



DECODING DEITY

BY

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Science has become more humble where spiritual matters are concerned, while the humanities (especially the subset that prefers the label “social sciences”) are lagging far behind. Does the ancient Hebrew name for G-d hold a Key for the 21st Century? Was there a code-link hidden in the name of the Creator of the Universe as it was revealed to Moses? Even if this key only unlocks the threshold to the great Mystery of existence...even if we are never able to get closer than the outer room, is not the quest worth pursuing?

THE KEY [אֲשֶׁר אֶתְּקֶה]]

THAT WAS LEFT FOR US

Spoiler alert: If you are looking for FINAL answers, you will need to keep looking...

The Approach ...

By Jay B Gaskill

The common practice of naming one's deity usually comes with a dark legacy of authority-abuse, sort of like the black sheep in the family no one likes to mention. This problem is fairly common because the very act of naming tempts the namers to claim ownership or control. Ah, but the *mystics*, both ancient and modern, decline to name God on the grounds that names inevitably limit that-which-transcends all limits. And in some religious traditions (thinking of Buddhism), the existence of God is simply not in the conversation.

Among other things, this article is about unpacking the **name** of the supreme-deity that was given to Moses as described in the Exodus tradition (variously dated from 1000 BCE). So I've decided to use the term G'd¹ as our referent. I hope that the insights that follow can prove useful to those agnostics and secular humanists among us who are receptive to the esthetic, moral and spiritual dimensions of the human experience. My premise here is that spirituality is real and relevant. History and anthropology track the long path of humanity's spiritual development. I believe that this chronicle holds a data set, a 10,000 year field survey well worth mining. Not all of its rewards can arbitrarily be dismissed as the fantasies of superstitious minds.

Our expedition begins with the Hebrew tradition captured in the Book of Exodus describing a signal moment when G'd conveyed the divine's name to Moses. I propose that The name holds a key for us moderns. For these purposes it doesn't really matter how much of the entire Exodus tradition can be archeologically and historically pinned to a timeline. The details of Moses's encounter with the divine being are so well embedded in the tradition that they represent an authentic, even epic, moment in humanity's spiritual development. Yes, I am aware of the natural skepticism that bubbles up whenever anyone asserts that some ancient tradition, however hallowed, might contain a major key to the mysteries of existence. But this one clearly does. And even if this key - which I think is more akin to a code - only unlocks the threshold to the great Mystery of existence; even if we are never able to get closer than the outer room, is not the quest worth pursuing?

¹ The name Yahweh is rendered YHWH to avoid stating the complete name. Another convention is to use G-d for God. For many, the full name of deity is considered too sacred to speak or write, For example, Adonai - or Lord, is another substitute. For others, the assignment of any name is misleading because it includes an implied limitation. But the focus here is based on the working premise that any divine communication or inspiration that conveyed a name, *outside extant tradition* (as was the case with the Moses encounter) would convey a meaning for the ages to follow,

So here's my threshold question: Was there a code-link hidden in the name of G'd as it was revealed to Moses?

The Hebrew phrase in the title to this piece is G'd's answer to Moses's, "What is your name?", question. I am not at all Hebrew-literate. But the experts tell us that the ancient Hebrew phrase - (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, 'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh - translates as "I Will Be What I Will Be", **and / or** as "I Am That I Am" **or even** as "I shall be What I Shall Be". I am reminded that Hebrew lacks a future tense. So, is it "being?" or "beingness?" or "becoming?" or something that combines all of these? The consensus is that the ancient phrase is too time-ambiguous to be perfectly translated.

Our discussion is based on the working theory that the legendary Moses encounter transcended ordinary inspiration; that it was an epic teaching moment that involved the universe itself; that the incident displayed the signature of an encounter with living intelligence, not a mere thing. ...And that it was the kind of history-altering event that compels us to take the biblical account on its own terms and with the utmost respect and seriousness.

I am personally persuaded that Moses experienced a glimpse of a reality so profoundly beyond ordinary human experience that it would have been vividly, **but incompletely** remembered - like the retinal afterimage of a lightning stroke. Surely, it was a massive information transfer, beyond the normal bandwidth of the human mind.² Certainly, the set of images, ideas and insights that entered the consciousness of Moses was beyond the ability of ordinary language to capture. But it was not beyond the power of poetic expression to convey a sense of its power and essence. It seems that when inspirations are spiritual in nature, especially when they have immense transformative power, their memories tend to be recorded in enigmatic shorthand.

Which raises our question again: What if that shorthand captured more of the message than was first understood? What was G'd getting at? Or to put it differently, what was the meaning of Moses's discovery moment? The ambiguity about whether G'd was saying, "My name is 'I am', present tense, or 'I shall be' or 'I will be'", or the three taken together, or something closely related, hints at an underlying concept for which there was no grammar, a recursive, ongoing being or state of **beingness**.

When the Book of Exodus was written, the Athenian philosophers had not been born; the mathematics of Euclid and Pythagoras were undiscovered; and the Buddha had not yet arrived. How can we moderns entertain the possibility that Moses's account held a key to "Life, the Universe and Everything"?³ How could anything so ancient be intelligible and relevant in modern terms? But universals are not time bounded. The post holocaust, post-atomic bomb, post-quantum physics era was close at hand...on the scale of eternity. What if we were left a message? We need to make the attempt, utilizing the insights conferred by our modern condition.

² At the outer edges of the normal human bandwidth, there are recorded moments of profound inspiration as when a genius composer or theoretical physicist is suddenly struck with a complete composition or fully developed theoretical solution (Mozart and Einstein provide striking examples of this).

³ Borrowing the phrase from Douglas Adams', *Hitchhiker to the Galaxy* novels, in which the supercomputer, Deep Thought, came up with the solution to the question of life the universe and everything -number 42. 😊

Let's begin with the readjustments in context that have taken place during the intervening millennia. We in the developed Western cultures have lived through a period of *radical materialism*. This is the philosophical claim that everything, inside and outside our heads, consists only of matter and energy, including our thoughts, hopes and aspirations. In this view, a magnificent work of esthetic inspiration, whether rendered in pictures or music, is perfectly inter-convertible to its physical components - canvas and oil paint in the former, air pressure fluctuations in the latter. In this mindset, our most sublime thoughts are just electrical impulses. Wishes are hormone driven impulses. Meaning is something we have just made up. And so on.

In the over-the-top form I've just outlined, this world-view is arch-materialism. Even in its weaker versions, materialism has tried to persuade us that all of the unseen powers in the world are completely explainable in terms of mechanics, as the behaviors of energy and matter. Any other model is dismissed as superstition. Even the miracle of conscious being, the reality of which we know through direct experience, has been dismissed by materialists as a sort of illusion. ...And the universe itself? In and of itself, by definition, it is meaningless within a purely materialist construct. From the materialist viewpoint, we humans are accidental arrivals who are free to make our own meaning...or not.

The materialist mindset is so pervasive in the modern culture that its effects are almost invisible.

But materialism, as it was concretely understood in the ancient sense, was just one element in a larger and richer reality. The ancients lived in a world that they perceived as sharply bifurcated between the seen and the unseen. The invisible powers were everywhere. They were forces that could not directly be seen but generated effects that affected daily life. In this world view, there was no real difference between the action of the wind and that of a ghost or malevolent spirit⁴. This mindset is revealed in the ancient Hebrew term for the Holy Spirit, the *Ruach*, which translates roughly as the holy breath or holy wind.

All the deities and spiritual powers of that ancient era were seen as mechanically interacting with humanity, accounting even for earthquakes, plagues and the rise and fall of whole nations. When the people of Moses's time thought and spoke of G'd, this occurred within the same world view that took for granted that a shaman could summon evil spirits capable of causing disease and death.

Of course, the Hebrew understanding of deity was as a moral being instead of malevolent one, and as the One instead of many. But the people of that time had little ability to differentiate natural forces from supernatural ones.

Enter the Greek philosophers of the Golden Age: These thinkers paved the way to modern science by introducing the study of form, logic and mathematics, which they understood as every bit as real as were the earth, air, fire and water of the material world. They retained the realm of the spiritual within the non-material realm of universals.

⁴ Subtler forms of spirituality were manifest in the Upanishads by 800 BCE and in many aboriginal populations. Generally speaking, the Asian spiritual traditions were less dualistic, in that the division between spiritual and material was more complementary, less sharp. But in the pre-scientific mind, actions in the visible world caused or prompted by the unseen forces, were regarded as normal, whether via wind or spirit.

I think that the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, *Heraclitus*, could have been a contemporary modern thinker. In just 124 pithy fragments, he describes a world characterized by ongoing change & flux (“everything flows”), in which unseen designs & the eternal Logos exist alongside change, a world where harmony is found in contradiction. Among the fragments from Heraclitus, two personal favorites of mine nicely capture the ancient Greek vision of an eternal realm that exists alongside the mundane one:

Fragment 62: *“The mind of man exists in a logical universe but is not itself logical.”*

Fragment 64: *“Man, who is the organic continuation of the Logos, thinks he can sever that continuity and exist apart from it.”*

The subtlety and elegance of Heraclitus’s thinking makes arch-materialism look like a chain saw attack on a stunningly beautiful sculpture.

Modern post-materialist thinking is comfortable with metaphor and allegory as cognitive tools that help bridge the spiritual realms of conscious being (taken to include the esthetic and moral) and the physical one. These tools are coming back into fashion in the wake of the great attack of the materialist skeptics.

We are still in recovery from the 20th century assault on belief. The arch-materialism of the last 150 years was an orchestrated attack (much like a software virus) on key aspects of ancient spiritualism and Greek philosophy alike. As a demolition process, materialism (Marx called it “scientific materialism”) almost took out religion completely, at least among the sophisticated intelligentsia; and it left spirituality, even objective morality, in a disreputable ghetto.

In the early stages of recovery from arch-materialism, we can take heart from the developments in the sciences and mathematics of the latter 20th and early 21st centuries that have kicked over its support pillars. Disciplines like relativity, quantum physics, probability and chaos theories, and - very recently- studies about the nature of information, have introduced radical ideas, including: the understanding that all reality is relational; that all is interconnected; that chaos generates both novelty and order; and that creativity is an ongoing feature of our existence.

As a result, science has become more humble where spiritual matters are concerned, while the humanities (especially the subset that prefers the label “social sciences”) are lagging far behind. Their acolytes still dominate in the academy, where many embrace an anti-spiritual version of arch-materialism bordering on arrogance. There are four developments now in play, that will spark a renaissance of intelligent spirituality in general, and a reexamination of G’d and Moses in particular. They are:

1. The growing realization that all reality, material and non-material, is relational in character;
2. the dawning understanding that the universe is so constructed that order naturally emerges from chaos, revealing the ongoing creative processes that exploit the seeming randomness around us, making us and all that is;

3. the new understanding that information, a non-material existent that is manifest in material carriers (thinking for instance, of electromagnetic wave forms, neurological connections, and quantum wave states), has the ability to shape material events;
4. ...and the growing faith/conviction that all this, seen and unseen, is deeply interconnected within an overall Unity.

Dare we hope that the message to Moses was so cleverly framed and authentically captured that we moderns, thousands of generations later, might still be able to discover something fresh about the significance and meaning of G'd's declared name?

Of course we can.

Moses and his coreligionists were absolutely dedicated to recording the word of G'd as they understood it – and even if a scribe did not fully understand it, it would still be recorded with careful fidelity. Millennia later, medieval monks faithfully copied the Greek philosophers, word for word, without always understanding the manuscripts. Such is the integrity of religious scribes.

The answer to our threshold question depends on whether we moderns are willing to seriously entertain the possibility that G'd (or some active aspect of the Universe) was *really communicating* with Moses.

You are hereby invited to engage with me in an exercise of *heuristic* faith. The strategy is to take the possibility of spiritual reality seriously enough to provisionally believe in its truth, taking a reasonable faith-leap in order to learn what otherwise might be undetected or ignored. Unless we are receptive to well embedded lessons, they will remain hidden.

Let's start by looking closely at some of the other elements in this epic encounter for embedded meaning that opens up in a modern context:

The image of the burning bush, a network of branches that hold a fire or a light that does not consume them, looks to my modern mind as a metaphorical description of *a neural net lit by consciousness*.

The earlier creation narrative in Genesis that begins *before there was light* provides a clue about the nature of G'd and the purpose of creation once we grasp that conscious being was the light.

And this insight about light and consciousness leads us to understand that to be made in the image of G'd meant something deeper and subtler than notion of a master hominid G'd making lesser hominids. The juxtaposition of light and the name of G'd as "being" was meant (I submit) that the features of the conscious, intelligent human mind, our soul architecture if you will, especially our capacities of compassion, creativity and the apprehension of beauty, are among the inherited divine attributes. The childish notion of a bearded, male G'd is an artifact of the concrete materialism of an era and culture, and it falls into the same trap for all those of us who hope to finally name "our" G'd.

In the Exodus tradition, we have G'd's gift of a moral rule-framework, not just to Moses, but to a whole population. This is a gift that assumes humanity's G'd-given capacity for moral intelligence.

We have been given the assurance that "I (G'd) will be with you"; this was not a time limited nor a time dependent gift.

Finally, we have a declaration of G'd's absolute unity, a single, whole, all-encompassing deity-being, author of wholeness. Monotheism was and is of a piece with the unitary view of reality, the promise that all of creation ultimately is - in the fullness of time- an integrated whole. This was a powerful promise that has produced extraordinary fruits. The faith that the universe is an integrated whole, even if we can't yet tease out all of the connections and unities, has propelled science's thirst for integration, explanation, and the rejection of arbitrary discontinuities. We are reaping the benefits of this gift to the present day.

The genius of Isaac Newton was endlessly inspired by his belief that, in *discovering* the harmonies, the rational laws governing the universe, he was apprehending the mind of G'd. Albert Einstein has expressed much the same impression.

This is the sort of message-unpacking that the first ancients were not as well equipped to do as are we moderns. My exercise was personal, intended as a rough guide. This is your path to choose.

If G'd's name was a code intended to be worked out anew in each age, we can assume that its Author knew then what we would have now discovered: In the 21st century, we have discovered chaos behaviors that often generate emergent order, the deeply relational nature of the physical universe, the discovery that at the tiniest level of examination, the very "stuff" of matter and energy seems to disappear into pure relationality and the fields of probability.

We know that there are seemingly simple mathematical and geometrical relationships that generate recursive, nested forms of extraordinary beauty that are found in seashells and butterfly wings. We know that consciousness is an emergent property of certain, living neural networks (at least those that support our minds). We know that the conscious, self-aware state is a miraculous whole greater than its parts, that conscious intelligence is capable of achieving inter-being communication, the sharing of meaning, and negotiating unities of thought, using discovered universals.

Einstein remarked that the most remarkable thing about the universe is that it is intelligible to the human mind. It is even more remarkable that our conscious minds are capable of apprehending moral principles, which in turn are the foundations of great civilizations.

As moderns, we know much more about ourselves, the world and the universe, only because we were endowed with the cognitive equipment that eventually enabled us to form civilizations. The ability to form stable, growing communities was the gift by which we ascended from the animal level of existence, allowing us to promote our continued survival, and to flourish as long as we did not lose our moral compass, and to sustain our progress as long as we protected our institutional memory, including our moral and spiritual traditions.

This is why the gift of the moral law to humanity via Moses was not trivial. It is significant that much of modern Western civilization's durability is traceable to G-d's teaching moments with Moses. The moral principles that underlie the Decalogue are part of the moral infrastructure of modern functioning civilizations.

Seen through a 21st century lens, the unity principle in the Great I-am can be understood as extraordinary and vitally important software. Equally important: That ancient software came bundled with the moral code without which of the laws that support modern civilization could not have survived.

Taking all this into account, our decoding project now needs to integrate the *context* formed by three great realities - *relationship*, *meaning*, and *being*, now that we can clearly see them as the universals that they are, the decline and fall of arch-materialism having cleared away the fog. Universal relationship, universal meaning and universal being are vital, living sinews of the total reality that includes the mechanical-material universe, in all its laws and turbulence. This re-contextualization is a necessary precondition to knowing the implications of a Universal "I Am".

My challenge: Follow this code-trail without the blinders of arch-materialist thinking. I believe that you will be able to find your way into a metaphorical clearing. Imagine with me the branches parting to reveal a scene. A self-identified Source is telling us moderns (channeling though Moses) that "I am" is the "I" that connects to all beings who consider themselves "I".

This is a key element of the coded message carried by the very linguistic and conceptual ambiguities within the "I am / I will be / I shall be" name of G'd. The revelation to Moses was configured so that later ages could discern on their terms that Supreme Being exists in time and outside time as being & emergent-being & becoming & eternal being.

For some skeptics among us, the task of unpacking the message has gotten hung up on the question whether this was a message, as such. If so, I invite you to give the higher priority to deciding whether the name reported by Moses encodes one of the Great Insights...whatever its source. To assist in that exercise, here is a review:

Quantum theory reveals that that the universe is relational. We are invited to explore the apparent separateness of *relationships*. We sense over and over again that we are discovering, not inventing *meaning*. We are invited to explore these shared meanings with our fellow beings in the world. When we notice the beautiful recursiveness of form and being in us and in nature, we are invited to explore the unity implied by recursiveness.⁵ Are we not invited to revel in a sense of awe at the ultimate unity of being?

⁵ Recursion describes a property of mathematics and natural reality in which nested forms can operate or unfold in an infinite repetition (think of mirrors) that echo the original. In advanced geometry, for example, fractals recursively "mirror" a large scale form in an unlimited set of tinier scales, but with infinite variation. Mandelbrot fractals generate variety within unity up and down the scale, generating startlingly beautiful images that are computer generated but mimic those that naturally appear in nature (snowflakes, zebra stripes, and so on). Benoit B. Mandelbrot was the mathematician whose "theory of roughness" led to fractal geometry. But the real author was the Creator of the Universe.

I sense that this modern setting was an anticipated context of the message, in the sense that if we hadn't blown ourselves up, by now we would be ready to revisit the Moses encounter. And here we are. It would follow that the holy name that was conveyed to Moses was a time capsule-clue to the ultimate unity of being; an information packet holding the key to the ultimate essence of "I am-ness"; a wonderfully condensed statement of a greater reality that can only be suggested by language, but can never be reduced, limited, or captured in words and symbols. It was a hint that when fully unpacked announces to all who are willing to listen that creation is a process, a process including the eternally recurring "I am", that "I am" and "creation" are the One who is engaged with us in an eternally unfinished project.

Please stay with this line of thinking just a bit longer. I can imagine what the Name might look like if conveyed by a symbolic thread, suggesting an infinitely recursive string of being, beingness and becoming, something in the form: " ∞ .i.am ∞ ..." The infinity symbol, ∞ , is followed by ".i.am.", using the web address format, then infinity again, and the repeating decimal ... to indicate that it goes on and on.... Such a key - my illustration is one attempt for purposes of discussion- would indicate an *infinitely recursive* set of keys.

The form of a wing or a fin is a universal engineering solution in fluid dynamics. Think of it as a stand-in for all the clever, wonderfully adaptive designs that have emerged from apparent chaos over 13 billion years. In this view, life emerged from chaos; and it initially succeeded in sticking around by virtue of the sheer volume of its replicated, propagated numbers. Enter the fins and other mechanical adaptations. Then life became even more supremely adaptive: When it eventually generated intelligence, the capacity for intelligent action was a more powerful adaptation than all that came before it.

Intelligence is a universal design solution, but the creative adaptation process did not end there. It actually accelerated. Novelty, this time *within intelligence*, continues to appear, iteration following iteration, on the world's stage. When the capacity for moral intelligence was achieved, something else began to dawn within intelligence: an awareness of the source of being.

We can begin to see evolutionary change as the emergence of information-sensitive systems, a process tending towards the capacity for communication. Rocks and trees are not sufficiently information-sensitive to detect a message from other creatures, or from G-d, *but I believe that now humanity obviously is, and I also believe that the evidence of the last 10,000 years shows that its more sensitive members have.*

Imagine watching a cosmic movie in which the universe plays in fast-forward, in which we the audience, witness the drama of evolutionary change, unpacking universal relationship, universal meaning and universal being by endlessly generating novelties that become universals...the first foot, the first fin, the first eye, the first mind, emergent designs ever more complex, but elegantly simple and always ever more creative, over and over again. Note that this entire drama is only detectible by sufficiently aware intelligent beings. We are embedded agents on a quest that is infinitely rewarding but has no finite terminus. Think of a cascade of nested openings.

More striking still: Over very large spans of time, the progressive emergence of morally-aware intelligence becomes incrementally evident *and increasingly relevant to what follows*. Without morally-aware intelligence, we humans would be as extinct as the T-Rex.

At critical moments morally-aware intelligence becomes receptive to a message from the Creator Being. The Moses moment was among the first, but certainly not the last of such moments. I believe that visions of this sort have already landed countless times in receptive minds.

Comb history for a series of profound flashes that alter outlook and behavior in ways that are distinctly moral. You find a distinct signature.

I believe that the vision of an eternally unfolding of infinitely differentiated being within a master unity, was encoded within the original Hebrew G-d encounters captured in the Genesis and Exodus accounts. It is the first well recorded signature.

It took a nominal atheist, the late Karl Sagan, to write this paean on the universe and humanity. It is a mountaintop epiphany, evidence that the *numinous* light can arrive in any receptive mind, no matter what one's nominal belief system –



“We succeeded in taking that picture [from deep space], and, if you look at it, you see a dot. That’s here. That’s home. That’s us. On it, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever lived, lived out their lives. The aggregate of all our joys and sufferings, thousands of confident religions, ideologies and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilizations, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every hopeful child, every mother and father, every inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every superstar, every supreme leader, every saint and sinner in the history of our species, lived there on a mote of dust, suspended in a sunbeam.”

From the Introduction to *The Pale Blue Dot* (1993) by Karl Sagan (1934-1996-∞)

Faith and Knowledge

There are aspects of the real world that unaided reason can never fully know. But partial knowledge can seem like wisdom in the context of full-on ignorance. This is as true of the creatures that have acquired a capacity and practice of caring for their young, as it is of the men and women who have acquired the intelligence, foresight and empathy to educate their young. In contrast with the creatures and persons who lack the capacity and practice, they are very wise.

We – our living minds – are the *heuristic*⁶ reasoning agents of the universe, tasked by our very cognitive architecture to discover meaning in a reality realm that is entirely relational in nature (in which the nature of nature is relation, recursively distributed). We experience this as a thirst for explanation, curiosity and the expectation of discovered connections leading to an ultimate – but ever elusive – unified understanding.

I've just used the term 'faith' in a special sense, as opposed to 'blind faith', as in obedience to seemingly arbitrary authority. It is open, *heuristic* faith. This echoes the sages who said *Credo ut intelligam* – capturing the notion that we use faith in order to believe because we need to believe in order to understand. Let me restate their heuristic strategy slightly differently:

We employ faith (as the working assumption of the truth of that which has not yet been demonstrated) as provisional belief (stronger than a mere hypothesis) because we need to test it out by living into it to see what additional insights and revelations it might bring.

This is faith as a necessary heuristic tool to approach truths that, by their very nature, are beyond the verifying protocols of the laboratory.

"Credo ut intelligam" is Latin for "I believe so that I may understand"- from St Anselm (1033-1109) & Augustine (354-430), *crede, ut intelligas*, "believe so that you may understand".

ON APPROACH

Intellectuals have debated the "G'd question" for several millennia, only to discover that the most thoughtful and well informed minds can never quite agree on the question of proof. Rather than get snagged in *arguments* for or against the "existence" of G'd, we are wiser to adopt an approach strategy that can take any receptive mind into some level of contact with the "holy-as-divine-persona".

The particular approach I'm outlining here consists of a series of *heuristic* steps. All of our ultimate encounters - whether to the "holy", the "numinous" or the very face of deity - must necessarily remain personal (and for the deeply skeptical, provisional in meaning).

The steps of Approach can be repeated in sequence over a lifetime without getting to finality -- as one might listen to Mahler, Bach or Saint Seans, or stand in the apse of a cathedral or in awe at the night sky over time, and on each occasion tease something new out of the encounter. There is never one definite moment when the ultimate embedded meaning in a truly great work of art (or the mind of G'd) has finally been fully mined.

Step One: The discovery of the significant *mind-to-mind correlations* that can be mined for universal experiences.

⁶ I love this word – from the Greek *heuriskein*, "to find". I'm using it here in the sense of a strategy or stance that is adopted or favored because it aids in learning new truths about "life, the universe and everything". I note that the usage has slipped over into the software realm; *heuristic* algorithms are designed to "learn" from experience. I note that any sufficiently rigid dogma, which it not itself designed as an open process, can become *anti-heuristic*. For reasons that should be evident as you reflect on my design for an approach to G'd, a reasonable faith stance can be profoundly heuristic.

We necessarily begin the Approach with a shared insight – that there are no fully adequate mechanical explanations for the shared states of aware being that constitute adult, self-aware and other-aware consciousness. All great art represents an exploration of this very realm. Only by correlating our experiences with others are we able to reliably infer that our “subjective” states are not only local but also general. The analysis and deep correlation of our shared “subjective” states yields an emergent picture of the recurring deeper universals in all human experience. This sets the stage for Approach.

Step Two: The mutual recognition that one’s very states of “beingness” are aspects of a larger, ineluctable mystery.

We share the sense that all of the behavioral “explanations” leave an Essence that is experienced and therefore real, but beyond the scope of any mechanical level description. This threshold acceptance that there really is something much more than the mechanical level of explanation constitutes a *heuristic* mindset. The sense of mystery represents the natural and reasonable response of any thinking, rationally ordered mind that is seeking unity of understanding with the intellectual humility that not all can be immediately known; it is a state of directed openness; it is the beginning of Approach.

Step Three: An honest acknowledgment of potential the reality and significance of the shared “*encounter*” experiences of being, whether they are described as “awe” or “grace” or as the experience of the “presence” of an Other, greater “being” or “beingness”.

This is the necessary first stage before our actual of the apprehension of the “holy” or the “numinous”. Note the heuristic key here. We must suspend any *a priori* rejection of our deepest experiences of the transcendent. Anything less will frustrate the search for ultimate meaning. We humans – all of us on some level – are equipped with an appetite for meaning and thirst for the transcendent. When we deny this thirst and hunger, we can injure our selves on a deep level. To abandon the Approach is to embrace despair.

Step Four: An intentional expansion of deep context for all that matters to us (and therefore an open-mindedness towards the greatest possible scope of meaning); this mindset or quest is necessarily adopted as a life project.

Even secular thinkers are occasionally forced to look at reality from “the G’d perspective”. The very existence of this “universal perch” and the utility of its perspective hint strongly at the “there is something more to all this, something more than the mundane” mindset which is the first stage of Approach.

Step Five: The ascent from confusion and mental compartmentalization.

We humans tend to build and rebuild our “world models” by a process of reasoned differentiation and global integration. Differentiation invites compartmentalization; but the rigid compartmentalization of key elements of our experience, reason, artistic and spiritual apprehension will bring the integration process to full stop. The heuristic mindset insists on breaking through our compartmentalizations by seeking the larger integrations that fold in and illumine *all* that is real. Integration at this global level entails expanding and deepening the

experience of meaning and the meaning of experience. The project quickly becomes an integration of all of the significant elements of our internal mental and emotional life, and the integration of all of this “internal stuff” with the living beings and events that fill the world “outside our heads”.

Meaning is always increased and enhanced by integration, while confusion represents a failure of integration. Our natural tendency to take refuge in compartmentalization or mental encapsulation is actually a defensive response to confusion. The project of the integration of our individual states of beingness, all mystery acknowledged, and the integration of our apprehension of the *holy* or *numinous* with the material realm “outside our heads” is both healthy and heuristic, even when - as is inevitable – the integration remains incomplete.

Step Six: To live into the reality model that there really is an integration of the holy and the numinous with the purely physical, material realm.

All belief starts with a decision; in this instance we decide to adopt a world view and to live into it while always holding the possibility of correction in reserve. Our strongest beliefs are anchored in authentic personal experience and in trust of those whom we deem worthy of trust.

The state of mindedness I have called “On Approach” is rooted in a life-derived heuristic faith stance: that the mystery of shared being is always reconcilable with “the world”; that the arch-materialist mindset, the fad of this age, always can be transcended; and that our deepest urgings, that sense of connection with being-as-universal, including our intimations of the numinous, all these things represent our glimpses of that greater reality that transcends the mundane.

I personally understand this stance to be a reasonable act of faith, no more or less reasonable than the faith-perceptions that allow us to see into the hearts of other persons, to recognize them as persons and not objects, and to see, in them, something of ourselves. The very suite of cognitive faculties that allow us to be social and sometimes moral beings, to apprehend and create beauty, and to experience awe - and even reverence - for creation, also allows us to apprehend G’d, by whatever name or no name at all. Destination may elude us, but not purpose. As long as we are *on approach*, nothing more is required of us, because the patience of *heuristic* faith is self-rewarding. I am therefore persuaded that the G’d who approached Moses⁷ and said – “I am with you” is the same being that approaches our Buddhist friends in a state emptiness; because emptiness is openness; and because nothing is truly empty when it is apprehended by a conscious being. The distance between self and G’d (however we choose to name or not name) is no greater than the distance between self and self-knowledge.

APPROACHING THE NUMINOUS

As normally endowed persons, we are equipped with a cognitive suite that anthropologists and biologists studying animal intelligence sometime refer to as the capacity for “other minds” detection, but in our case, as humans, it is much more.

⁷ Or was approached **by** Moses – the approach is always mutual.

Crows soon learn to fear scarecrows, but that is part of their capacity for threat-assessment. A more interesting test is how well crows can detect fake, mechanical birds. Most mammals and birds are quite good at determining the difference between animate and inanimate objects, but infant mammals are often comforted by cuddle toys and birds have been observed to “fall in love” with flapping flags.

Authentic personality recognition is something requiring a whole order of great complexity, sophistication and depth. I have become firmly persuaded over the years, relying as we all do on personal experience as well as studies, that almost all healthy adults come equipped with a finely honed suite of cognitive faculties that are designed to facilitate social cooperation. This suite includes the baseline capacity to detect, in effect to “see into”, the minds and hearts of other thinking, feeling persons.

We humans come equipped with the ability to recognize the difference between a human being and something else. These faculties are all bundled in the sense that each element is cognitively integrated with the rest.

The authentic personality recognition suite includes our esthetic capacity and our empathic capacity (as in the ability to model and inhabit someone else’s inner feelings), our capacity for creative imagination, and so on. Trust relationships enlist these abilities and depend on our willingness to use faith heuristically.

And, yes, trust is a faith-based social experiment.



With all this in mind, consider what is happening when anyone apprehends the **universe** with sudden awe and insight (or as much of the universe presents itself to us, because the awe is recursively available at any scale, tiny or great⁸).

I’m thinking of Karl Sagan’s **Pale Blue Dot** epiphany and of the mountaintop experiences (however we’ve named or not named them), and the exalted out-of-self moments that many have experienced at one time or another in life.

⁸ The recursiveness of nature’s beauty is startlingly revealed in our microscopes, telescopes and mathematics.

If you have ever lived through such an awakening moment, know that is a version of the *numinous* experience. This is your shared encounter with the same moment that has lit up the minds and souls of mystics, scientists, saints, seers and ordinary men, women and children in countless recorded and unrecorded instances from the beginning of the human story on earth.

But when that cognitive suite of yours, designed by nature for authentic personality recognition, lights up in you in this moment of awe; ***when your mind signals to you the presence of conscious, caring personality in and of the Universe...*** know that your perception of the light was real ***and reciprocal.***

You have been noticed.

JBG



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