The inner will is the part of us that desires what it wants simply because one wants it, even if that desire seems not to make sense. |

To understand the thinking process we need to acknowledge that there is an inner play of intellect and the inner will. What we observed with the example of the newspaper is how the “inner will” dictates to the mind how much brain space to dedicate to each subject—it gives more brain space to something it wants. Something your inner will wants to avoid gets less brain space. Regardless of our intelligence, one person may be drawn to read about science, new recipes and ignore the business section, and someone else, even with the same intelligence may focus on arts and culture, sports and the opinion section.

*“If a scientist is going to carry out some very intricate and delicate experiments, and the gravest consequences attend on the slightest imprecision in his results, his first thought will to be to ensure the accuracy of his instruments.” The Truth Perspective by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler.*

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| Q: If you met a scientist, and saw that all his equipment—his weights, measures, and scales were inaccurate, would you trust his data and the conclusions?  A: No, it would be inaccurate.  Q: When it comes to the brain -- a very sophisticated instrument, like a computer –one might assume that it will process whatever data or ideas are introduced. What shortcoming of the mind do we observe when we factor in that each person has a will with its own set of natural “interests?”  Example Answer: We see from our own lives, the inner will of each person decided which data to have the mind focus on. Due to what interests us, the brain may ignore huge chunks of information and focus on others exclusively.  Q: What is the more accurate way to define a “thinker” or an “intellect”- by their intelligence or by their “intellectual honesty?”  Example Answer: Intellectual honesty is a more accurate gauge of “Intellect” because intelligence can be used to skew facts to lead a person towards one’s desires.  For example, across cultures we recognize that if a judge adjudicating a case is being paid by one of the litigants, he is not likely to render a 100% accurate ruling. This demonstrates that above intellect we value intellectual honesty.  Q: So is it reasonable that to be a true “thinker” requires us to have some criteria to measure “honesty”? |

In Summary – The Shortcoming of the Mind – There is no thought without prior interest or bias.

There is a difference between being an Intellectual and being a Truth Seeker/ Honest Intellectual. What is the difference? An intellectual may tend to rely on his intellect, yet a truth seeker first understands why the mind may not be a reliable tool. The **first step of a true thinker** is to realize that by default the mind focuses on whatever it is naturally inclined to focus on and gives minimum attention to everything else. This means that before anything comes up on our minds, our will is dictating to our minds whether or not it is worthwhile to process the information. In other words, the brain only thinks about what we let it think about, and is therefore not reliable to reach the truth unless we understand the tactics of how our inner will leads our thought process.

**Part 2: *Chemical Warfare:*** *Drew Weston’s Emory University research published in Scientific American* reveals how strong emotions produce chemical reactions in our brain that help to shut down our thinking process.

Q: Until now, we gave an example of newspaper articles that may not evoke much emotion. Is it possible that the more emotionally charged an issue will be the more the brain will be inclined to ignore or focus on information?

A: It is possible.

The 2006 study at Emory University showed that based on one’s preexisting interests, the brain actually creates chemical reactions in response to ideas that either coincide or oppose one’s personal values. In order to consider all the options objectively a person literally has to fight his own brain.

***Scientific American*** published the article, [**The Political Brain**](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-political-brain/)**,** describing the results of an Emory University brain-imaging study showing our political predilections are a product of unconscious confirmation bias.

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| **The Political Brain**  by Michael Shermer, *Scientific American*, July 1, 2006  *Psychologist Drew Westen led the study, conducted at Emory University, and the team presented the results at the 2006 annual conference of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.*  *During the … 2004 presidential election, while undergoing an fMRI bran scan, 30 men--half self-described as "strong" Republicans and half as "strong" Democrats--were tasked with assessing statements … in which the candidates clearly contradicted themselves. Not surprisingly, in their assessments Republican subjects were as critical of [the democratic candidate] as Democratic subjects [the Republican candidate], yet both let their own candidate off the hook.*  *This surety is called the confirmation bias, whereby we seek and find confirmatory evidence in support of already existing beliefs and ignore or reinterpret disconfirmatory evidence. Now a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study shows where in the brain the confirmation bias arises and how it is unconscious and driven by emotions.*  *The neuroimaging results, however, revealed that the part of the brain most associated with reasoning—the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex — was quiescent. Most active were the orbital frontal cortex, which is involved in the processing of emotions; the anterior cingulate, which is associated with conflict resolution; the posterior cingulate, which is concerned with making judgments about moral accountability; and — once subjects had arrived at a conclusion that made them emotionally comfortable — the ventral striatum, which is related to reward and pleasure.*  *"We did not see any increased activation of the parts of the brain normally engaged during reasoning," Westen is quoted as saying in an Emory University press release. "What we saw instead was a network of emotion circuits lighting up …known to be involved in resolving conflicts." Interestingly, neural circuits engaged in rewarding selective behaviors were activated. "Essentially, it appears as if partisans twirl the cognitive kaleidoscope until they get the conclusions they want, and then they get massively reinforced for it, with the elimination of negative emotional states and activation of positive ones," Westen said.*  *The implications of the findings reach far beyond politics. A jury assessing evidence against a defendant, a CEO evaluating information about a company or a scientist weighing data in favor of a theory will undergo the same cognitive process.* |

1. *Ask participants to break up into groups, read or listen to the article, and identify areas where “confirmation bias” may be a problem in reaching truthful conclusions with one or two examples.*
2. *Afterwards ask each group to present an example.*
3. *If we are not aware of how the “interests” of our inner will is mixing in, should this make us rethink how we listen to the conclusions of experts in science, research, law, business and government?*

**Part 3: Kahn Academy Presentation on Cognitive Dissonance (CD)**

Jacob role-plays the four ways CD shuts down our capacity to be intellectually honest.

**Intro to CD**

Q: Does modern thinking have a term for when inner will and intellect clash?

A: The modern term for this is Cognitive Dissonance.

[Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance) describes CD as:

*In the field of psychology, cognitive dissonance is the experience of psychological stress that occurs when a person holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, values, or participates in an action that goes against one of these three. According to this theory, when two actions or ideas are not psychologically consistent with each other, people will do all in their power to change them until they become consistent. The discomfort is triggered by the person's belief clashing with new information perceived, wherein they will try to find a way to resolve the contradiction to reduce their discomfort.*

CD is in short, the rationalizing we do to deal with the negative feelings we experience when we follow our inner will and ignore what the mind holds to be a “truth” or “value” or “fact.”

What is an example of this? Let us introduce a character Jacob. Jacob is a research scientist at MIT. Jacob smokes and has just been informed that if he continues he has two years to live. What is the conflict between his inner will and what his mind perceives to be true?

A: Jacob’s inner will: to smoke versus Jacob’s perception of truth: to continue smoking is suicide.

Q: According to the rules of CD what will the inner will direct the mind to do?

A: The inner will may direct the mind to construct an intellectual justification that will allow him to continue smoking and not feel bad about choosing what his body wants over what makes sense to him.

Q: In the online class, “Principle of Cognitive Dissonance,” the Khan Academy presents four common ways that one’s will may direct one’s intellect to cover up negative feelings that manifests cognitive dissonance.

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| Ask Participants: What four responses might we give if we were Jacob the smoker who was told he has two years to live if he continues smoking? |

A: Four ways we find people deal with CD are to: Modify it, to Trivialize it, to Add factors to offset it, or to Deny it.

Q: Let’s role-play Jacob the smoker. The Doctor tells Jacob: “If you continue smoking you will die.” Jacob feels discomfort. He wants to smoke. He does not want to die. What are the four ways his inner will to smoke can direct his mind to deal with the negative cognition that “continuing to smoke is suicide?”

1. **Modify**

Jacob: “I’ll cut down to a pack a day”

This is a “partial admission.” Jacob says to himself: “True, two packs is suicide. One pack is already normal.” He “modifies” his attitude and behavior to reduce the discomfort arising from the MD’s prognosis.

1. **Trivialize**

Jacob trivializes: “Everyone eventually dies. I might as well enjoy life.”

The original cognition was, “Smoking will kill me.” Is now: “Dying is not such a big deal. It happens to everyone.” Jacob reduces his discomfort in his behavior of smoking by rationalizing that even if he would not smoke he would also die.

1. **Add**

Jacob adds a new cognition: “I heard that if I **exercise** and **give charity,** I can lengthen my life.”

Jacob ADDS two new factors. By adding the new fact “I can lengthen my life,” Jacob feels he no longer affected by the cognition: “My behavior of smoking is killing me.” **ADDING** is a third way that we deal with cognitive dissonance.

1. **Deny**

Jacob denies the doctors evidence that by smoking more he will die:

There are several ways Jacob may deny this:

He may say: “The doctor is wrong. There is no link between my smoking and my lifespan.”

He may deny it emotionally by ignoring it, or by distracting himself in order not to think about it, or even blank it out from his mind.

A person’s inner will can direct the mind to **DENY**. Classically, emotional denial can be called: “Shooting the Messenger” -- eliminating negative information by pretending it does not exist. Or intellectually, by denying any link between cause and effect. Here Jacob gets rid of the cognitive dissonance by saying there's no evidence that smoking and disease are linked.

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| **Ask Participants to break into pairs:** At the very beginning of this seminar we observed our human dilemma: “There is no thought without some prior interest or bias.” If a person’s inner will is directing his thought process, what must a person do to become intellectually honest? See if you can come up with two suggestions.  Present the following answers: He can develop an emotional desire for the value to be truthful.  Ask Participants: Imagine if Jacob loved truth more than anything else—what would he do when the MD presented him with the bad news?  A: Jacob would know the truth (smoking kills) and could choose to change (stop smoking) or live with the discomfort that he was going against what he knows to be true, without diminishing the value of the truth. |

Q: Can anyone suggest some other scenarios where a person may experience CD?

A: BEHAVIOUR COMPROMISED ATTITUDE/BELIEF

Starts Smoking Smoking Kills

Breaking a promise to a best friend Real friends keep their word

Shoplifting To steal is to be a criminal

Cheating on a spouse A faithful spouse is monogamous

Q: Do we agree that intellectual honesty asks us to consider facts that may be emotionally challenging?

A: Yes

**Part 4:** **View *2001: A Space Odyssey*** as a case study of how millions may accept evidence of an “intelligent designer” when their personal worldview or lifestyle are unchallenged, and yet may then reject it when CD is introduced.

[**Let’s watch a seventeen minute abridged version of 2001**](https://vimeo.com/577536910)**. After the film we resume.**

**THE MYSTERY OF "2001"**

In the annals of motion picture history, the film "2001: A Space Odyssey" holds a special place. Watching the film, the viewer feels that he is being treated to nothing less than an encapsulated tale of human civilization, from Day One to the present, and even into the future. Millions of people have seen this film, and though "2001" is outwardly science fiction, every viewer senses an important message. Something is being said about life, the universe, and reality in general, and the message seems to be one of enormous consequence. In the 1960s, when "2001" came out, it left its audiences so awestruck, most who went to see it once went back to see it again and again, hoping that they would be able to decipher it.

Let us try to crack this riddle. We shall see, in fact, that "2001" does contain a message about reality -- one of ultimate importance for every human being.

**"2001: A Space Odyssey" – Plot Summary (Not all shown in our clip.)**

1. The film begins with about a half hour of footage featuring a troupe of apes living by a water hole. The place: "Earth." The time: "The Dawn of Man."
2. The troupe of apes is attacked by a second troupe and driven away from its water hole. In exile, the first troupe is awakened early one morning to the eerie sounds being generated by a mysterious object -- a black metallic slab. It is about 15 feet tall, and shaped like a huge domino. Its smooth metallic surfaces and perfect right angles are totally out of place and incongruent with the pristine beauty of a world untouched by man-made objects. It is immediately obvious to the viewer that the black geometric form originates from an intelligence which dwarfs that of the apes. With great fear and trepidation, the apes eventually work up the courage to approach the slab. They lay their hands on its "wondrous" features – its smooth polished surfaces. This is their first encounter with "high" technology. The scene is accompanied by loud music and eerie human-like voices in the background. Suddenly, the scene switches.
3. It is the next day. The leader of the exiled troupe is sitting on his haunches, playing idly with the dried-up bones of the skeleton of an ox. Seemingly, yesterday's encounter with the slab has given the leader a jolt forward, increasing his intelligence, for while playing with one of the bones, he discovers that a large bone can be used to break smaller bones. Longing for the water hole that was once his home, the troupe leader gathers up several large bones from the ox's skeleton, and gives them to the other male members of his troupe.
4. Armed with this new, sophisticated weaponry, the apes easily retake the water hole, in a quick and bloody battle.
5. Afterwards, the leader of the troupe triumphantly tosses his ox bone high into the air, and in what has been called “the greatest fast-forward in movie history,” the swirling bone comes down as a spaceship, implying that the apes have evolved into man.
6. Since that first technological advance, at the battle for the water hole, mankind has evolved considerably, and civilization on Earth has made great technological progress. The United States has built a colony on the moon, and scientists exploring there discover what looks to be the same slab that the apes had found! At this point, there is no reason for the scientists to assume that the slab is anything more than an inert building block. What they do know is that it has been on the moon for four million years, precluding the possibility that any human being put it there. The inevitable conclusion, as stated in the film, is as follows:

"THIS IS THE FIRST EVIDENCE OF  
INTELLIGENT LIFE OFF THE EARTH."

[Stop film and help viewers articulate the discovery]:

-This is the first objective evidence that the universe contains intelligent life other than man. -Why do viewers accept this as true?

1. The momentous discovery of the geometric slab is kept secret, for the Americans fear that if Earth's inhabitants learned about it "without adequate preparation and conditioning," widespread "culture shock" and "social disorientation" would inevitably ensue.
2. The moon moves in its orbit. Sunlight hits the slab, perhaps for the first time in eons, causing it to emit a beam into outer space. A spaceship is built and a crew is assembled to follow the beam. There is hope that the Americans will discover the intelligence that is responsible for the slab and its beam.
3. The spaceship takes off on an odyssey that spans the universe. The spaceship’s computer usurps control, ends the lives of all but one of the crew, “Dave,” who continues the odyssey alone. In the end, Dave is captured in an inter-galactic net, apparently by the makers of the slab. We find him facing himself as an old man, sitting in a room on the other side of the universe. No explanations are given. A huge embryo appears on the screen, and the film ends.

**AFTER THE FILM**

*2001: Space Odyssey* has gone down in the annals of film history as an all-time international classic. It has struck such a powerful chord in international consciousness that this year, over fifty years after its release, some unknown person or group of people, erected monoliths in locations spanning from [Utah](https://www.nytimes.com/video/science/earth/100000007471987/monolith-utah-desert-discovery.html) to the [UK](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-55212336#:~:text=A%20monolith%20has%20mysteriously%20appeared%20in%20Britain%20-,an%20island%20off%20the%20south%20coast%20of%20England.), in hopes that mass media would conclude what the movie concluded: THIS IS THE FIRST EVIDENCE OF INTELLIGENT LIFE OFF THE EARTH. Whereas the media assumed it was a stunt, they were also willing to entertain such a possibility.

However, *2001: Space Odyssey* is much more than just a world renowned and revered film. It can serve us as a fascinating anthropologic case study in how people evaluate information when freed from the influences of CD and Confirmation Bias. As discussed above in Part Two, confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs or values (Wikipedia). Let’s go through a series of four steps together and see what we conclude.

**Step 1: How 2001 tested amongst millions of subjects that the threshold we accept as evidence of “intelligent design” is quite low.**

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| Q: In the film what led the film and viewers to conclude:  "THIS IS THE FIRST EVIDENCE OF INTELLIGENT LIFE OFF THE EARTH."  - that is to say, what threshold of objective evidence indicated the universe contained intelligent life other than man?  A: A simple geometric slab, a black monolith.  Q: Why do you think the filmmaker Stanley Kubrick did not feel it necessary to add something more complex as evidence of the existence of a higher intelligence? For example, a monolith with a clock?  Q: Even though it is easier to dismiss a monolith as a random rock formation than a monolith with a clock, because the more complex a thing is, the more it indicates that an intelligent designer made it, how high a bar did Stanley Kubrick need to set to establish a threshold for intelligent design that people across all borders and nationalities would accept?  Sample Answer: The threshold of what people would accept as evidence was low. Stanley Kubrick intuited that a simple monolith would be intellectually compelling to millions of viewers across the globe, and he was correct in assuming so.  *Conclusion:* We just concluded that threshold of credible evidence of the existence of a nonhuman intelligence to audiences worldwide is a black stone monolith. Millions of viewers across the globe from all walks of life felt this was compelling evidence of “intelligent design and life.” |

**Step 2: When subjects, viewers of *2001*, determined the monolith to be a sufficient threshold for “intelligent design,” there was no pressure from confirmation bias nor was there any CD blocking them from making this conclusion.**

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| Q: The *Scientific American* article discussed “confirmation bias:” “*Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study shows where in the brain the confirmation bias arises and how it is unconscious and driven by emotions*.” When viewers of *2001: Space Odyssey* concluded that the simple black monolith was sufficient evidence of “intelligent design,” did they have to work against any preexisting emotions to reach this conclusion?    Q: We discussed that “*cognitive dissonance…  is triggered by the person's belief clashing with new information perceived, wherein they will try to find a way to resolve the contradiction to reduce their discomfort.”* When viewers of *2001: Space Odyssey* concluded that the simple black monolith was sufficient evidence of “intelligent design,” did this conclusion seem to clash or lead to any discomfort?  Sample Answer: In the theater, eating popcorn, free of personal, social, intellectual and other any emotional pressures from CD or confirmation biases, people agreed unanimously that a black slab with smooth surfaces and a few right angles was conclusive proof of intelligence. Neither did any film critic take issue. Most importantly, based on all available information, no objections were raised by anyone in any movie theater either. The people in the theaters "agreed" not because they were watching fantasy, and would agree to anything. "2001" was taken very seriously. Viewers were looking at the film critically, and they realized that if such a momentous discovery were to be made under identical conditions in real life, any qualified scientist inevitably would reach the same conclusion.  Conclusion: The film was not challenging viewer’s preexisting ideals or emotional stances. In short, there was no external interests or factors pushing viewers to either reject or confirm the monolith as evidence of “intelligent design.” |

**Step 3: Now that subjects have accepted and set a low threshold as what is evidence of “intelligent design,” lets us introduce an element of CD, and observe if they are consistent in viewing it as evidence of “intelligent design,” or whether due to CD or confirmation bias they reject such evidence of “intelligent design.”**

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| Q: Based on what we learned about confirmation bias, i.e. as the article in *Scientific America* put it: “*We seek and find confirmatory evidence in support of already existing beliefs and ignore or reinterpret disconfirmatory evidence”* how should we expect people to react to the evidence of “intelligent life,” like the monolith, if that evidence was in conflict or supported some belief they already held to be true?  Together let us get an internal read on what we think. Now let’s introduce an idea we just learned about-- CD. Let us introduce an emotional factor, a topic about which many people have strong emotions on both sides of the spectrum, both negative and positive—the topic of G-d.  First let us measure intuitively, without thinking, what is your first knee-jerk reaction to the following question.  Q: If the filmmaker Stanley Kubrick, instead of implying that the monolith was a proof for alien life, he instead implied in the movie that it was a proof for the existence of G-d, do you think *2001: A Space Odyssey* would have had the same mass appeal?    Q: Why or why not?    Sample Answer: If we also take into account CD, like Wikipedia said: “*the experience of*[*psychological stress*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_stress)*that occurs when a person holds two or more contradictory*[*beliefs*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belief)*,*[*ideas*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idea)*,*[*values*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value_(ethics))*,… people will do all in their power to change them until they become consistent,”* it may be reasonable to assume that people stressed by the concept of G-d may object to the monolith as being evidence of “intelligent life.” If we take into account confirmation bias, it may be a person who already believes in G-d will tend to ignore flaws in the evidence presented.  Q: Let’s put it differently: We already measured proof for an intelligent designer off the planet earth with our survey of 2001 audience reaction, when no CD or confirmation bias was present.  Is the following a reasonable statement:  If we want to conduct an intellectually honest experiment to measure what constitutes ‘evidence for an intelligent designer that could be G-d,’ we will first have to test subjects and measure their preexisting stance on this subject. We will have to measure what emotions they have towards the concept of G-d in order to check whether or not they are more likely to ignore or over-emphasize certain data; we will also have to check for confirmation bias, i.e., we will have to see if they dismiss or rationalize the evidence based on what they want to be true. |

**Step 4: To reliably measure scientific evidence about the design of the universe, we need to factor in potential CD and confirmation bias.** In order to be an objective truth seeker, one must develop an awareness of potential emotional responses undermining our ability to perceive truth.

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| Q: Consider the two quotes below.  1. Nobel laureate, high-energy physicist (a field of science that deals with the very early universe), Professor Steven Weinberg, in the journal *Scientific American*, reflects on "how surprising it is that the laws of nature and the initial conditions of the universe should allow for the existence of beings who could observe it. Life as we know it would be impossible if any one of several physical quantities had slightly different values." Although Weinberg cannot but be astounded by the extent of the fine-tuning. He goes on to describe how a beryllium isotope having the minuscule half-life of 0.0000000000000001 seconds must find and absorb a helium nucleus in that scintilla of time before decaying. This occurs only because of a totally unexpected, exquisitely precise, energy match between the two nuclei. If this did not occur, there would be none of the heavier elements. No carbon, no nitrogen, no life. Our universe would be composed of hydrogen and helium. But this is not the end of Professor Weinberg's wonder at our well-tuned universe. He continues: "One constant does seem to require an incredible fine-tuning... The existence of life of any kind seems to require … accura[cy] to about 120 decimal places."  This means that if the energies of the big bang were, in arbitrary units, not:  1000000000000000000000000000000000000000 0000000000000000000000000000000000000000 0000000000000000000000000000000000000000,  but instead:  1000000000000000000000000000000000000000 0000000000000000000000000000000000000000 0000000000000000000000000000000000000001,  there would be no life of any sort in the entire universe because as Weinberg states: "the universe either would go through a complete cycle of expansion and contraction before life could arise or would expand so rapidly that no galaxies or stars could form."  2. Michael Turner, the widely quoted astrophysicist at the University of Chicago and Fermilab, describes the fine-tuning of the universe with a simile: "The precision is as if one could throw a dart across the entire universe and hit a bullseye one millimeter in diameter on the other side."  Q: Is the emotional cost for admitting the **monolith** was designed by some intelligent designer the same as admitting that the **universe** is a designed by some intelligent designer?  Q: Even if fine-tuning of the universe is unfathomably more complex than a simple monolith, and therefore more compelling evidence pointing to an “Intelligent Designer,” we acknowledge that the concept of a Creator is a concept which triggers emotional resistance amongst many. Will we be intellectually honest to factor in that it might be a confirmation bias or CD as a factor as to why certain scientists do not consider the option that the universe was created by an “intelligent designer?”  **Summary of the Four Steps**: In our mental experiment we have two test groups. Test group number one: millions of viewers worldwide who saw *2001: A Space Odyssey* who accepted the simple monolith as an intuitive proof for “intelligent design.” We then changed one factor. We asked: If the film implied the “monolith” was proof for design and that the designer could be an Infinite Creator and Maintainer of existence, may people begin to reject the premise that the monolith was “designed?” Most of us agree that *2001: A Space Odyssey* would have many more critics. We then went one step further and gave examples of some of the greatest scientific minds who are boggled by the precision of the universe. These scientists go so far as to adapt a new term, “fine tuning,” which implies some unspoken personality who is overseeing this “tuning” process, but yet will not offer an explanation which was obvious to them upon viewing the monolith; that is: The universe reflects evidence of an intelligent designer. |

**In conclusion:** Based on what we learned about CD and confirmation bias, that a person may ignore data or explain away data, it is possible to have a very intelligent person who in one situation agrees that a simple monolith is a credible demonstration for “intelligent life off planet earth,” and at the same time may be unwilling to acknowledge that the “fine tuning of the universe” is the product of some Intelligent Designer.

In the theater, eating popcorn, free of personal, social, intellectual and other interests, people agreed unanimously that a black slab with smooth surfaces and a few right angles was conclusive proof of intelligence, for the intelligence that was implied was not G-d.

Therefore, what level of complexity does it take for people to see intuitively that something was made purposefully? Does it take a computer found on the moon? An automobile? A wristwatch? An entire universe? No, even a domino-shaped slab is enough! In short, "2001" serves as a controlled, scientific experiment which establishes man's intuitive "threshold" for design. In the movie theater, where there are no implications for one's life, and the intelligence which is the source of the design is not Divine, this "threshold" level is quite low.

We now want to proceed and analyze the two groups, the movie viewers whose conclusion did not imply a G-d and the scientists whose conclusions may imply G-d, with utmost accuracy. Will we be intellectually honest in considering why two groups of people may be answering the same basic question differently, if we factor in the inner will of a person whose emotional resistance may impact or control one’s decision making? Even if Professor Weinberg and Dr. Turner did not allude to a Designer, does not the astounding precision of the universe compel us to be more reflective of the possibility of a Designer than the monolith?

**PART 5:** Jacob role-plays 4 CD Tactics that keep him from considering G-d’s existence

**JACOB’S CD**Q: Let us consider how a person with cognitive dissonance responds when he sees the black monolith, and any other evidence that suggests the existence of a Creator and Maintainer of the Universe.

Let’s imagine Jacob, a research scientist at MIT, who sees himself as rational. For whatever reason, his will is objecting to the evidence of G-d his mind perceives. Perhaps as a child he was taught that about a god who strikes people with lightning bolts and he has a phobia of being struck by lightning, or he was taught that people who believe in G-d are backwards and he does not want to identify himself with such people.

How will his inner will respond to the data he calculates?

A: Jacob’s inner will: I prefer not to consider the ramifications of there being a G-d who Created, Maintains and Supervises the Universe;

Whereas Jacob’s intellect will say: I see “evidence of a higher intelligence.”

Q: *Ask the participants, “What type of tactics might Jacob use to avoid uncomfortable feelings arising from weighing the evidence?” Afterwards, proceed with the responses below based on the Kahn Academy model.*

**Modify**

Jacob’s inner will may tell the mind MODIFY: “There may be a Creator but I lack conclusive evidence.”

By modifying Jacob reduces his discomfort by a “partial admission.” I admit I see evidence, but without defining a clear threshold of what I consider to be conclusive data I can remain in doubt.

**Trivialize**

We said Jacob’s inner will may tell the mind TRIVIALIZE: Even if G-d is all-powerful, why does He need me acknowledge Him? Like Groucho Marx said: ‘I’d never want to be a member of a club that would let someone like me in as a member.’ Doesn’t G-d needing me to acknowledge His existence imply He is lacking?

Even if Jacob is unable to deny the evidence his mind perceives, he relieves his discomfort by belittling the concept in general. In this case, rather than letting the evidence give him a picture of what a Creator and Maintainer could be like, he superimposes his own preconceived notion of what that is and makes fun of it. This allows him to cut short an honest investigation that could have led him to fully evaluate the evidence.

**Add**

Jacob’s inner will may tell the mind ADD a new cognition: “One of the principles that I live by is that I only accept evidence that I can prove by scientific methods that can be measured.”

ADDING helps resolve the cognitive dissonance. Jacob added a new rule that gives him an intellectual justification of why he does not have to consider certain intellectual evidence. In this case he has added a rule to limit what information he will and will not consider, ruling out any possibility of intellectually evaluating something he cannot measure, thereby justifying why he does not have to think about the existence of a Creator who by definition is beyond measure. The Jewish concept of G-d is a Being Who created, sustains and directs the universe, is all-powerful and all-knowing, yet cannot be seen.

**Deny**

Jacob’s inner will may tell the mind DENY: Jacob may DENY emotionally by keeping himself too busy to think things through. He may DENY what his mind perceives to be a fact by saying: “There must be some other explanation” or by disregarding what he perceives as possibly being true by saying: “It must not be true if many important scientists do not hold it to be true. It must not be.”

Q: We just summarized what Jacob the scientist may do if he experienced a clash between his negative feelings about the existence of a G-d who Created, Sustains and Supervises existence and the fact that he perceives evidence of a higher intelligence. Now let us ask ourselves the following question: If Jacob pushed himself to be an honest intellectual what may he do?

A: As an honest intellectual Jacob would admit that he is experiencing a clash between what his inner will wants and what his mind perceives to be true. Nevertheless, he would venture, for the sake of truth, to be broadminded and to think through his issues from every side -- being on the lookout in his thoughts for one of the four types of Cognitive Dissonance that we just discussed- MODIFY, TRIVIALIZE, ADD and DENY.

Q: Let us now see what Jacob might answer back to himself as an honest intellectual, admitting his clash between intellect and emotions.

Again, Jacob’s inner will: “I prefer not to consider the ramifications of there being a Creator and Maintainer of the Universe.”

Jacob’s intellect will say: “I see evidence of a higher intelligence.”

**Part 6: The bravery of intellectual honesty – Jacob confronts his CD to consider G-d’s existence.**

Let us imagine Jacob the scientist’s inner will is blocking him from considering the possibility of the existence of an Infinite Creator. Yet he decides to fight to overcome this block and the negative emotions that may be accompanying it to consider such a possibility. Let us role play the four responses to cognitive dissonance and examine possibilities that could happen with Jacob answering as an honest intellectual.

**Modify**

We said Jacob’s inner will tells the mind to MODIFY: “There may be a Creator but I lack conclusive evidence.”

Jacob may now say the “evidence of a higher intelligence” is way beyond the threshold of what I consider to be conclusive. Perhaps my opposition to belief in G-d is coming from somewhere else.

**Trivialize**

We said Jacob’s inner will may tell the mind to TRIVIALIZE: Even if G-d is all-powerful, why does He need me acknowledge Him? Like Groucho Marx said: ‘I’d never want to be a member of a club that would let someone like me in as a member.’ Doesn’t G-d needing me to acknowledge His existence means that He is lacking?

Now Jacob may approach someone with knowledge in these subjects and ask seriously: “I am unable to deny the evidence my mind perceives, but I am disturbed by the fact that if G-d is all-powerful, why should He need my acknowledgement of Him?”

Perhaps this person will respond: “You are correct, necessarily an All-Powerful Creator and Maintainer does not need anything.”

It is not important for you to acknowledge an all-powerful G-d not because He needs it. It is important because you need it. I’ll give you two descriptions of a parent. You tell me which of the two is the good parent.

One parent pushes his child to succeed so people will praise the parent. The other parent pushes his child to succeed not because he wants praise, but because he wants his child to have the pleasure of becoming who he is meant to become.

Jacob: “The first parent is in it for himself. The second parent is doing it selflessly because he knows who his son is meant to be, and how much his son will regret it if he ends up being mediocre.”

Knowledgeable Friend: In your question to me you were describing a “selfish god” who is in it for himself. There is certainly no point in acknowledging or relating to such an idea of god. If that is the god you don’t believe in, that is also the god I don’t believe in. You are correct, a god who is selfish is by definition lacking perfection. In order to really ask your question, first we rephrase your question with the assumption of G-d as being giving and caring. Then we may reach a reasonable answer. Let’s ask your question like this: Is there any benefit in acknowledging an all-powerful G-d, in as much as G-d has no needs? Again, like we said, if G-d is like the good parent in our example, the importance of your acknowledging Him will be the benefit of gaining the knowledge which will enable you to enjoy the unparalleled pleasure of achieving who you are meant to become.

To understand this, let us consider two quotes by authors who make a similar observation. One author describes her existence as being “by chance” and the second describes himself as created by a G-d. Listen to the two quotes and tell me: “What is the difference about how they view themselves, and their purpose and potential?”

Here is the first quote by:

[**DORIANNE LAUX**](https://www.theatlantic.com/author/dorianne-laux/)*, author of several poetry collections, including Only as the Day Is Long*: New and Selected Poems*, a finalist for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in poetry.* *Atlantic Magazine,* December 20, 2020.

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| ***Life on Earth: A Poem for Sunday***  *The odds are we never should have been born. Not one of us. Not one in 400 trillion to be exact.... the moonbeams lighting up your brain’s gray coils, the exquisite hills of your face, the human toy your mother longs for, your father yearns to hold, the unmistakable you who will take your first breath, your first step … And those are only a few of the things you will one day know, slowly chipping away at your ignorance and doubt, you who were born from ashes and will return to ash. When you think you might be through with this body and soul, look down at an anthill or up at the stars, remember your gambler chances, the bounty of good luck you were born for.* |

Here is the second quote by:

**Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 168 – The profound importance of each individual and his purpose in life.**

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| Every person needs to know that he has importance. Not an imagined importance that he “considers himself special”… rather a deeply profound importance that is even shocking.    The Talmud states, “Each and every person must declare, ‘The world was created for me’ (Sanhedrin 37a). Rashi explains that this means, “I am considered as important as the entire world …”    “As the entire world” – This is the one-time life experience of a particular person – there was never a person like him, nor will there ever be throughout history. I, with my with my unique blend of abilities, the child of my specific parents, born at a specific time period, and in a certain environment – must certainly have a unique challenge that is placed upon me. I have a special share in the Torah, and the entire world is waiting for me to actualize that which is incumbent upon me. For my role cannot be exchanged with anyone else in the world! | כל אדם חייב לדעת, שיש לו חשיבות. לא חשיבות מדומה שהוא "מחשיב עצמו בעצמו"... אלא חשיבות בעלת משמעות עמוקה ואף מזעזעת.        "כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר: בשבילי נברא העולם" (סנהדרין לז, א) - רש"י: "כלומר: חשוב אני כעולם מלא...      "כעולם מלא" – זוהי חוית חד-פעמיותו של האדם, שלא היה עוד כמותו ולא יהיה כמותו עד סוף כל הדורות. אני עם המיזוג המיוחד של כוחותי, בן לאותם אבות, נולד בתוך אותה תקופה ובאותה סביבה- בודאי עבודה מיוחדת מוטלת עלי, חלק מיוחד לי בתורה, וכל הבריאה מחכה לי שאתקן את המוטל עלי, כי את עבודתי לא אוכל להחליף עם שום אדם אחר בעולם! |

Jacob answers: “First let me tell you what both writers observed. The chances that anyone of us should be alive are less than those of winning every million-dollar lottery, in every city, every day. They also both observed that this information should make an impact on how we think about our lives.

The difference between the two of them was really the next step. How do we think about our own life? For Dorraine Laux, the Pulitzer Prize finalist, she hoped this information would one day “chip away her ignorance and doubt” and register deeply. For the author of *Alei Shur*, belief in G-d is the key to unlock a person’s purpose, unique sense of mission, potential and ability to value and take responsibility for other people and the world in general.

Jacob may ponder and continue: “Now I see the answer to my question. Assuming it is true that an All-Powerful Creator and Sustainer of the Universe exists, that information will be more powerful for me than winning a 400 trillion-dollar lottery. It infuses pricelessness into every moment of my life because it endows it with a meaning and mission that is unique and that only I can accomplish. If I will assume that G-d is like a good parent, and He wants me to get the most out of my life, then it makes sense that this Creator and Sustainer would want me to know about His existence.

**Add**

We said Jacob’s inner will told the mind ADD a new cognition: “One of my life principles is I only accept evidence that I can prove by scientific methods that can be measured.” If G-d is the Creator of time and space, and therefore by definition beyond any measure, I do not have to accept such a concept as true because I have no method to measure His existence.

Now Jacob asks himself: Is it true – do I really only accept what I measure to be true? Let’s see:

Jacob begins to ask himself:

Q: Are there parts of my life which I treat as true even though I cannot prove them? I mean to say, are their things I can know with perfect clarity and certainty even if many people may tell me I am wrong?

Let me try to make a list of the parts of my life that I experience as true even though they cannot be measured.

Here is my list:

1. Pain – the pain I experience, whether it be physical pain or the pain of being embarrassed or failing is very real for me. Even if others will disregard it, I know it’s real and a lot of the decisions I make are made as a result of pain I felt that I have no way of proving is real. The pain I experienced in losing my mother to cancer motivated me to go into scientific research to find a cure for cancer. This pain I feel and have no way to measure has been one of the biggest driving forces in my career choice for the past forty years.
2. The Nature of Time – Since every second is fleeting and disappears before it can be measured, scientists can’t even agree on what it is, much less if and where it exists. The present moment only exists between the past and the future, and itself disappears into the past before you can measure it. And the past itself can also not be measured. It would not be honest for me to say G-d is not real because He is beyond measuring, because I do not say the present moment must not be real because I also have no means to measure it. On the contrary, the present moment is the most real thing in my life, and the past is not measurable, which is at best a memory that is not objective, is long gone, I also accept as real.

**Description of Time – Science debates whether time is measurable (**[**Wikipedia**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time)**)**

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| Two contrasting viewpoints on time divide prominent philosophers. One view is that time is part of the fundamental structure of the universe – a dimension independent of events, in which events occur in sequence. Isaac Newton subscribed to this realist view, and hence it is sometimes referred to as Newtonian time. The opposing view is that time does not refer to any kind of "container" that events and objects "move through", nor to any entity that "flows", but that it is instead part of a fundamental intellectual structure (together with space and number) within which humans sequence and compare events. This second view, in the tradition of Gottfried Leibniz and Immanuel Kant, holds that **time is neither an event nor a thing, and thus is not itself measurable** nor can it be travelled. |

1. My own existence and the existence of others one minute ago: Of the 7 billion people who exist, none of us can really prove we existed one minute ago. Whatever proof of the past we bring is from the present moment, and perhaps we were all created one minute ago with *vivid* *memories* of what could have been our life up to this point, accompanied by a compatible sociological, historical, genealogical, archeological and geologic record. Since no one can travel back in time, no one can really even measure if anything existed, and in as much as the present disappears as soon as it arrives. Consequently, we all live fine with a seeming vivid recollection of our lives up to “now” without the ability to scientifically prove or verify our timelines.

I guess it is not entirely honest for me to say that “One of my life principles is I *only* accept evidence that I can prove by scientific methods that can be measured.” Just like I cannot put the concept of time under the microscope and measure it but I know it is real, and I do not view myself as irrational for doing so, it does not make it unreasonable to entertain the concept of G-d just because I cannot put G-d under a microscope.

**Deny**

Jacob’s inner will may tell the mind DENY: Jacob may DENY emotionally by keeping himself too busy to think things through. He may DENY what his mind perceives to be compelling data by saying: “There must be some other explanation” or by disregarding what he perceives as true by saying: “It must not be true if many important intellectuals do not hold it to be true. It must not be.”

Now Jacob may say to himself: “Are the opinions about whether G-d exists my opinions, or someone else’s opinions that I accepted without really investigating the other side.” Having been trained in science for the last twenty years he may realize: “My thoughts about science are very mature and developed. However all the concepts I have about G-d have not been seriously explored. It could be I deny and dismiss it because I never put more time into thinking about it with a mature mind. He may ask if it makes sense to so easily dismiss such Jewish religious thinkers.

**Paul Johnson, History of the Jews: Describing a nation of honest intellectuals.**

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| “One of their greatest gifts was the critical faculty. They had always had it. It was the source of their rationality, one of the factors which brought them to monotheism in the first place, for their critical sense would not allow them to accept the follies of polytheism. But they were not only critical; they were, perhaps above all, self-critical. And they were, or at any rate had been in ancient times, superb historians. They saw the truth, sometimes the ugly truth, about themselves, and they told it in the Bible. Whereas other peoples produced their national epics to endorse and bolster their self-esteem, the Jews wanted to discover what had gone wrong with their history, as well as what had gone right. That is why the Bible is littered with passages in which the Jews are presented as a sinful people, often too wicked or obstinate to accept G-d’s law, though they know it. The Jews, in fact, produced the evidence for their own prosecution.” ― **Paul Johnson,**[**History of the Jews**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/455718)**, 1987, Epilogue**  “Certainly, the world without the Jews would have been a radically different place. Humanity might have eventually stumbled upon all the Jewish insights. But we cannot be sure. All the great conceptual discoveries of the human intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they had been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jews had this gift. To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of human person; of the individual conscience and so a personal redemption; of collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without Jews it might have been a much emptier place.” |

**John Adams**, Second President of the United States: About The Jews

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| “I will insist the Hebrews have [contributed] more to civilize men than any other nation. If I was an atheist and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations ... They are the most glorious nation that ever inhabited this Earth. The Romans and their empire were but a bubble in comparison to the Jews. They have given religion to three-quarters of the globe and have influenced the affairs of mankind more and more happily than any other nation, ancient or modern.”  **John Adams**, Second President of the United States (From a letter to F. A. Van der Kemp [Feb. 16, 1808] Pennsylvania Historical Society) |

And I realize surely, I must be missing something if I hold onto the concept of a G-d I had when I was a kid, because it does not make sense that the group of individuals who inspired the writing of the American Declaration of Independence, the English Constitution, etc. were superficial thinkers. Jacob may take out his calendar and say: “When is my next vacation? I have two weeks in July. I want to make time to really consider the evidence on whether it may be that the universe has a G-d who created, sustains, and supervises our world, and seeks a personal relationship with every person.”

As is common when approaching such thoughts, he may reach a decision about which philosophy or religion’s perspective to explore the possibility of the existence of G-d. Since Jacob is Jewish, he may approach someone Jewish knowledgeable about comparative religions and ask them if there is any logical reason to think about one religion or philosophy over another.

Let us assume that in his research Jacob writes down all the different religions and brings the list to an expert and asks him: “Is there any reason to study one of these religions or philosophies of G-d over another?

The expert may answer him: Before I suggest which religion or philosophy to explore, I will tell you some reasons and you tell me if it makes sense to think about this group’s concepts about G-d.

-Only one of them claims to have experienced a revelation by G-d in front of over two million people where they received a clear word for word text, and have a record of how it was passed down and preserved until the present day.

-Only one religion, Judaism, features a rigorous, ongoing peer review of its system of law and philosophy. The adjudicators of Jewish law have an established reputation of integrity, constantly working on refining their character traits, steering clear of bias. The greatest minds of each generation apply Jewish principles to contemporary social, legal, economic and medical questions. In the process, they themselves ask the most challenging questions to clarify Jewish law, and together with the answers, the discussion and codes are recorded for all to review and further analyze.

It therefore may make sense to start with researching the Jewish understanding of G-d.

**Part 7: Seminar Summary and Take away: The Freedom to Think Bravely and Honestly.**

There is an interesting phenomenon we have studied: People often employ their intelligence to figure out how to feel “good” about the actions they want or do not want to do. The motivation of one’s thought process is one’s inner will. It comes out that the more intelligent a person is, the more we should be concerned that he will successfully disguise his inner will with intelligent arguments that perhaps neither others nor sometimes even he is aware. If this is what people do, how accurate is our assumption that because they are intelligent that their conclusions are trustworthy? We must have some other criteria, aside from intelligence alone that will help us to reach accurate conclusions. Otherwise, how can we ever depend on the conclusions?

What is the answer?

It seems that we will be stuck forever following our inner will and its dictates to ignore or obscure what it wants to avoid or dismiss?

We find amongst the Jewish people a fascinatingly ironic prayer that traditional Jews pray:

The words of this prayer are: *Pesach libi beSorasecha*. “Open my heart in Your Torah”

Let’s understand what is so fascinating about the prayer of an observant Jew to G-d. This Jews who claims that the Torah given by G-d is the ultimate truth, in the same breath is telling G-d: “Even though I know Torah is truth I also acknowledge that my heart does not feel like doing what I recognize as truth.” If the Torah is true, then intelligence dictates that a person should do what is true and not what is false. How can the Jewish people who accepted the Torah as the ultimate truth and swore to live by it, then turn to G-d Himself and say, “Open my heart and make me want the truth?”

The answer is that this prayer is an ancient acknowledgement of both confirmation bias and the potential of CD. The prayer to G-d is actually an attempt to resolve these two issues.

Let us translate the message of this prayer into our language:

Just because I may know intellectually something is true, I still may have an inner will to dismiss the truth. My intelligence and even my seeming one hundred percent certainty will not necessarily help me live with the truth because my inner will may desire a different outcome despite what it knows to be true. Depending on the circumstances, my inner will may speak to me more than the truth. I am therefore stuck. So, what do I do? I can only do one thing. I have to develop an inner will and a desire for truth itself that outweighs the desire to avoid or undermine the truth. When I identify with the value of being honest and desire it, I will not be able to tolerate living with something which is not true. This is what the prayer of these Jews is saying: “Open my heart or give my inner will a desire to live according to the truth because I am honest enough with myself to recognize its ultimate value even if I may be emotionally inclined to compromise the truth because of biases or desires.”

Let’s illustrate this challenge with an example many of us may have experienced. At one point in life, we may have said to ourselves: “I am like a little kid who loves to play with my ‘toys,’ but I see others growing up, on their way to becoming great people. Even though I love playing, I also want to want to face reality and become a great person; help me want to face reality even though I do not feel like it.”

The key to becoming a true honest intellectual is:

First, is to acknowledge that it is possible to know something is true and to dismiss it, and that this is a normal and natural part of life when facing ideas that we may not be emotionally ready to cope with.

Second, to acknowledge that even our inner will may have several contradictory wants. A person’s inner will may be in conflict and simultaneously desire something which that person knows objectively does not make sense or is even harmful, like the example of smoking.

Once a person is aware of this conflict within his inner will, he can come to the third step.

The third step is to be aware that inasmuch as a person may want to live in sync with what he knows to be true, and at the same time may want to avoid parts of reality, he is in danger of subconsciously choosing and then intellectually justifying what is convenient or feels good, and avoiding the truth he knows deep down, like the smoker in our example.

Fourth, once a person is aware of both the conflict of his inner will as well as the tendency to try to justify or dismiss what may be true, he can now be on the lookout for such conflicts of will when they arise. A person can talk to himself in two voices and say: “One the one hand I acknowledge the will to smoke… and on the other hand I acknowledge the desire to live... and thirdly I acknowledge the voice within me that is trying to make me feel ok about smoking.” By doing this a person now has a chance to then ask: “Which do I want more? What is my true inner will? Do I want to smoke and deceive myself that everything will be ok, or do I want to face the reality that my choice is killing me and let me really consider everything I am giving up? I am giving up my spouse, and my children, and the pleasure of growing old together with them, and enjoying a next generation and all the pleasure from swimming, skiing, eating, and of being alive.”

Once a person is honest about this conflict, he can weigh the two options and become honest about the consequences of each choice; this will then help him strengthen his desire for intellectual honestly. For example, a person can know: “I have become a bigger person simply because I am no longer avoiding the truth. Even if I have not yet strengthened my desire to quit smoking, at least I am on my way to strengthening my desire to be honest with what I should be giving up, and this will perhaps help me make the difficult choice of stopping smoking.”

This is the model for how to give ourselves **freedom to think bravely and honestly.**

A brave person is willing to consider anything, and will not be afraid of being bullied by threats of certain wants and desires. Rather he will stand up to the possibility of being temporarily uncomfortable, and will feel liberated that he can truly face the greatness of truth and become a great person. This may open up for us vistas of new exhilarating possibilities of how to think and relate to life which we may have never let ourselves imagine possible. We may even find ourselves reconsidering with a brave intellectually honesty the existence of an Infinite Force, the relationship with an Infinite Giver who cares and is interested in every aspect of our life being perfect.