HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

202 - EMUNA & BELIEF - PART 1
OU ISRAEL CENTER - WINTER 2020/21

• As we approach Parashat Yitro and the public reading of the 10 Commandments¹ we should spend a little time looking at the first², and most fundamental mitzva of the 613 - Emuna.

A] ANOCHI: THE FIRST MITZVA

The 10 Commandments open with the statement ‘Anochi Hashem Elokecha’ - I am the Lord your God. What is the nature of this statement? Is it an introduction? A mitzva? A foundational concept?

1. (ב - (א) אנכי: אני: The Ramban understands that this statement is a mitzva - to know (yedia) and to believe (emuna) that there is a God. He also breaks down the aspects of this knowledge and belief into many subcategories: (i) that God exists; (ii) that He is a personal God, involved in each individual’s life³; (iii) that he is Eternal and beyond time; (iv) that we have a correlative obligation to serve Him; (iv) that God knows and is actively involved in the world (hashgacha); (v) that the world is created (chidush) and not eternal (kadmut) since it can be changed by God; (vi) that God is One unlike anything else in the universe; (vii) that we are witnesses to this through the process of Yetziat Mitzrayim, Matan Torah and the mesora of those events which has been passed down to us.

2. (ט - (ג) אנכי: הנכון: The Smag⁴ understands that Anochi is the mitzvah of emuna in Torah Min HaShamayim - to recognize that Torah comes from God.

3. (נ - (ב) אנכי: המאחדנו בדים את התהום שנים לאחר מיתו, אך עוד מעם רבי עקיבא, את אחיו של אברכים בית דניאל. שמתמר

4. (י - (ד) אנכי: והיה.Body

The Smak⁵ understands that Anochi is the mitzvah of emuna in Hashgachat Hashem - to recognize that God runs the world.

• Note that these authorities count Anochi as the first of all the Mitzvot. We will see below that this is also the position of the Rambam.

---


² Emuna was not the first mitzva given to the Jewish people; that was the mitzva of kiddush hachodesh, given to the people while still in Egypt. But Emuna is listed as the first mitzva in the Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot.

³ The first two of the Dibrot are worded in the second person singular - lecha. From the third commandment onwards they shift to the third person.

⁴ Sefer Mitzvot Gadol - completed by R. Moshe of Coucy in 1247.

⁵ Sefer Mitzvot Katan - completed by R. Yitzchak of Corbeille in 1277.
The Ramban (in his commentary on the Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot) brings the view of the Behag - that ‘Anochi’ is worded as a statement and not a command. It is in fact the underpinning of emuna, and not the mitzvah of emuna.

- Rav Chisdai Crescas, in the introduction to his philosophical work Or Hashem, points out that it is circular reasoning to speak of God commanding us to believe in God. No one can believe in God because God commanded him to do so, for if he obeys God’s command, that means that he already believed in God. Conversely, for someone who does not believe in God, telling them that God commands belief is irrelevant. Therefore, concludes Crescas, it is illogical for God to command that you believe in Him.

The First Ikar from the Rambam’s Introduction to Perek Helek

- The First Ikar does not posit God as a TEMPORAL cause (ie first in time), but rather as an ONTOLOGICAL cause (ie fundamental in existence). This means that, for the Rambam, it does not propose specifically that God came before creation (this is in fact the 4th Ikar). God could determine and cause existence without necessarily being prior to it.

This Ikar is in fact the foundation of all the others.

The Rambam begins his Minhne Torah with two Torah mitzvot (a positive and a negative). Note that the Rambam is very clear that this mitzvah is to KNOW that God exists. He does not use the word ‘emuna’.

Shlomo is commanded by his father David to ‘know’ God.

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbimanning.com
The Malbim explains that, when it comes to matters of understanding God, it is not sufficient to rely solely on tradition. One must also try to understand these issues in a logical and rational way.

In Sefer Hamitzvot, the Rambam uses the expression לעתامت. Is that the same as עיוד in the Mishna Torah?

- What does it mean to say that the first two mitzvot were given directly by God to the people?

The Rambam understands that these first two commandants (which encapsulate the first 3 Ikarim) are knowable and provable philosophically. The other commandments (and most of the Ikarim) are known to us through revelation.

Most commentators understand that the the Rambam requires us to gain knowledge and understanding of God to the point that we can prove His existence philosophically. The Rambam agrees that ‘belief’ in the existence of God must precede mitzvot. However, he understands that there is a specific mitzvah to build that belief by chakira – rational proof to the point of knowledge.

The Sefer Hachinuch explains that the basic mitzvah of emuna is to strengthen belief that one already has. However, the most enhanced way to fulfil the mitzva is by finding logical, intellectual and rational proofs for the existence and qualities of God. The Chinuch calls this a ‘mitzvah min hamuvchar’ - the mitzvah in its ideal form.

8. Actually, it’s not so simple. The Sefer Hamitzvot was written in Arabic and a number of translations are extant. The translation into Hebrew brought in this source is direct from original manuscripts by Rav Yosef Kapach (1917-2000) and is generally accepted as reliable. The original Arabic word used here is ‘אעננה which could also be translated as ‘belief’ and not ‘knowledge’. Indeed, Rav Saadia Gaon’s famous book Sefer ha-Mitzvot is actually called in the original Arabic אעננה דאתרא. If so, little can actually be made of the difference between emuna and da’at here. The classic commentators are divided as to whether the Rambam really meant two different things in the Mishne Torah and the Sefer Hamitzvot. R. Chisdai Crescas does take this position whilst the Abarbanel understands both sources to be saying the same thing - see Rosh Amana Chap 7. (In modern Arabic الايمان means belief).
Rabbeinu Bachya, in Chovat Halevavot (Spain, 11C) is highly critical of the laziness of those who are capable of rationalizing God’s existence but who fail to do so.

**E] WHAT IS ‘UNDERSTANDING OF GOD’**

Man is created in the ‘tzelem’ and ‘demut’ of God.

18. Some have been of opinion that by the Hebrew *tzelem*, the shape and figure of a thing is to be understood, and this explanation led men to believe in the corporeality [of God]. For they thought that the words "Let us make man in our *tzelem*" (Gen. 1:26) implied that God had the form of a human being ...

I hold that the Hebrew equivalent of "form" in the ordinary acception of the word, ie. the figure and shape of a thing, is *to‘ar*. ..... This term is not at all applicable to God.

The term *tzelem*, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, ie. that which constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is - the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being. .... In the phrase "Let us make man in our *tzelem*", the term signifies the specific form of man, ie. his intellectual perception, and does not refer to his figure or shape. .... As man’s distinction consists in a property which no other creature on earth possesses, ie. intellectual perception .... on account of the Divine intellect with which Man has been endowed, he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form!

Moreh Nevuchim I:1

The first section of the Moreh, the Rambam explains that the creation of Man ‘in the image of God’ means the ability of Man to reach conscious intellectual perception in the way (apparently) that only God does.

19. .... God .... is an *active intellect* and that there is absolutely no potentiality in Him .... so that He is not sometimes perceiving and sometimes not perceiving, but is always an intellect in *actu*, it follows necessarily that He and the thing perceived are one thing, which is His essence.

.... It is accordingly also clear that [this] .... is not true of the Creator only, but also of every intellect. Thus, in us too, the intellectually cognizing subject, the intellect, and the intellectually cognized object, are one and are the same thing wherever we have an intellect in *actu*. We, however, pass intellectually from potentiality to actuality only from time to time.

Moreh Nevuchim I:68

When we exercise our ‘active intellect’, in so doing we become a tzelem Elokim. Unfortunately, we rarely get to think ‘actively’ in the way that God does. Nevertheless, such thinking constitutes a ‘Godly’ act.

• The 13 Ikarim, especially the first four which are philosophical, and most especially the mitzva of ‘Anochi’ constitute ‘active faith’. The process of thinking and analysis (perhaps irrespective of the immediate result or conclusion) represents an expression of Tzelem Elokim AND the mitzvot of ‘Anochi’/‘Lo Yihye Lecha’/‘Ahavat Hashem’.9

**F] ‘ANOCHI’ AS THE FIRST OF THE 6 CONSTANT MITZVOT**

The Sefer Hachinuch makes multiple mention of the 6 Mitzvot that apply to every Jew at every waking moment of every day. The first is the mitzva of ‘Anochi’. Here, this is ruled at the very start of the Biur Halacha on Shulchan Aruch.

---

9. It will also be a fulfillment of the mitzva of Veh alachta Biderachav - to copy Hashem and imitate His middot. Just as God thinks actively, so do we.

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbimanning.com
G) CAN WE INTELLECTUALLY ‘PROVE’ THE EXISTENCE AND REALITY OF GOD?

- What level of ‘proof’ would we require to ‘know’ the existence of an Infinite Being? Can it be expressed as a percentage? 100%? 80%? 51%?
- Where should we look for this ‘proof’? There are a number of traditional arguments for the existence of God, including:

  - **(i) The Teleological Argument** - “argument from design” - what is the probability that the universe with all its fine-tuning evolved randomly - the Goldilocks Principle

    This argument is found in Chazal in the famous Midrash of Avraham discovering the lit tower.

    Chovot Halevavot brings the classic argument from design in nature - the metaphor of spilling random ink on a page and producing a work of writing. All the more so the incredible depth of design in nature bespeaks a Designer.

  - **(ii) The Cosmological Argument** - what could be the logical First Cause for the existence of this finite world.

    Rabbi Akiva presents this argument to a heretic.

  - **(iii) The Ontological Argument** - a pure logic argument developed over the last 1000 years.

    But how far do philosophical proofs take us? These three proofs have been severely critiqued and refuted over the last 250 years, particularly by Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason (1787) and later with the onset of Darwinian and Neo-Darwinian evolution. Does that detract from the purpose of this philosophical approaches to God’s existence?

  - **(iv) The Argument from Morality** - whether an absolute morality is possible without God.

H) SO WHAT IS ‘EMUNA’?

Avraham had ‘emuna’ in God. This was not a cognitive act of awareness or even a declaration of faith in God existence. It was a expression of confidence in and commitment to God.

---

11. This was made most famous by Anselm of Canterbury in his 1078 work Proslogium - Discourse on the Existence of God. It has the following basic steps:
   - **Step 1**: By definition, you cannot imagine a being greater than God;
   - **Step 2**: A being that necessarily exists is, in reality, greater than a being that does not necessarily exist.
   - **Step 3**: Thus, by definition, if God existed as an idea in the mind but did NOT necessarily exist in reality, then we would be able to imagine something that is greater than God.
   - **Step 4**: But we cannot imagine something that is greater than God!
   - **Step 5**: Thus, if God exists in the mind as an idea, then God must necessarily exist in reality.
   - **Step 6**: God DOES exist in the mind as an idea.
   - **Step 7**: Therefore, God DOES necessarily exist in reality.
12. We will see in Part 2 that, even for the rationalist, there are severe limitations to how far this rational understanding can take us.

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbimanning.com
Moshe’s hands were ‘emuna’ - ie **faithful** to the task that they were given.

God complains to Moshe that the Jewish people have no emuna. This is not belief in God’s existence but **faithfulness** to ‘carry through’ God’s mission.

G-d is described as ‘emuna’ - ie **faithful** to His promises to the Jewish people.

Yirmiyahu uses the term emuna for ‘truth’ - the opposite of sheker.

- Emuna normally means ‘faithful commitment’, not necessarily cognitive or intellectual, but also not anti-intellectual or irrational.
- Our relationship with God must be based (i) on rational understanding - yedia; and (ii) deep commitment and **faithfulness** to live by the knowledge that we have - emuna.
- Yedia is ‘belief that’, implying the knowledge of facts. This does not however prevent ‘cognitive dissonance’ - I believe that the chocolate fudge cake is bad for me yet I eat it anyway! Emuna is ‘belief in’ implying a relationship, as in - ‘I believe in my wife’. In this case, there is no room for cognitive dissonance. I cannot make the statement - ‘I believe in my wife’ whilst at the same time hiring private detectives to check on her movements. That would mean very clearly that I did NOT believe in my wife!!

**I] R’ YEHUDA HALEVI AND A ‘JEWISH’ APPROACH TO EMUNA**

- In R’ Yehuda HaLevi’s book The Kuzari, he sets out two further proofs for God based on Jewish history.
  (v) The **Historical Argument** - the nature of world/Jewish history.
  (vi) The **Revelation Argument** - that God revealed himself to us at Sinai and our unbroken tradition teaching us of this reality.

The Rabbi: ... In the same way Moses spoke to Pharaoh, when he told him: ‘The God of the Hebrews sent me to you,’ meaning, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For Abraham was well known to the nations, who also knew that the divine spirit was connected to the patriarchs, cared for them, and performed miracles for them. He did not say: ‘The God of heaven and earth,’ nor ‘my Creator and yours sent me.’ In the same way God commenced His speech to the assembled people of Israel: ‘I am the God whom you worship, who has led you out of the land of Egypt.’ But He did not say: ‘I am the Creator of the world and your Creator.’ Now in the same style I spoke to you, Prince of the Khazars, when thou asked me about my creed. I answered you as was fitting, and is fitting for the whole of Israel who knew these things, first from personal experience, and afterwards through uninterrupted tradition, which is equal to the former.

The Kuzari brings the classic argument for our commitment to God from the mass Revelation at Sinai and the accurate transmission of that message through the generations.
R. Yehuda HaLevi argues for a proof of God’s existence not from philosophy but from our national (and personal) story, most particularly, the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

Kuzari 1:11-13

R. Yehuda HaLevi argues that philosophical proofs take one only so far, but ultimately leave one with doubts. At this point of doubt, we draw on the source of Emuna rooted in Klal Yisrael - being part of the Jewish people with its special experience of God's reality and the clear Mesora of that experience.

Kuzari 4:2-3

R. Yehuda HaLevi argues for a proof of God’s existence not from philosophy but from our national (and personal) experience of God’s reality and the clear Mesora of that experience.

J] PRACTICAL EMUNA IN THE 21st CENTURY

- In a seminal 1967 essay, Rabbi Dr Norman Lamm discusses attitudes to Emuna and different types of faith and doubt in the contemporary world.

- Rabbi Lamm outlines three types of faith:
  - cognitive faith - a 'belief-that' approach to emuna questions which deals with specific intellectual and rational questions about God, Torah and Judaism. Emuna in this sense is understanding of truth over falsehood. It does not necessarily bring closeness to God or 'religious' satisfaction.
  - affective faith - a 'belief-in' approach to emuna which involves as sense of trust, reliance, dependance and hope. It demands an attempt to form a relationship with God and a quest for personal peace and meaning in life. It is related to the idea of bitachon.
  - functional faith - a 'belief-in' approach to emuna which expresses itself in action and behavior. It bespeaks a commitment to live by halacha and a dedication to Torah and mitzvot. It is related to ne’emanut - being trustworthy in one's relationships with God.

---

15. I call this 'hitting the wall'. However advanced one's philosophical intellect, there will ALWAYS come a point when one runs out of mental energy and 'hit's the wall'. This could be a result of limitations in intelligence, drive, background or energy. At that stage people arbitrarily cease their quest for truth, even though there is no logical reason to yet reach a conclusion. No matter how convinced one is by proofs that God does exist or does not exist, it is intellectually dishonest to reach a firm conclusion. If one had only been more intelligent, tried harder etc etc, one may have answered a key question or come up with a devastating new one!

16. The Kuzari begins with a king who has a recurring dream that, though his intentions are worthy, his idolatrous actions are not. This highly personal, psychological and even emotional route to God is very different to that of the Rambam.


18. These different types of faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive, nor do they always have clear boundaries. A person may have different types of faith and doubt which also represent blurred overlaps between the categories.

19. In the terminology of Buber, Rabbi Lamm expresses cognitive faith as an 'I-it' relation, affective faith as 'I-Thou', and functional faith as 'I-He'. See footnote 8 in his essay.

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbimanning.com
Rabbi Lamm also outlines three types of doubt:

- **spurious doubt** - where the doubt is not driven by a quest for truth, but an attempt to avoid dealing with the issues (and possibly also a cynical justification for the rejection of mitzva observance).
- **methodological doubt** - where the doubt is isolated and detached from the essence of the individual. It is essentially an intellectual question and a lack of understanding of some key issue in Jewish thought or philosophy. It can be compartmentalized in life and switched on and off within a committed life of faith and mitzva observance.
- **substantive doubt** - where the doubt is an ongoing condition of life and cuts to the core of faith itself. It grasps and engages with us, not we with it, and is inextricably wrapped up with the existential search for meaning.

A Jew must always have functional faith. Allowing doubts to translate into non-observance is effectively a decision of denial.

Affective faith must be addressed by a move from belief-that to belief-in, which involves development of connection and relationship with God. Rabbi Lamm proposes that even the mediaeval rationalists who focused so much more on cognitive doubt and methodological faith, also intended this to lead to a relationship-based and emotive affective faith.20

Rabbi Lamm suggests three approaches to grow in affective faith: (i) Tefilla and developing the ‘innate prayerfulness’ inside the person; (ii) Torah learning so that the light of Torah will draw us back to God; (iii) Chessed to others and connection to Klal Yisrael. Essentially - Torah, Avoda and Gemilut Chasadim.

There is no greater Simcha in life than the ability to resolve doubts!

In Part 2 we will iy’H take the concept of Emuna and understanding of God to the next stage - Hashem Echad - and the inherent limitations of our understanding.

20. This seems clear from the Rambam’s emotive description of Ahavat Hashem in the 10th chapter of Hilchos Teshuva. From cognitive knowledge of God one is meant to come to affective love of God.

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbimanning.com