We’re all too familiar with multifaceted personalities, like friends who are serious, sophisticated, amiable and overwhelming, all at the same time. Because the nature of this world is a complex one, most things are a composite of lots of features. Healing processes require medication, respite and a healthy diet. Careers can be a blend of customer relations, creative brainstorming, and actual practice. All the varying aspects, however, usually complement each other. But, when something is multifaceted in a way where the different perspectives fundamentally contradict each other- that’s a marvel. The nature of speed, specifically in conjunction with the speed of light, is multi-faceted in a way where the individual properties completely undermine each other, yet still coexist.

Many scientists throughout the centuries devoted a significant portion of their life trying to understand light and its personality. Newton, one of the earliest scientists to endeavor to define nature by one universal formula, proposed that everything in the universe has relevance to a universal constant, and everything can be measured in relation to a nonmoving frame of reference. Hundreds of years later, in 1905, Professor Albert Einstein’s miracle year, he broadcasted a completely revolutionary theory, one that would shatter and completely undermine all previous assumptions of Science. He proposed that there is not one absolute frame of reference and everything, including time, is relative. As part of this theory, Einstein stated that although speed is relative and is measured only by how much faster or slower one object is traveling than another, the speed of light follows no such rules. Modern physicists all agree on subjecting everything in the universe to the theory of relativity, everything except the speed of light. The speed of light is constant and independent of the observer’s or the source of light’s motion. According to Einstein, one can never catch up to the speed of light. If superman attempted to chase a beam of light, the beam would always be traveling 3.00x10^8m/s faster than him, precisely the constant speed of light in a vacuum.

An interesting phenomenon arises because of the properties of the speed of light. When another object is introduced, and the two objects’ speeds are compared to each other, one can be perceived as traveling at a faster speed than the other. But, according to Einstein both have made zero progress in catching up to the speed of light. When measured in a conventional framework, the concept of greater and lesser speeds exists, but when we take the same objects and measure them in the framework of the constant speed of light, both speeds become equally insignificant. We’re left with a fascinating situation; something can have made progress yet no progress at the same time. This can remain a scientific marvel or this speculation about the nature of light can be used to better understand G-d and how he relates to this world.

Chassidus consistently uses light and its personality as an analogy for Gd. Quantum physics demonstrates that the speed of light is the nexus between matter and energy, two vastly different realms. Comparably, G-dliness is the portal between two worlds, namely spiritual energy and physical matter. Just as the speed of light has a dual (/contradictory) facetted nature, Godliness shares this same phenomenon.

Rabbi Abbahu in Bereishis Rabba (2:4-5) discusses a metaphoric angle of the creation of light and darkness. Using light as a symbol for righteous deeds and darkness a symbol for deeds of the wicked, he says that “From the very beginning of creation, the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw the deeds of the righteous and the deed of the wicked..” he continues to comment that “I still don’t know in which of these he delights, the former or the latter. But from what is written ‘and G-d saw the light, that it was good (Genesis 1:4)’ it follows that He desires the deeds of the righteous.” Rabbi Abbahu’s commentary explains that before G-d specifically singled out the righteous deeds to be most favorable to Him, both righteous and wicked deeds were of equal significance (or insignificance). Only because G-d chose righteousness did it give us the means to bridge the gap between us and an infinitely unreachable Gd. What follows is that the only reason good or bad are on a G-dly radar is because G-d chose to want the good. If G-d wants something and gives us the power to grant it, he creates a walkable distance between us and Him. The giving of the Torah with all its commandments was G-d’s way of telling us how we can create a world where Creator and creation bond. The Hebrew word Mitzvah shares the same root as ‘Tzavta’ which means a link and connection, because these commandments are our only way to connect to G-d who is beyond infinity[[1]](#footnote-1). The speed of light is unapproachable and so was G-d before he gave us means to approach him.

We all bridge the infinite gap between Creator and creation by crossing the one and only bridge engineered by G-d, namely Torah and Mitzvos. There is only one way to make that infinite leap and that is by G-d’s command. No amount of our own footsteps would ‘catch us up’ with Gd. Yet, the other part of our job on earth has to do with every individual’s character, personal growth and emotions. This aspect of our relationship is as vast as the number of people on this earth. This aspect is about gradually sensitizing ourselves to perceiving G-d’s hand in everything and refining our inner “I” which shouts louder than better judgment. And for this, one must slowly step by step develop an awareness and sensitivity to G-d and his own Neshama. Both avenues of creating a home for G-d in this world are part of the same road map. On the one hand we can’t get any closer to G-d on our own accord, yet simultaneously, on the other hand, G-d created a framework for us to gradually evolve from having a juvenile, basic perception and sensitivity of G-d to a more enlightened one.

We attribute labels and measurements of accomplishment and greatness to people because there is definitely room for it on a human level. When in reference to others or to the ‘you of yesterday’, relativity is motivating. The ability to look back and see how far we’ve come is a two-fold gift. It gives meaning and purpose to our journey and it also prompts us to keep graduating[[2]](#footnote-2). On the other hand, concurrently we must always be consciously aware that bridging the gap between finitude and infinity is not done by placing one foot in front of the other and gradually climbing. The only possibility of making that quantum leap is by doing so on infinity’s terms.

1. Berachot 6. Derech Chaim Sha’ar Tefillah 52, 72. Likkutei Torah Bechukosai 45, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Jealousy of Scribes increases Wisdom” (Bava Batra 22, p1) Comparability to scribes and sages is jealousy that is properly placed because it allows us to aspire and strive to be like them. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)