

THE 13 IKARIM

י'ג עקרי אמונה של הרמב"ם

(7) THE FOURTH IKAR - CREATION EX NIHILO

סמך מדרשת רחל וחייה

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 (דברים לג:ז) *מֵעַנְהוּ אֱלֹהֵי קֹדֶם*. ודע כי היסוד היותר גדול 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 ב'מורה'

רמב"ם - הקדמה לפ' חלק, משנה סנבדרין¹

[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 the most fundamental principle of the Torah of Moshe our Teacher is 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 wording of the 4th Ikar follows original manuscripts of the Rambam found and studied by the renowned rabbi and Maimonidean scholar, Rav Yosef Kapach². It is **not** the wording of the 'standard' edition³ to be found in the back of the regular Vilna Shas edition of 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 clearly as one of the Ikarim

1. תרגום רב יצחק שילת - הקדמות הרמב"ם למשנה תשנ"ו

2. b. 1917 (Yemen) d. 2000 (Israel) - see <http://www.ou.org/publications/ja/5761winter/KAFACHPR.PDF> for an obituary

3. **הקדמות:** והוא שנאמין כי זה האחד האמור הוא קדמון בהחלט, וכל נמצא זולתו בלתי קדמון בערכו אליו. והראיות על זה בכתבי הקודש הרבה. והיסוד הרביעי הזה מורה עליו מה שנאמר *מֵעַנְהוּ אֱלֹהֵי קֹדֶם*

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 clearly 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

2. Twenty-five of the propositions which are used in the proof for the existence of God, or in the arguments demonstrating that God is neither a corporeal nor 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

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

Guide to the Perplexed 2:2

4. We do not reject the [theory of] the Eternity of the Universe just because certain passages in Scripture confirm [the theory of] 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: [thus] those passages in the Bible, which in their literal sense contain statements that can be refuted by proof, can and must 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 to reject 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

C] The 'Greatest Ikar'

Why is this principle described as the 'Greatest Ikar'? A few reasons have been suggested.

(i) Revelation -vs- Logic

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

5. ודבר זה עיקר גדול הוא והוא עמוד התורה והמצוה שנאמר ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים, וכתביב ראה אנכי נתן 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

6. 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 - then we would necessarily be in opposition to the foundation of our religion. We would disbelieve all miracles and signs and certainly reject all hopes and fears derived from Scripture, unless the miracles are also explained figuratively. The Allegorist school amongst the Muslims have done this, and have thereby arrived at absurd conclusions.

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, like Plato, that the heavens are also transient, we would 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 need to do so as long as the theory has not been proved. Since there is no convincing proof, this theory need not be considered, nor should the other one. We take the text of the Bible literally and say that it teaches us a truth which we cannot prove. 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

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

In the next shiur we will see that the Rambam's TRUE intention on the issue of Creation is difficult to clarify. This is a major theme of the Guide and is the subject of much of the later discussion on the Rambam's exoteric and esoteric writings.

D] Hashkafic and Halachic Applications

7. אני מאמין באמונה שלמה, שהבורא יתברך שמו הוא ראשון והוא אחרון
אני מאמין ד'

I believe with perfect faith that **G-d is first and last**

8. כֹּה אָמַר ה' מִלְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגֹאֲלוֹ ה' צְבָאוֹת אֲנִי רִאשׁוֹן וְאֲנִי אַחֲרוֹן וּמִבְּלִעְדֵי אֵין אֱלֹקִים
ישעיהו מד'

That Hashem is 'First' and 'Last' is expressed in a number of pesukim in Yishaya

9. He who is the G-d of all eternity bears every fleeting moment of every present time

Commentary of R. Shimshon Refael Hirsch on Devarim 33:27

Rav Hirsch understands Devarim 33:27 (see source 1) as an indicator that G-d exists outside time and 'supports' each moment of existence. This underlines the concept of constant re-creation and G-d's intervention through miracles

10. יכוין בברכות פירוש המלות. כשיזכיר השם, יכוין פירוש קריאתו באדנות שהוא אדון הכל, ויכוין בכתיבתו 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

11. 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 ב'ג

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'

12.

וזה"ל השל"ה הק' במסכת שבת, (תורה אור) "שהשבת מורה על החידוש, כי החידוש היה בעצם ששת ימי המעשה, שהיה הקב"ה מהוה ומחדש ואח"כ פוסק. ואילו לא פסק והיה מחדש ומהוה תמיד, לא היתה הבריאה פוסקת, ואז היו סוכרים שהעולם קדמון לא סר ולא יסור. אמנם מאחר שפסק לברוא החדשות, רק הכל כפי מה שעשה בששת ימים וחוזר 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 the fact that G-d rested on the 7th day is to reinforce that creation is not eternal (kadmut haolam)

13. אֲדוֹן עוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר מִלְּךָ בְּטָרֵם כָּל יְצִיר נִבְרָא, לַעֲת נַעֲשֶׂה בְּחַפְצוֹ כָּל אֲזֵי מְלֶךְ שְׁמוֹ נִקְרָא וְאַחֲרֵי כָּלֵל לְבָדוֹ יִמְלוֹךְ נוֹרָא, וְהוּא הִנֵּה וְהוּא הוֹה וְהוּא יִהְיֶה בְּתַפְאָרָה וְהוּא אֶחָד וְאֵין שְׁנֵי לְהַמְשִׁיל לוֹ לְהַחְבִּירָה, בְּלִי רֵאשִׁית בְּלִי תַכְלִית וְלוֹ הָעוֹ וְהַמְשָׁרָה

אדון עולם

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

Points for Discussion

1. Do you think that the modern scientific 'Big Bang' theory agrees with the Torah approach or the other philosophical approaches? What does science have to say about what caused the Big Bang?