

# Introduction

**A**braham, the world's most famous monotheist and Jewish patriarch, had absolutely no tradition about God. His immediate forebears were pagans, as was the culture he lived in. Abraham operated without any initial revelation. It was necessary for him to engage in a scientifically objective quest to find God.

Interestingly, the written Bible is entirely mute on how Abraham discovers God. Abraham is mentioned only in the context of his first spiritual assignment, but his entire spiritual saga of discerning God remains shrouded in mystery.

Why is that? Why should Abraham's intellectual drama be so obscured?

Perhaps it is to illustrate to us that the search for truth is too personal a subject to be broadcast publicly. To decipher truth is a formidable challenge. The emotional and intellectual rigor, turmoil, and anguish of such a discovery is a battle waged in the innermost recesses of one's heart and mind. Mustering the courage to let go of long-held doctrines and beliefs, and forgoing practices one has become ingrained with, is a deeply private exercise.

The lesson of Abraham's obscurity is a lesson for us.

History has proven time and again that an uninspired Judaism does nothing to insure the religious and spiritual integrity of a person. Living a life of truth when entrenched in a society of spiritual murkiness is sometimes too great a challenge for even one who hails from the most devout ancestors.

The Jews of twentieth-century Europe proved that when faced with the personal challenge of unprecedented liberties and rights versus religious observance, the religion of rote and habit is tossed out the window for purportedly greener pastures. The fact remains that the majority of Jews in pre-Holocaust Europe assimilated.

Today, assimilation is at an all-time high. The majority of American Jewry has little in-depth knowledge of their heritage.

Rote, habit, and uninspired Judaism may be good anchors when the waters are calm and still, but are not enough to sustain a person through the perilous waters that rage in contemporary society.

How does one who has not engaged in his or her own private spiritual quest react when he or she 1) is presented with allegedly ironclad science which totally repudiates Judaism's claims, 2) is faced with an unexpected, compelling moral or ethical dilemma, or 3) is challenged by others about core Jewish beliefs?

The thirteenth century Spanish scholar, Rabbi Bachya ben Asher, says that while such a study and quest, if conducted impartially and objectively, will result in an actual knowledge of God, knowledge of God's essence and nature is impossible. As King Solomon said (Proverbs 25:2): "The honor of God lays in His concealment." The fact that God's essence and nature remain inscrutable is because He is God. This is crucial to bear in mind.

No matter how far one probes and investigates intellectually, one is still mortal and can't ever fathom the intricacies and designs of an eternal, omnipotent God. Yet in the darkest, most confounding, torturous, and bleak times of persecution and

tragedy, most Jews throughout history remained steadfast and tenacious in their belief of God. Simple Jews with simple, unmitigated faith have preserved the beauty of Judaism for posterity.

This book is modeled after Saadia Gaon's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Ibn Pakudah's *Duties of the Heart*, Maimonides' *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Rabbi Joseph Albo's *Book of Principles*, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato's *The Way of God*, Rabbi Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters*, Rabbi Dessler's *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, and Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan's myriad works. It aims to assert the irrefutable veracity of Judaism in light of twenty-first century science and psychology, and instill the reader with the tools to embark on a personal odyssey of inspiration, spiritual refinement, and religious integrity.