

THE 13 IKARIM

י'ג עקרי אמונה של הרמב"ם

(9) THE FIFTH IKAR - PRAYER TO GOD ALONE

סמנ מדרשת רחל וחייה

The first 3 Ikarim focused on our understanding of G-d. Ikar 4 focuses on G-d's free will and, as a corollary, man's free will. Thus the focus is shifted away from G-d to man. Now Ikarim 5-9 focus on man's communication and connection with G-d through prayer and prophecy

1. **והיסוד החמישי** - שהוא יתעלה הוא הראוי לעבדו ולגדלו, ולפרסם גדולתו ומשמעתו. ולא יעשה כן למי שהוא תחתיו במציאות, מן המלאכים והכוכבים והגלגלים והיסודות וכל מה שהורכב מהן. לפי שהם כולם מוטבעים על פעולותיהם ואין שלטון להם ולא בחירה מבלעדי רצונו יתעלה. ואין לעשותם אמצעים בשביל להגיע אליו, אלא עילו יתעלה יכוונו המחשבות וינח מה שזולתו. וזה היסוד החמישי הוא האזהרה על עבודה זרה, ורוב התורה מזהרת עליה

רמב"ם - הקדמה לפ' חלק, משנה סנבדרין

The fifth principle is that G-d is the only One whom it is fitting to serve, elevate, praise his greatness and subordinate oneself. We may not act in this way towards anything beneath Him, whether it be an angel, a star, one of the elements, or anything formed from them since all these have a predetermined nature and have no authority or free will. Rather they simply do the will of G-d. One should not make them intermediaries to connect with Him. Rather, all our thoughts should be directed only towards Him. Nothing else should even be considered. This fifth principle forbids all forms of idolatry and most of the Torah comes to warn against this

2. **א** בימי אנוש טעו בני האדם טעות גדול ונבערה עצת חכמי אותו הדור ואנוש עצמו מן הטועים היה, וזו היתה טעותם, אמרו הואיל והאלהים ברא כוכבים אלו וגלגלים להנהיג את העולם ונתנם במרום וחלק להם כבוד והם שמשים המשמשים לפניו ראויין הם לשבחם ולפארם ולחלוק להם כבוד, וזהו רצון האל ברוך הוא לגדל ולכבד מי שגדלו וכבודו, כמו שהמלך רוצה לכבד העומדים לפניו וזהו כבודו של מלך, כיון שעלה דבר זה על לבם התחילו לבנות לכוכבים היכלות ולהקריב להן קרבנות ולשבחם ולפארם בדברים ולהשתחוות למולם כדי להשיג רצון הבורא בדעתם הרעה, וזה היה עיקר עבודת כוכבים לא שהן אומרים שאין שם אלוה אלא כוכב זה ...

ב ואחר שארכו הימים עמדו בבני האדם נביאי שקר ואמרו שהאל צוה ואמר להם עבדו כוכב פלוני או כל הכוכבים והקריבו לו ונסכו לו כך וכך ובנו לו היכל ועשו צורתו כדי להשתחוות לו כל העם וכנהיגם אומרים להם שבעבודה זו תרבו ותצליחו והתחילו כוזבים אחרים לעמוד ולומר שהכוכב עצמו או הגלגל או המלאך דבר עמהם ואמר להם עבדוני בכך וכך והודיע להם דרך עבודתו ועשו כך ואל תעשו כך. ופשט דבר זה בכל העולם לעבוד את הצורות ונמצאו כל עם הארץ הנשים והקטנים אינם יודעים אלא הצורה של עץ ושל אבן וההיכל של אבנים שנתחנכו מקטנותם להשתחוות לה ולעבדה ולהשבע בשמה, והחכמים שהיו בהם כגון כהניהם וכיוצא בהן מדמין שאין שם אלוה אלא הכוכבים ועל דרך זה היה העולם הולך ומתגלגל עד שנולד עמודו של עולם והוא אברהם אבינו

רמב"ם הלכות עבודת כוכבים פרק א-ב

Idolatry started in this way - giving honor to G-d's creations as intermediaries and eventually seeing them as the SOURCE of blessing. Idolatry is NOT in essence a denial of G-d. It is the following attitude - 'I can get what I need without having to form a connection with G-d but rather through some subsidiary means'

3. **והיה אם שמעו תשמעו אל מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום לאהבה את ה' אלקיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם**

דברים י"א

The Torah commands us to love Hashem and to serve Him with our לב - our mind

4. דתניא: (דברים י"א) **לאהבה את ה' אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם**. איזו היא עבודה שהיא בלבי? - הוי אומר זו תפלה. וכתבי בתריה (דברים י"א) **ונתתי מטר ארצכם בעתו יורה ומלקוש**.

תענית ב.

This is the mitzvah to pray - service of the mind

5. מצות עשה להתפלל בכל יום שנאמר ועבדתם את ה' אלהיכם, מפי השמועה למדו שעבודה זו היא תפלה שנאמר ולעבדו בכל לבבכם אמרו חכמים אי זו היא עבודה שבלב זו תפלה, ואין מנין התפלות מן התורה, ואין משנה התפלה הזאת מן התורה, ואין לתפלה זמן קבוע מן התורה

רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק א הלכה א

The Rambam rules that there is a Torah mitzvah to pray - the structure and wording of our prayers is Rabbinic in origin¹

6. אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כובד ראש. חסידים הראשונים היו שוהים שעה אחת ומתפללים כדי שיכוננו את לבם למקום

משנה ברכות ה:א

The Mishna describes prayer as something which can only be done with much thought and concentration. The Rabbis would spend an hour before tefilla preparing

7. תנו רבנן: חסידים הראשונים היו שוהין שעה אחת ומתפללין שעה אחת וחוזרין ושוהין שעה אחת

ברכות לב:

In fact, this turned out to be an hour before tefilla preparing, and hour in tefilla and an hour 'coming back down' from prayer. Clearly, the prayer experience was deeply meditative

How does prayer fit with the Rambam's hashkafa of negative philosophy? How can we square the personal address to a personal G-d, with all the expressions of closeness and connection used in our liturgy, with a G-d that we can never grasp or know? Even the most basic building-block of prayer - ברוך אתה - seems to offend our concept of the unknowability of G-d. The wording of the 5th Ikar seems to demand that I praise G-d. How is that possible?

8. Fifthly. A thing is described by its actions e.g., of Zaid, who made this door, built that wall, wove that garment. This kind of attribute is separate from the essence of the thing described, and, therefore, appropriate to be employed in describing the Creator

Moreh Nevuchim 1:52

Description of G-d's acts is not an infringement of negative theology since it does not seek to identify His essence

9. The idea is best expressed in the book of Psalms, "Silence is praise to You" (65:2). It is a very expressive remark on this subject; for whatever we utter with the intention of extolling and of praising Him, contains something that cannot be applied to God, and includes derogatory expressions; it is therefore more becoming to be silent, and to be content with intellectual reflection You must surely know the following celebrated passage in the Talmud - would that all passages in the Talmud were like that! A certain person, reading prayers in the presence of Rabbi Haninah, said, 'God, the great, the valiant and awesome, the powerful, the strong, and the mighty.' The rabbi said to him, Have you finished all the praises of your Master? The three descriptions, 'God, the great, the valiant and awesome,' we should not have applied to God, had Moses not mentioned them in the Torah, and had not the men of the Great Synagogue come forward subsequently and established their use in the prayer; and yet you say all this!

Moreh Nevuchim 1:59

Chazal's statement criticizing the over-praising of G-d fits perfectly with the Rambam's negative theology. The 'heter' to use the expressions הגבור והנורא is the fact that they were included in Chumash and adoption by the Anshei Keneset Hagedola

1. The issue of whether there is a Torah mitzvah to pray is disputed. The Ramban's position is that there is no such Torah mitzvah, other than in times of communal distress. Regular personal prayer for the Ramban is entirely Rabbinic in origin.

10. It has, however, become necessary to address men in words that should leave some idea in their minds and, in accordance with the saying of our Sages that 'the Torah speaks in the language of men', the Creator has been described to us in terms of our own perfections. However we should not on that account have uttered any other than the three above-mentioned attributes, and we should not have used them as names of God except when we find them in reading the Torah. **Subsequently, the men of the Great Synagogue, who were prophets, introduced these expressions also into the prayer**, but we should not on that account use [in our prayers] any other attributes of God. The principal lesson to be derived from this passage is that there are two reasons for our employing those phrases in our prayers: first, they occur in the Torah; secondly, the Prophets introduced them into the prayer. Were it not for the first reason, we should never have said them and were it not for the second reason, we should not have copied them from the Torah to recite them in our prayers. How then could we approve of the use of those numerous attributes!

Moreh Nevuchim 1:59

*Our permission to use expressions of directness and description in prayer stems from the fact that the wording of our prayers come from **Prophecy***

11. Prophecy is, in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man's rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty

Moreh Nevuchim 2:36

Prophecy itself is a Divine Emanation or Flow which moves from G-d to the world

12. These actions do not depend on impact, or on a certain distance. They are termed "influence" (or "emanation"), on account of their similarity to a water-spring. The latter sends forth water in all directions, has no particular side for receiving or spending its contents: it springs forth on all sides, and continually waters both near and distant places. In a similar manner incorporeal beings, in receiving power and imparting it to others, are not limited to a particular side, distance, or time. They act continually, and whenever an object is sufficiently prepared, it receives the effect of that continuous action, called "influence" (or "emanation"). Since God is incorporeal and everything is created by Him as the efficient cause, we say that the Universe has been created by the Divine influence and that all changes in the Universe emanate from Him. In the same sense we say that He caused wisdom to emanate from Him and to come upon the prophets.

Moreh Nevuchim 2:12

G-d's action in creating the world works through a similar Emanation (otherwise creation itself would be extremely problematic in the world-view of Negative Theology). Thus Prophecy is also a description of G-d's acts or creation in the world - not of G-d Himself

13. Thus the Law distinctly states that the highest kind of worship to which we refer in this chapter, is only possible after the acquisition of the knowledge of God. For it is said, *"To love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul"* (Deut. 9:13) and, as we have shown several times, **man's love of God is identical with His knowledge of Him.**

Moreh Nevuchim - Maimonides 3:51

The concept of prayer is coming to a knowledge of G-d

14. דבר ידוע וברור שאין אהבת הקב"ה נקשרת בלבו של אדם עד שישגה בה תמיד כראוי ויעזוב כל מה שבעולם חוץ ממנה, כמו שצוה ואמר בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך, אינו אוהב הקב"ה אלא בדעת שידעהו, ועל פי הדעה תהיה האהבה אם מעט מעט ואם הרבה הרבה

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק י הלכה ו

This is also ruled in the Mishne Torah

15. *See the attached extract from Moreh Nevuchim 3:51.*

The Rambam's concept of prayer is one where a person contemplates G-d through focus on the meaning of the words of the prayers. This leads a person to knowledge of G-d which in turn creates the connection through which Divine Providence can attach to a person. In this sense the prayers are 'answered'.

16. שְׂוִיתִי ה' לְנֶגְדֵי תַמִּיד כִּי מִיָּמִינִי בֵּל אֲמוּט

תהלים ט:ז

This verse is quoted by the Moreh Nevuchim as central to the connection between man and G-d

17. שְׂוִיתִי ה' לְנֶגְדֵי תַמִּיד (תהילים ט:ז) הוא כלל גדול בתורה ובמעלות הצדיקים אשר הולכים לפני האלהים, כי אין ישיבת האדם ותנועותיו ועסקיו והוא לבדו בביתו, כשישבתו ותנועותיו ועסקיו והוא לפני מלך גדול, ולא דבורו והרחבת פיו כרצונו והוא עם אנשי ביתו וקרוביו, כדבורו במושב המלך. כ"ש כשישים האדם אל לבו שהמלך הגדול הקב"ה, אשר מלא כל הארץ כבודו, עומד עליו ורואה במעשיו, כמו שנאמר: **אם יסתר איש במסתרים ואני לא אראנו נאם ה'** (ירמיה כג:כד), מיד יגיע אליו היראה וההכנעה בפחד השי"ת ובושתו ממנו ותמיד (מורה נבוכים ח"ג פ' נ"ב).....

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות הנהגת אדם בבקר סימן א סעיף א

It is also, together with a quote from Moreh Nevuchim 3:52, brought as the first halacha in Shulchan Aruch

Extracts from Moreh Nevuchim 3:51 (my paragraph breaks and numbering)

[1] The Divine service enjoined in these words must, accordingly, be preceded by the love of God. **Our Sages have pointed out to us that it is a service in the mind, which explanation I understand to mean this: man concentrates all his thoughts on the First Intellect, and is absorbed in these thoughts as much as possible.**

.....

[2] It has thus been shown that it must be man's aim, after having acquired the knowledge of God, to deliver himself up to Him, and to have his heart constantly filled with longing after Him. He accomplishes this generally by seclusion and retirement. Every pious man should therefore seek retirement and seclusion, and should only in case of necessity associate with others. Note: **I have shown you that the intellect which emanates from God to us is the link that joins us to God. You have it in your power to strengthen that bond, if you choose to do so, or to weaken it gradually, till it breaks if you prefer this.** It will only become strong when you employ it in the love of God, and seek that love: it will be weakened when you direct your thoughts to other things. You must know that even if you were the wisest man in respect to the true knowledge of God, you break the bond between you and God whenever you turn entirely your thoughts to the necessary food or any necessary business; you are then not with God, and He is not with you: for that relation between you and Him is actually interrupted in those moments. The pious were therefore particular to restrict the time in which they could not meditate upon the name of God, and cautioned others about it, saying, "Let not your minds be vacant from reflections upon God" In the same sense did David say, "*I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved*" (Ps. 16:8): i.e., I do not turn my thoughts away from God; He is like my right hand, which I do not forget even for a moment on account of the ease of its motions, and therefore I shall not be moved, I shall not fail.

[3] We must bear in mind that all such religious acts as reading the Law, praying, and the performance of other precepts, serve exclusively as the means of causing us to occupy and fill our mind with the precepts of God, and free it from worldly business; for we are thus, as it were, in communication with God, and undisturbed by any other thing. If we, however, pray with the motion of our lips, and our face toward the wall, but at the same time think of our business; if we read the Law with our tongue, whilst our heart is occupied with the building of our house, and we do not think of what we are reading; if we perform the commandments only with our limbs, we are like those who are engaged in digging in the ground, or hewing wood in the forest, without reflecting on the nature of those acts, or by whom they are commanded, or what is their object. We must not imagine that [in this way] we attain the highest perfection; on the contrary, we are then like those in reference to whom Scripture says, "*You are near in their mouth, and far from their hearts*" (Jer. 12:2)

[4] I will now commence to show you the way how to educate and train yourselves in order to attain that great perfection. The first thing you must do is this : Turn your thoughts away from everything while you read Shema or during the Tefillot, and do not content yourself with being devout when you read the first verse of Shema, or the first paragraph of the prayer. When you have successfully practiced this for many years, try in reading the Law or listening to it, to have all your heart and all your thought occupied with understanding what you read or hear. After some time when you have mastered this, accustom yourself to have your mind free from all other thoughts when you read any portion of the other books of the prophets, or when you say any blessing; and to have your attention directed exclusively to the perception and the understanding of what you utter. When you have succeeded in properly performing these acts of divine service, and you have your thought, during their performance, entirely abstracted from worldly affairs, take then care that your thought be not disturbed by thinking of your wants or of superfluous things. In short, think of worldly matters when you eat, drink, bathe, talk with your wife and little children, or when you converse with other people. These times, which are frequent and long, I think must suffice to you for reflecting on everything that is necessary as regards business, household, and health. But when you are engaged in the performance of religious duties, have your mind exclusively directed to what you are doing. When you are alone by yourself, when you are awake on your couch, be careful to meditate in such precious moments on nothing but the intellectual worship of God, viz., to approach Him and to minister before Him in the true manner which I have described to you-not in hollow emotions. This I consider as the highest perfection wise men can attain by the above training.

[5] When we have acquired a true knowledge of God, and rejoice in that knowledge in such a manner, that whilst speaking with others, or attending to our bodily wants, our mind is all that time with God; when we are with our heart constantly near God, even whilst our body is in the society of men: when we are in that state which the Song on the relation between God and man poetically describes in the following words:" I sleep, but my heart wakes: it is the voice of my beloved that knocks" (Song v. 2) :-then we have attained not only the height of ordinary prophets, but of Moses, our Teacher, of whom Scripture relates : " And Moses alone shall come near before the Lord 11 (ibid. xxxiv. 28):" But as for you, stand thou here by me" (Deut. V. 28). The meaning of these verses has been explained by us. The Patriarchs likewise attained this degree of perfection; they approached God in such a manner that with them the name of God became known in the world. Thus we read in Scripture: "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.... This is My name for ever" (Exod. iii. 15). Their mind was so identified with the knowledge of God, that He made a lasting covenant with each of them. "Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob," etc. (Lev. xxvi. 42). For it is known from statements made in Scripture that these four, viz., the Patriarchs and Moses, had their minds exclusively filled with the name of God, that is, with His knowledge and love; **and that in the same measure was Divine Providence attached to them and their descendants.**

[6] **We have already stated in the chapters which treat of Divine Providence that Providence watches over every rational being according to the amount of intellect which that being possesses. Those who are perfect in their perception of God, whose mind is never separated from Him, enjoy always the influence of Providence. But those who, perfect in their knowledge of God, turn their mind sometimes away from God, enjoy the presence of Divine Providence only when they meditate on God; when their thoughts are engaged in other matters, divine Providence departs from them.**

[7] **If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him; for it is only that intellectual link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents.**

[8] It is now clearly established that the cause of our being exposed to chance, and abandoned to destruction like cattle, is to be found in our separation from God..... **For if we prepare ourselves, and attain the influence of the Divine Intellect, Providence is joined to us, and we are guarded against all evils."**