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 Commandments we should spend a little time looking at the first, 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?

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 life; (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.

The Smag understands that Anochi is the mitzvah of emuna in Torah Min HaShamayim - to recognize that Torah comes from God.

The Smak 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.


5. Sefer Mitzvot Katan - completed by R. Yitzchak of Corbeille in 1277.

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbimanning.com
B] ANOCHI: IS IT A MITZVA AT ALL?

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.


6. The First Principle of Faith - The existence of the Creator (praised be He) - that there is an existing Being invested with the highest perfection of existence. He is the cause of the existence of all things. In Him they exist and from Him emanates their continued existence. … This is the first cardinal doctrine of faith, which is indicated by the commandment, “I am the Lord your God”

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.

D] ANOCHI IN HALACHA - THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The Rambam begins his Mishne 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.
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 הלאפנות. Is that the same as הידע 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 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 mitzvah 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.
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 ...

The term tzelem, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, i.e. 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, i.e. 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, i.e. intellectual perception, 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 the same thing wherever we have an intellect in actu. We, however, pass intellectually from potentiality to actuality only from time to time.

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 the same thing wherever we have an intellect in actu. We, however, pass intellectually from potentiality to actuality only from time to time.

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.

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 Vehalacha Biderachav - to copy Hashem and imitate His middot. Just as God thinks actively, so do we.
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.

(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’?

The Sefer Hachinuch, who states that the mitzva is to know (yedia) and ‘believe’ (emuna) that there is a God.

We saw above that the mitzva of Anochi, according to many of the Rishonim is to develop knowledge of God based on rationality and intellectual proof. 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 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.

13. Emuna is derived from the word emet, through a now-lost intermediate form ‘emenet’. Emet --- Emenet --- Emuna. Note a similar formation in the formation of daughter in Hebrew from son. Ben --- Benet --- Bat. The ‘nun’ in the intermediate form still survives in the plural ‘banot’.
14. For a more detailed analysis of the ‘belief that’/’belief in’ issue see Prof. Menachem Kellner - Must a Jew Believe Anything pp12-13 and notes there.

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbimanning.com
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 story, most particularly, the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

The concerns of R. Yehuda HaLevi in the 12th Century about philosophy were born out 300 years later at the Spanish expulsion in 1492. R. Yosef Yavetz, who was part of that expulsion and witness to its tragic horrors, gave testimony that many of the less educated Jews, with the strength of their simple faith, were prepared to sacrifice all their belongings and their lives al kiddush Hashem. Sadly, many of the philosophically more educated were quicker to convert to Christianity.

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

11. The Rabbi replied: I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles. Who fed them in the desert and gave them the Land, after having made them cross the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way. Who sent Moses with His law, and subsequently thousands of prophets, who confirmed His law by promises to the observant, and threats to the disobedient. Our belief is comprised in the Torah - a very large domain.

12. Al Khazari: I had not intended to ask any Jew, because I am aware of their reduced condition and narrow-minded views, as well as their misery left them nothing worth-while. Now shouldn’t you, Jew, have said that you believe in the Creator of the world, its Governor and Guide, and in Him who created and keeps you. And such attributes which serve as evidence for every believer, and for the sake of which He pursues justice in order to resemble the Creator in His wisdom and justice?

13. The Rabbi: What you are describing is a religion based on speculation and system, the research of thought, but open to many doubts. Now ask the philosophers, and you will find that they do not agree on one action or one principle, since some doctrines can be established by arguments, which are only partially satisfactory, and still much less capable of being proved!
J] PRACTICAL EMUNA IN THE 21st CENTURY

- In a seminal 1967 essay\(^\text{18}\) - Faith and Doubt - 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\(^\text{19}\):
  - **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.\(^\text{20}\)

- Rabbi Lamm also outlines three types of doubt:
  - **spurious doubt** - where the doubt is not driven by a quest for truth, but a 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.\(^\text{21}\)

- 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) Chesed to others and connection to Klal Yisrael. Essentially - Torah, Avoda and Gemilut Chasadim.

---


19. 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.


21. This seems clear from the Rambam’s emotive description of Ahavat Hashem in the 10th chapter of Hilchot 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](http://www.rabbimanning.com)