

# THE 13 IKARIM

## יג עקרי אמונה של הרמב"ם

### 4 - THE FOURTH IKAR - CREATION EX NIHILO

מכון לנדר - חורף תשע"ב

#### **A] The Accurate Wording of the 4th Ikar**

1. **הקדמות:** והוא, שזה האחד המתואר הוא הקדמון בהחלט, וכל נמצא זולתו הוא בלתי קדמון ביחס אליו, והראיות לזה בכתובים הרבה. וזה היסוד הרביעי הוא שמורה עליו מאמר מענה אלהי קדם. ודע כי היסוד הגדול של תורת משה רבינו הוא היות העולם מחודש, המציאו ה' ובראו אחר ההעדר הגמור. וזה שתראני סובב סביב ענין קדמותו על דעת הפילוסופים הוא כדי שיהא המופת על מציאותו יתעלה - מוחלט, כמו שביארתי ובררתי במורה

רמב"ם - הקדמה לפ' חלק, משנה סנדרין

[The fourth principle] is that He is beyond time. This means that the One G-d we have described [in Ikarim 2 & 3] is absolutely Eternal [First] and that everything that exists apart from Him cannot be eternal in comparison to Him. Proof for this can be brought from many verses. This Fourth Principle is what is expressed by the verse "A support/shelter is the Eternal G-d" (Devarim 33:27). Know that it is a critical fundamental principle of the Torah of Moshe our Teacher that the world was created and formed new. God brought it into existence from a state of absolute nothingness. The reason that you will see that I have discussed at length the issue of 'the Eternity of the World' [*kadmut haolam*], which is the view of the philosophers, is to demonstrate conclusively that G-d exists, as I have explained and clarified in the Moreh Nevuchim

*The critical points of this ikar are:-*

- That G-d has always and will always exist. In this sense he is not 'Eternal' ie existing for all time, past and future, but is BEYOND time, which He created
- That the material universe did NOT always exist but was brought into being by G-d ex nihilo

*Note that this version of the 4th Ikar is the wording brought in the R' Shilat translation of the Ikarim, which was found in manuscripts of the Rambam by Rav Yosef Kapach. It is **not** the wording of the 'standard' edition to be found in the back of the regular Gemara Sanhedrin. This version differs in two important respects: (i) it makes explicit reference to creation ex nihilo; and (ii) it cross refers to the Moreh Nevuchim (written much later in the Rambam's life) and the assumption there that in fact the world IS eternal and was not created ex nihilo. Resolving this contradiction is an important part of understanding this Ikar.*

*Even according to the other version which does not mentioned creation ex nihilo, many scholars have sought to read this into the text there. Alternatively some scholars have sought to interpret קדמון as an ontological precedence - G-d drives the world constantly as a First Cause - rather than as a chronological precedence. This is also not so clear-cut as this concept appears to have been fully covered by the First Ikar. Nevertheless, the version of the Ikarim that we have quoted is thought to be the most accurate and thus we see creation ex nihilo as one of the Ikarim*

#### **B] 3 Mediaeval World Views on Creation**

##### **(i) The traditional Jewish approach - creation ex nihilo**

That G-d created the world from total nothingness

##### **(ii) Aristotle - eternity of the world without creation**

That the physical matter in the universe today had **always** existed in essence but simply changes form as time moves on. Thus the physical universe is eternal and was not 'created' at all

##### **(iii) Plato - creation using eternal matter**

That G-d will not do the impossible and create something from nothing. Rather, He created the world from material which had always existed, albeit in a transient form

In the *Moreh Nevuchim* the Rambam apparently rejects the view of Aristotle and expounds the traditional view of creation *ex nihilo* as the correct position (see 2:13). However, he also clearly states (2:25-26) that the Platonic position has support in some Torah and Rabbinic sources and is not antithetical to Jewish thinking. Other Rabbinic thinkers of the time (such as the Ibn Ezra and the Ralbag) also expressed support for the Platonic position but creation *ex nihilo* is today accepted as the mainstream Jewish approach

### C] The 'Great Principle'

#### (i) Revelation -vs- Logic

Since this is the first and most fundamental 'proof' which is based on the 'Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu'. The Rambam understands that the first 3 Ikarim can be proved through pure logic and reason (which he does in the Guide). From this Ikar onwards the Ikarim have their roots in **Revelation** and not logic.

#### (ii) Free Will

2. ודבר זה עיקר גדול הוא והוא עמוד התורה והמצוה שנאמר ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים, וכתוב ראה אנכי נותן לפניכם היום, כלומר שהרשות בידכם וכל שיחפוץ האדם לעשות ממעשה בני האדם עושה בין טובים בין רעים, ומפני זה הענין נאמר מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם, כלומר שאין הבורא כופה בני האדם ולא גוזר עליהן לעשות טובה או רעה אלא הכל מסור להם

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה הלכה ג

In the *Mishne Torah* the 'Great Ikar' is man's Free Will. If the Universe were eternal (on Aristotle's model) and exists independently of G-d, then G-d does not have total Free Will. If G-d does not have free will then man cannot have full free will.

This is also a fundamental assumption of the 11th Ikar - reward and punishment. Man must have free will to deserve reward and punishment. Further, the Rambam's thesis in *Ta'amei Hamitzvot* assumes that Man has free will which G-d would not manipulate. Thus G-d gave certain mitzvot to wean the people off idolatry, rather than simply change their nature by supernatural intervention.

#### (iii) Aristotle's view would undermine the entire Torah

3. If we were to accept the Eternity of the Universe as taught by Aristotle, that everything in the Universe is the result of fixed laws, that Nature does not change, and that there is nothing supernatural, **we should necessarily be in opposition to the foundation of our religion, we should disbelieve all miracles and signs**, and certainly reject all hopes and fears derived from Scripture, unless the miracles are also explained figuratively. The Allegorists amongst the Mohammedans have done this, and have thereby arrived at absurd conclusions.

..... [see below re the Platonic position]

Accepting the Creation, we find that miracles are possible, that Revelation is possible, and that every difficulty in this question is removed

Guide to the Perplexed 2:25

Aristotle's view on the Eternity of Nature puts the natural world at least to some degree outside the G-d's control. This undermines the concept of a truly supernatural miracle. Plato's model would be less objectionable and we will see if the Rambam accepts the possibility of subscribing to Plato over Creation Ex Nihilo

### D] Hashkafic and Halachic Applications

4. יכוין בברכות פירוש המלות. כשיזכיר השם, יכוין פירוש קריאתו באדנות שהוא אדון הכל, ויכוין בכתבתו ביו"ד ה"א שהיה והיה ויהיה ....

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות הנהגת אדם בבקר סימן ה

According to halacha, every time that one says Hashem's name in a beracha, one should have kavana for the fact that Hashem Was, Is and Will be. According to the Vilna Gaon, this is only (but especially) applicable when saying Hashem's name in the first paragraph of the Shema

5. אשר ברא אלהים לעשות. לפי שהשבת מורה על בריאת יש מאין ודוקא מאותה בריאה שבת, אבל מבריאת יש מיש לא שבת כי כמה נטיעות קולטות וצומחות בשבת ...

כלי יקר בראשית פרק ב

*The mitzvah of Shabbat is a weekly reaffirmation of the concept of creation ex nihilo. This should be part of our kavana when we say in kiddush that Shabbat is 'Zecher Lema'aseh Bereishit'*

6.

וז"ל השל"ה הקי' במסכת שבת, (תורה אור) "שהשבת מורה על החידוש, כי החידוש היה בעצם ששת ימי המעשה, שהיה הקב"ה מהרה ומחדש ואח"כ פוסק, ואילו לא פסק והיה מתחדש ומהרה תמיד, לא היתה הבריאה פוסקת, ואז היו טוברים שהעולם קדמון לא סר ולא יסור. אמנם מאחר שפסק לברוא החדשות, רק הכל כפי מה שעשה בששת ימים וחזר חלילה. כי השבת היא נקודה, וששת ימים הם הקצוות היוצאים מן הנקודה וחוזרים אליה. וחוזרים ויוצאים ונכנסים, עד זמן שיהיה רצון האל ית"ש" עכ"ל.

של"ה - תורה אור

*The Shl'a explains that G-d's 'resting' on the 7th day reinforces that creation is not eternal (kadmuth haolam)*

7. אָדוֹן עוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר מְלֶךְ בְּטָרֵם כֹּל יִצִיר נִבְרָא, לְעֵת נַעֲשֶׂה בְּחִפְצוֹ כֹּל אֲזִי מְלֶךְ שָׁמוּ נִקְרָא וְאַחֲרֵי כִּכְלוֹת הַכֹּל לִבְדוֹ יִמְלוֹךְ נוֹרָא, וְהוּא הָיָה וְהוּא הוֹנֵה וְהוּא יְהִיָּה בְּתַפְאָרָה וְהוּא אֶחָד וְאֵין שְׁנֵי לְהַמְשִׁיל לוֹ לְהַחְבִּירָה, בְּלִי רְאִישִׁית בְּלִי תַכְלִית וְלוֹ הַעֲזָ וְהַמְשָׁרָה

אדון עולם

*The first part of Adon Olam is a hymn with the theme of this ikar*

## E] The Rambam's Esotericism

8. One of seven causes should account for the contradictory or contrary statements to be found in any book or compilation .....:- The seventh cause: In speaking about very obscure matters it is necessary to conceal some parts and to disclose others. Sometimes in the case of certain dicta this necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of a certain premise, whereas in another place necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of another premise contradicting the first one. in such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means. Whether contradictions due to the seventh cause are to be found in the books of the Prophets is a matter of speculative study and investigation .... in the *Midrashim* and the *Haggadah* there are to be found .... contradictions due to the seventh cause .... Divergences that are to be found in this Treatise are due to the .... seventh [cause]

Moreh Nevuchim - preface

## F] Did the Rambam (also) subscribe to the Eternity of the Universe

### F1] Use of Eternity in his philosophical proof of G-d

9. TWENTY-FIVE of the propositions which are employed in the proof for the existence of God, or in the arguments demonstrating that God is neither corporeal nor a force connected with a material being, or that He is One, have been fully established, and their correctness is beyond doubt. Aristotle and the Peripatetics who followed him have proved each of these propositions. There is, however, one proposition which we do not accept - namely, the proposition which affirms the Eternity of the Universe, but we will admit it for the present, because by doing so we shall be enabled clearly to demonstrate our own theory.

Guide to the Perplexed - Introduction to Part 2

10. We have thus shown that whether we believe in the Creation ex Nihilo, or in the Eternity of the Universe, we can prove by demonstrative arguments the existence of God,

Guide to the Perplexed 2:2

F2] Acceptance that the Torah verses do not negate Eternity

11. We do not reject the Eternity of the Universe, because certain passages in Scripture confirm the Creation; for such passages are not more numerous than those in which God is represented as a corporeal being; nor is it impossible or difficult to find for them a suitable interpretation. We might have explained them in the same manner as we did in respect to the Incorporeality of God. We should perhaps have had an easier task in showing that the Scriptural passages referred to are in harmony with the theory of the Eternity of the Universe if we accepted the latter, than we had in explaining the anthropomorphisms in the Bible when we rejected the idea that God is corporeal. For two reasons, however, we have not done so, and have not accepted the Eternity of the Universe. First, the Incorporeality of God has been demonstrated by proof: those passages in the Bible, which in their literal sense contain statements that can be refuted by proof, must and can be interpreted otherwise. But the Eternity of the Universe has not been proved; a mere argument in favour of a certain theory is not sufficient reason for rejecting the literal meaning of a Biblical text, and explaining it figuratively, when the opposite theory can be supported by an equally good argument.

Guide to the Perplexed 2:25

F3] Acceptance that Platonic Eternity is not against Jewish thought

12. If we were to accept the Eternity of the Universe as taught by Aristotle, that everything in the Universe is the result of fixed laws, that Nature does not change, and that there is nothing supernatural, we should necessarily be in opposition to the foundation of our religion, we should disbelieve all miracles and signs, and certainly reject all hopes and fears derived from Scripture, unless the miracles are also explained figuratively.....  
If, however, we accepted the Eternity of the Universe in accordance with the second of the theories which we have expounded above (2:23) and assumed, with Plato, that the heavens are likewise transient, we should not be in opposition to the fundamental principles of our religion; **this theory would not imply the rejection of miracles, but, on the contrary, would admit them as possible. The Scriptural text might have been explained accordingly, and many expressions might have been found in the Bible and in other writings that would confirm and support this theory.** But there is no necessity for this expedient, so long as the theory has not been proved. As there is no proof sufficient to convince us, this theory need not be taken into consideration, nor the other one; we take the text of the Bible literally, and say that it teaches us a truth which we cannot prove; and the miracles are evidence for the correctness of our view.  
Accepting the Creation, we find that miracles are possible, that Revelation is possible, and that every difficulty in this question is removed

Guide to the Perplexed 2:25

F4] Correspondence between the Rambam's views on Eternity and on Prophecy

13. THERE are as many different opinions concerning Prophecy as concerning the Eternity or Non-Eternity of the Universe. For we have shown that those who assume the existence of God as proved may be divided into three classes, according to the view they take of the question, whether the Universe is Eternal or not. Similarly there are three different opinions on Prophecy.....
1. Among those who believe in Prophecy..... there are some ignorant people who think as follows: God selects any person He pleases, inspires him with the spirit of Prophecy, and entrusts him with a mission. It makes no difference whether that person be wise or stupid, old or young; provided he be, to some extent, morally good.....
  2. The philosophers hold that prophecy is a certain faculty of man in a state of perfection, which can only be obtained by study. Although the faculty is common to the whole race, yet it is not fully developed in each individual, either on account of the individual's defective constitution, or on account of some other external cause..... It is only brought to a state of perfection in some individuals, and not in all; ..... Accordingly, it is impossible that an ignorant person should be a prophet; or that a person being no prophet in the evening, should, unexpectedly on the following morning, find himself a prophet, as if prophecy were a thing that could be found unintentionally. ....
  3. The third view is that which is taught in Scripture, and which forms one of the principles of our religion. It coincides with the opinion of the philosophers in all points except one. For we believe that, even if one has the capacity for prophecy, and has duly prepared himself, it may yet happen that he does not actually prophesy. It is in that case the will of God [that withholds from him the use of the faculty]. .... For the laws of Nature demand that every one should be a prophet, who has a proper physical constitution, and has been duly prepared as regards education and training.....

Guide to the Perplexed 2:32

If the 3 understandings of Creation/Eternity mirror the 3 understandings of Prophecy, as the Rambam claims, we arrive at the following correlation under which Platonic Eternity seems to come out as the preferred system<sup>1</sup>

<p><b>Aristotelian Eternity</b> -----</p> <p>Fully Natural</p>	<p><b>The Philosopher's View of Prophecy</b></p> <p>Fully Natural</p>
<p><b>Creation Ex Nihilo</b> -----</p> <p>Fully Supernatural</p>	<p><b>The Ignorant View of Prophecy</b></p> <p>Fully Supernatural</p>
<p><b>Platonic Eternity</b> -----</p> <p>Natural with G-d's Intervention</p>	<p><b>The Torah View of Prophecy</b></p> <p>Natural with G-d's Intervention</p>

**F5] Approach in the Mishne Torah**

Surprisingly, the Rambam makes no mention of Creation in Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah. In Hilchot Teshuva, in the list of people who deny key principles of Torah and lose their place in the World to Come, he does however mention Creation indirectly.

14. חמשה הן הנקראים מינים: האומר שאין שם אלוה ואין לעולם מנהיג, והאומר שיש שם מנהיג אבל הן שנים או יותר, והאומר שיש שם רבון אחד אבל שהוא גוף ובעל תמונה, וכן האומר שאינו לבדו הראשון וצור לכל, וכן העובד כוכב או מזל וזולתו כדי להיות מליץ בינו ובין רבון העולמים כל אחד מחמשה אלו הוא מין..... השגת הראש"ד: **וכן האומר שאינו לבדו הראשון. א"א כאותו שאמר אלכים יייר גדול היה אלא שמלא לו סמנים גדולים תכו וצכו חושך ומים ורוח וצכס עשה מה שעשה**

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג הלכה ז

The 5 categories of Min seem directly to parallel the first 5 Ikarim. Certainly as understood by the Ra'avad, the 4th category of Min is someone who understands that G-d fashioned the world from the pre-existing 'Simanim Gedolim' ie advanced materials. This would seem to exclude Aristotelian Eternity but does it exclude Platonic Eternity?

**F6] Is Creation based on a pre-existing rationale?**

15. [MAN'S] actions are divided as regards their object into four classes; they are either purposeless, unimportant, in vain, or good. .... After having explained this division, I contend that no intelligent person can assume that any of the actions of God can be in vain, purposeless, or unimportant. According to our view and the view of all that follow the Law of Moses, all actions of God are "exceedingly good." Thus Scripture says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good".....Those who adopt this absurd idea that God's actions are utterly purposeless, and refuse to consider them as the result of His wisdom, are afraid they might otherwise be compelled to admit the theory of the Eternity of the Universe.....

**Guide to the Perplexed 3:25**

G-d created the world for a purpose and with a rationale. This to some degree leans towards a view of Eternity - that something pre-existed the Creation i.e. a rationale and ethic according to which the world was made. The Rambam even acknowledges that some people are afraid to take this position in case they feel that it leads them to have to accept Eternity

**F7] Classical Interpretations of the Rambam's approach**

The following classical interpreters of the Rambam all considered that the Rambam's esoteric belief was inclined towards Eternity, rather than Creation:-

- R. Shmuel ibn Tibbon (1162-1232)
- R. Yosef ibn Kaspi (1280-1340) - commentary on Guide 1:9, 2:13
- R. Nissim b. Moshe - Ma'aseh Nissim 223
- R. Profiat Duran - commentary on Guide 1:9
- R. Moshe of Narbonne - Pirkei Moshe 302-3<sup>2</sup>

1. See Davidson, Herbert: Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation. In: I. Twersky, ed. Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 16-40.  
 2. See further Shapiro, Marc: The Limits of Orthodox Theology p77

**G] A Synthesis - Creation and Eternity - Both true in an irreducible dichotomy**

*Mori VeRabbi R' Meir Tribbitz shilt'a posits a synthesis as follows<sup>3</sup>. Creation Ex Nihilo is not a theory of the physical creation of the Universe. It is a theological position which ascribes free will to G-d and thus to Man. It is the cornerstone of Torat Moshe Rabbeinu. However, the actual physical origin of the world may indeed be Platonic. Furthermore, the pre-existing rationale to creation and the philosophical proof of G-d's existence require Eternity as an axiom*

16. יח ומלכי צדק מלך שלם הוציא לחם ננין והוא כהן לאל עליון: יט ויברכהו ויאמר ברוך אברהם לאל עליון קנה שמים וארץ: כ וברוך אל עליון אשר מגן צדיק בידו ויתן לו מעשר מכל: כא ויאמר מלך סדם אל אברהם תן לי הנפש והרכש קח לך: כב ויאמר אברהם אל מלך סדם הרמתי ידי אל ה' אל עליון קנה שמים וארץ:

בראשית יד-כב

*The Chumash outlines a fascinating meeting between Avraham, Malchizedek King of Shalem (identified by Chazal with Shem - the spiritual leader of the 'non-Jewish' world) and the King of Sedom. Malchizedek invokes G-d using the expression אל עליון קנה שמים וארץ*

*Avraham picks up this theme but adds the name of יהוה-יהוה and responds:- יהוה-יהוה אל עליון קנה שמים וארץ*

17. This [Creation] is the first theory, and it is undoubtedly a fundamental principle of the Law of our teacher Moses; it is next in importance to the principle of God's unity. Do not follow any other theory. Abraham, our father, was the first that taught it, after he had established it by philosophical research. He proclaimed, therefore, "the name of the Lord the God of the Universe" (ה' אל עלולם) (Gen. 21:33); and he had previously expressed this theory in the words, "The Possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:22)

**Guide to the Perplexed 2:13**

*Rambam sees in the words of Avraham a statement of Creation*

18. We must also consider the four different terms employed in expressing the relations of the heavens to God, *Boreh* (Creator), *Oseh* (Maker), *Koneh* (Possessor), and *E-I* (G-d)..... [I]n reference to the Universe ..... which comprises the totality of the Creation, Scripture employs the verb *bara*, which we explain as denoting he produced something from nothing; ..... *kanah*, "he possessed," because G-d rules over them like a master over his servants. For this reason He is also called, "The Lord of the whole earth" (Jos. 3:11-13); *Ha-adon*, "the Lord" (Exod. 23:17). And since one cannot be a master unless there exists something that is in one possession (*kinyan*), **and this would seem to indicate a belief in the Eternal existence of primal matter**, it therefore uses the expressions *bara* and *asah*

**Guide to the Perplexed 2:30**

*Nevertheless, the words 'Koneh' clearly imply, says the Rambam, a belief in Eternity. What we have here is an exchange between the Philosopher Shem and the Jewish statement of Creation Ex Nihilo by Avraham*

*NB The 'Big Bang' is an expression of Kadmut not Creation, in that it assumes a pre-existing scientific construct. Creation Ex Nihilo states that there is **no scientific account** of creation. Creation ex nihilo has to be beyond scientific or ethical rationale.*

*Thus Creation and Eternity exist side-by-side in an irreducible dichotomy*

3. go to <http://hashkafacircle.com/shiurim/ikarim/13-ikkarim-06-creation-ex-nihilo/>