

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

203 - EMUNA & BELIEF - PART 2 OU ISRAEL CENTER - WINTER 2020/21

- In Part 1 we saw that the first, and most basic, mitzva of the 613 is 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha'. According to most mefarshim, this is the mitzva of Emuna.
- The Rambam and other Rishonim understood that this mitzva includes a requirement to try as much as we can to understand God, including where possible the rational and logical proofs for His existence. We saw others who questioned the efficacy of this approach and stressed the need to connect with God not only intellectually but also psychologically and emotionally.
- In this shiur we will examine the next fundamental mitzva - Shema Yisrael - which focuses on the Oneness of God and, as we shall see, our inability to actually define Him at all!

A] HASHEM ECHAD: THE SECOND MITZVA

1. שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד.

דברים ו:ד

The expression 'Shema Yisrael' appears 4 times in Tanach - all in Sefer Devarim. The most famous is the mitzva on every Jew to understand - shema - that God is One.

2. והמצוה השניה היא הצווי שצונו באמונת היחוד. והוא שנאמין כי פועל המציאות וסבתו הראשונה אחד והוא אמרו יתעלה שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד רוצים בזה המאמר שהוא אמנם הוציאנו מן העבדות ועשה עמנו מה שעשה מן החסד והטוב על מנת שנאמין היחוד כי אנחנו חייבים בזה. והרבה שיאמרו מצות יחוד. ויקראו גם כן זאת המצוה מלכות. כי הם יאמרו (ברכות יג.) כדי לקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים רוצים לומר להודות ביחוד ולהאמינו

ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה ב

In Sefer Hamitzvot, the Rambam stresses that this principle of Yichud is the reason why we were brought out of Egypt. This is also identical with the concept of accepting God as a King - Ol Malchut Shamayim. Ultimately, it is focused on our awareness that there is a purpose and meaning to existence and ONE unified reality with God at its center.

B] RECITING THE SHEMA: IN HALACHA AND MINHAG

3. 

The custom is to write the ayin and dalet in large letters to spell 'eid' - the Shema is a testimony to our Emuna.

4. תנו רבנן: שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד - עד כאן צריכה כוונת הלב, דברי רבי מאיר. אמר רבא: הלכה כרבי מאיר. תניא, סומכוס אומר: כל המאריך באחד - מאריךין לו ימיו ושנותיו. אמר רב אחא בר יעקב: ובדלית. אמר רב אשי: ובלבד שלא יחטוף בח"ל. רבי ירמיה הוה יתיב קמיה דרבי חייה בר אבא. חזייה דהוה מאריך טובא. אמר ליה: כיון דאמליכתייה למעלה ולמטה ולארבע רוחות השמים, תו לא צריכת. (רש"י - שהארכת שיעור שתחשוב בלבך ה' אחד בשמים ובארץ וברצע רוחותיה).

ברכות יג:

Chazal bring a halacha to elongate² the dalet of Echad for the length of time that it takes to acknowledge in one's mind that God is One in all of existence.

1. Note that, even though R. Menachem Kasher did not finish his magnum opus Torah Sheleima on all of Chumash (he only reached the middle of Bamidbar), he DID produce a full sefer - Shema Yisrael (1979) - which is effectively Torah Sheleima on the first paragraph of Shema. There are 80 pages and over 200 entries just for the first verse!!

2. In fact, due to the way that most Ashkenazim and Sefardim now pronounce the dalet, this is impossible! In Mishnaic and Talmudic times, there was a clear distinction between dalet with a dagesh kal and without a dagesh kal, parallel to tav vs. sav or bet vs. vet. With a dagesh, it is a plosive, and is pronounced just as we pronounce a dalet. Without a dagesh, it is a fricative, and is pronounced like the 'th' in the word 'either'. It is thus possible to extend the dalet. Nowadays, in order to fulfill this Talmudic instruction, we could pronounce our dalets in the first verse of Shema as fricative. Otherwise, we can simply assert that it is no longer possible to fulfill this Talmudic instruction, and not attempt it. Extending the 'ahhh' or the chet does not achieve the goal of this halacha. Similarly, trying to extend a plosive dalet is impossible, and people just end up saying a harsh 'diiiiiii' sound at the end of the word. The Magen Avraham is clear that one should not make it into a dagesh chazak (strong dagesh, which effectively doubles the pronunciation of the letter). See <http://dafyummy.blogspot.com/2012/08/berachot-13b-extending-daled-in-echad.html> and also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dagesh>.

5. א יקרא קריאת שמע בכוונה, באימה, ביראה, ברתת וזיע.

ד נוהגין לקרות פסוק ראשון בקול רם, כדי לעורר הכוונה.

ה נוהגין ליתן ידיהם על פניהם בקריאת פסוק ראשון, כדי שלא יסתכל בדבר אחר שמונעו מלכוין.

ו צריך להאריך בחי"ת של אחד, כדי שימליך הקדוש ברוך הוא בשמים ובארץ, שלזה רומז החטוטרת שבאמצע הגג החי"ת. ויארץ בדלי"ת של אחד שיעור שיחשוב שהקב"ה יחיד בעולמו ומושל בד' רוחות העולם. ולא יאריך יותר מכשיעור זה. ויש נוהגים להטות הראש כפי המחשבה: מעלה ומטה ולד' רוחות.

ז ידגיש בדלי"ת שלא תהא כרי"ש.

ח לא יחטוף בחי"ת ולא יאריך באל"ף.

ט אסור לומר שמע ב' פעמים, בין שכופל התיבות שאומר שמע שמע בין שכופל הפסוק ראשון.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות קריאת שמע סימן סא

The Shulchan Aruch brings specific halachot and also minhagim on how to say the verse of Shema. These include how to pronounce the chet and the dalet. There is also a minhag to roll the head in all directions as one says Shema.

6. (יח) להאריך בחי"ת - כתב המ"א צ"ח המ"ע שיאריך בחי"ת כשיעור שליש וצ"ד כשיעור צ' שלישים. וי"א שלא יאריך בחי"ת כלל רק יכוין הכל בדלי"ת וכ"כ הגר"א צביאורו.

(כ) המחשבה - ... וכטייה לריכב לכוית מזרח לפון מערב דרום ולא יטב הראש מזרח מערב לפון דרום דכוי ח"ו שתי וערב.

(כא) בדלי"ת - ולא ידגיש יותר מדאי שנראה כאלו הד' נקודה צשו"א או צזיר"י אלף הכונה שיטעימנה צפה יפה.

משנה ברורה שם

The Mishna Berura notes a concern that the movement of the head should not c'v look like the sign of the cross!

7. ומאשר כל דבר הנכתב מאיזה מין שיהיה כבר אפשר שיובן בשתי הבנות מתחלפות, עד שאפשר שתהיה ההבנה האחת מסכמת לכונת האומר והשנית מתחלפת לה מכל וכל. כמו שכתב הרמב"ם ז"ל באגרת תחית המתים כי שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד - העברים יבינו ממנו האחדות הגמורה והנוצרים יפרשו אותו על כונת השלוש!

ספר עקרים גיכג

In fact there was a real concern with this since the Christians saw the verse of Shema Yisrael as a proof for the Trinity!

8. אנכי ה' אלהיך - א"ר אבהו משל למלך ב"ו מולך ויש לו אב או אח. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא אני איני כן! אני ראשון - שאין לי אב. ואני אחרון - שאין לי אח. ומבלעדי אין אלהים - שאין לי בן!

שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשת יתרו פרשה כט

There are clearly anti-trinitarian statements in the Midrash.

C] YICHUD HASHEM: THE SECOND IKAR

9.

והי"סוד השני - יחודו יתעלה. והוא, שזה שהוא עלת הכל - אחד. לא כאחד הסוגי⁶, ולא כאחד המין, ולא כאיש האחד המרכב, אשר יתחלק לאחדים רבים, ולא אחד כגוף הפשוט האחד במנין, אשר יקבל החלקה⁴ לאין סוף, אלא הוא יתעלה אחד באחדות שאין כמותה אחדות בשום פנים. וזה הי"סוד השני, הוא שמורה עליו מאמר⁷: "שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד".

רמב"ם הקדמה לפרק חלק - ר' יצחק שלית הקדמות הרמב"ם ע' קמא

The Rambam, in his introduction to Perek Chelek, explains the basic parameters of this Ikar - God's Unity is unlike all others. Other units can be broken down into smaller parts or are one out of a number of units. God's Unity is indivisible and all-encompassing. Clearly, this Ikar goes much deeper than a simple rejection of idolatry³.

3. From the Fifth Ikar - not to pray through intermediaries - it is clear that idolatry comes in two different forms. The 'weaker' of the two is the connection with God through other beings as intermediaries. This is the subject of the Fifth Ikar. The 'stronger', and even more serious, form is the subject of this Ikar i.e. an understanding of God in a way which ascribes to Him incorrect attributes.

10. ז' אֱלֹהִים זֶה אֶחָד הוּא וְאֵינוּ שְׁנַיִם וְלֹא יֵתֵר עַל שְׁנַיִם, אֲלֵא אֶחָד. שְׂאִין כִּיחֻדוֹ אֶחָד מִן הָאֶחָדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּעוֹלָם. לֹא אֶחָד כְּמִין שֶׁהוּא כּוֹלֵל אֶחָדִים הַרְבֵּה. וְלֹא אֶחָד כְּגוֹף שֶׁהוּא נֶחְלַק לְמַחְלָקוֹת וְלִקְצוּוֹת. אֲלֵא יְחֻד שְׂאִין יְחֻד אַחֵר כְּמוֹתוֹ בְּעוֹלָם. אֵלֹהִים הֵיוּ אֱלֹהוֹת הַרְבֵּה הֵיוּ גּוֹפִין וְגוּיֹת, מִפְּנֵי שְׂאִין הַנִּמְנִים הַשְׂוִין בְּמִצִּיאוֹתָן נִפְרָדִין זֶה מִזֶּה אֲלֵא בְּמִאֲרָעִין שְׂיִאֲרָעוּ בְּגוֹפּוֹת וְהַגּוּיֹת. וְאֵלֹהִים הֵיחָד הַיּוֹצֵר גּוֹף וְגוּיָה הֵיחָד לֹ קֶץ וְתִכְלִית, שְׂאִי אֶפְשֵׁר לְהִיּוֹת גּוֹף שְׂאִין לֹ קֶץ. וְכָל שְׂיֵשׁ לְגוֹפּוֹ קֶץ וְתִכְלִית יֵשׁ לְכַחוֹ קֶץ וְסוֹף. וְאֵלֵהֵינוּ בְּרוּךְ שְׂמוֹ הוֹאִיל וְכַחוֹ אֵין לֹ קֶץ וְאֵינוּ פּוֹסֵק - שְׂהַרִי הַגְּלָגַל סוֹבֵב תָּמִיד - אֵין כַּחוֹ כֶּחַ גּוֹף. וְהוֹאִיל וְאֵינוּ גּוֹף לֹא יִאֲרָעוּ לֹ מִאֲרָעוֹת הַגּוֹפּוֹת כְּדִי שְׂיֵהָא נֶחְלַק וְנִפְרָד מֵאַחֵר. לְפִיכָךְ אֵי אֶפְשֵׁר שְׂיֵהִיָּה אֲלֵא אֶחָד. וַיִּדְעַת דְּבַר זֶה מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה שְׂנֶאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים ו:ד) ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד.

רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק א הלכה ו,ז

The Rambam states that God's Unity is a natural corollary to his Infinity. Anything which is one of a number of items is by definition limited. Understanding God's Unity is a positive mitzva and denying it is the breach of a negative mitzva.

D] YICHUD HASHEM AS ONE OF THE 6 CONSTANT MITZVOT

11. שְׂחִיב כָּל אֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל לִיהַרְגַּע עַל מִצְוֹת יְחֻד, לְפִי שְׂכָל שְׂאֵינוּ מוֹדֵה בִּיחֻדוֹ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כְּאֵילוֹ כּוֹפֵר בְּעִיקָר, שְׂאֵין שְׂלֵמוֹת הַמִּמְשָׁלָה וְהַיְחוּד אֲלֵא עִם הָאֶחָדוֹת הַגְּמוּר ... וְאֵם כֵּן הָרִי מִצְוָה זֹו מְכַלֵּל אִיסוּר עֲבוּדָה זֶרָה וְזֹאת אַחַת מִן הַמִּצְוֹת שְׂאֵמַרְנוּ בְּתַחֲלַת הַסֵּפֶר שֶׁהָאֵדָם חִיב בְּהֵן בְּהַתְּמַדָּה, כְּלוֹמֵר שְׂלֹא יִפְסֵק חַיּוּבָן מַעֲלִיו לְעוֹלָם, וְאִפִּילוּ רַגַע קֶטַן

ספר החינוך מצוה תיז

The Mitzvah of Yichud is one of the 6 'Constant Mitzvot' which every Jew must fulfil at all times⁴.

E] IMPLICATIONS OF GOD'S ONENESS

E1] THE UNFATHOMABLE NATURE OF GOD

12. אֶחָד וְאֵין יְחִיד כִּיחֻדוֹ, נְעֵלָם, וְגַם אֵין סוֹף לְאֶחָדוּתוֹ.

יגדל

In Yigdal, the poet stresses that God's unity is infinite and, consequently, He remains ne'elam.

- Ne'elam is translated by different siddurim as 'inscrutable', 'unfathomable', 'unimaginable' and 'invisible'.
- God's 'invisibility' is a consequence of His all-pervasive reality. God is not 'locatable' within space or time?

13. וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמָקוֹם - רַב הוּנָא בְּשֵׁם ר' אַמִּי אָמַר - מִפְּנֵי מַה מְכַנֵּן שְׂמוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְקוֹרְאִין אוֹתוֹ 'מָקוֹם'? שֶׁהוּא מְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם וְאֵין עוֹלָמוֹ מְקוֹמוֹ. מִן מַה דְּכַתִּיב (שְׂמוֹת ל:כא) הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֱתָי, הוּי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם וְאֵין עוֹלָמוֹ מְקוֹמוֹ.

בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשת ויצא פרשה סח:ט

Chazal explain why God is called 'HaMakom'⁵ - the Place. The universe is located 'within Him' and not He within it.

- Spirituality is often compared to 'ruach' - wind. We do not sense the air around us since it is all encompassing. But when it moves, we can be blown away by the weight of it!

E2] A REFUTATION OF DUALISM

Given that **everything** comes from God, this affects the way that we perceive evil, struggle and challenges in life. We DO NOT believe in a 'Dark Side'.

14. יוֹצֵר אוֹר וְבוֹרָא חֹשֶׁךְ עֲשֵׂה שְׂלֹום וְבוֹרָא רָע אֲנִי ה' עֲשֵׂה כָּל אֲלֵה

ישעיהו מה:ז

God is the source of what we perceive as evil as well as of good.

- Similarly, in Torah thought the Satan and the yetzer hara as simply melachim - messengers of God.

4. As we saw in the previous shiur, these Constant Mitzvot are ruled by the Biur Halacha at the very start of the Shulchan Aruch - O.C. 1:1.

5. R. Aryeh Kaplan observes that this can be seen in a fascinating gematria. God's name י-ה-ו-ה is well known to have the gematria of 26 (10+5+6+5). But if we look to a spacial conception of God and thus square each of the letter - $10^2 + 5^2 + 6^2 + 5^2 = (100+25+36+25) = 186$, this is the gematria of מקומו.

15. אמר רבי לוי בר חמא אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: לעולם ירגיז אדם יצר טוב על יצר הרע אם נצחו - מוטב, ואם לאו - יעסוק בתורה ... **אם נצחו - מוטב, ואם לאו - יקרא קריאת שמע** אם נצחו - מוטב, ואם לאו - יזכור לו יום המיתה

ברכות ה.

Chazal explain how reciting the Shema can be a potent weapon in our fight against the yetzer hara!

E3] THE OMNISIGNIFICANCE OF OUR LIVES

• Since everything in this world derives from One Source, this must affect the way we view parts of life which many would regard as 'religiously neutral' - eg sleep, work, commuting. With the right kavanot, all of these activities can be dedicated to or preparation for connection to God. This is one of the reasons why we repeat the Shema before we go to sleep. In that way, sleep is not simply rest after a hard day, but essential preparation for the next day of Torah and mitzvot.

E4] PURPOSE AND MEANING IN LIFE

• Yichud Hashem is expressed to be the reason why we were brought out of Egypt. This concept gives meaning and purpose to our lives. Yetziat Mitzrayim was not simply 'freedom from' (let My people go) but 'freedom to' (let My people go SO THAT they can serve Me). The Jewish perspective on freedom is always purpose led - from avadim of Paro to avadim of God. Freedom to be wild and care-free is highly destructive.⁶

F] YICHUD HASHEM AND 'NEGATIVE THEOLOGY'

• Given that God has an absolute Unity, how can we positively describe Him? If we say 'God is great', does that imply two aspects of God: (i) Him and (ii) how He is.
• Are we even able to make any statement which defines God in any way? Such definition would seem only to limit God and to 'compartmentalize'⁷ His being.

16. ההוא דנחית קמיה דרבי חנינא, אמר: האל הגדול הגבור והנורא והאדיר והעוז והיראוי החזק והאמיץ והודאי והנכבד. המתין לו עד דסיים, כי סיים אמר ליה: סיימתניהו לכולה שבחי דמרך? למה לי כולי האי? אן הני תלת דאמרינן - אי לאו דאמרינהו משה רבינו באורייתא, ואתו אנשי כנסת הגדולה ותקנינהו בתפלה - לא הוינן יכולין למימר להו, ואת אמרת כולי האי ואזלת

ברכות לג:

Rabbi Chanina here expresses grave concerns at using ANY expression to describe God other than those which were revealed to us through nevu'a BY God. 'הא-ל הגדול הגבור והנורא' is given to us in Chumash, through the nevu'a of Moshe. It was also fixed into our tefilla by the Anshei Knesset HaGedola, which included nevi'im.

• It is not possible for us to truly understand anything positive about God - 'He is X'. All we can do is describe God in the negative - 'We don't know what He IS but we know that He is NOT X'. Note that the concept of 'infinite' is also a negative - INfinite - אין סוף.⁸

17. Know that the negative attributes of God are the true attributes: they do not include any incorrect notions or any deficiency whatever in reference to God, while positive attributes imply polytheism, and are inadequate

.... I would observe that, as has already been shown, God's existence is absolute, that it includes no composition, as will be proved, and that we comprehend only the fact that He exists, not His essence. Consequently it is a false assumption to hold that He has any positive attribute: for He does not possess existence in addition to His essence: it therefore cannot be said that the one may be described as an attribute [of the other]; much less has He [in addition to His existence] a compound essence, consisting of two constituent elements to which the attribute could refer. Still less has He accidents, which could be described by an attribute. Hence it is clear that He has no positive attribute whatever.

6. Note that the Greek names for the 5 books of the Chumash were taken from the Rabbinic names - Genesis = Sefer HaYetzira, Leviticus = Torat Cohanim, Numbers = Sefer HaPekudim, Deuteronomy = Mishne Torah. But Exodus is a mistranslation of Sefer HaGeula. For the Jews, the focus was redemption through Torah. For the non-Jews, the focus was escape from slavery. Rabbi Sacks zt'l also points out that the English and America revolutions were religiously motivated as 'freedom to', but the French and Russian were secularly motivated as 'freedom from'. The former led successfully to a freer society, while the later led to the reins of terror.

7. It becomes clear from this why most poskim regard Trinitarian Christianity as idolatrous. Aside from the corporealization of God as man (which is heretical under the Third Ikar) it also divides God into different attributes, in breach of Yichud Hashem.

8. On the subject of the Rambam's negative theology see the following article - www.hashkafacircle.com/journal/R1_RT_Neg.pdf and also audio shiurim at www.hashkafacircle.com/shiurim/category/moreh-nevuchim/

The negative attributes, however, are those which are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe concerning God; for, on the one hand, they do not imply any plurality, and, on the other, they convey to man the highest possible knowledge of God when we say of this being, that **it exists**, we mean that its non-existence is impossible. We ... therefore say that **it is living**, expressing thereby that it is not dead. We call such a being incorporeal, because we notice that it is unlike the heavens, which are living, but material. Seeing that it is also different from the intellect, which, though incorporeal and living, owes its existence to some cause, we say **it is the first**, expressing thereby that its existence is not due to any cause.

It has thus been shown that every attribute predicated of God either denotes the quality of an action, or, when the attribute is intended to convey some idea of the Divine Being itself, and not of His actions, the negation of the opposite.

What, then, can be the result of our efforts, when we try to obtain a knowledge of a Being that is free from substance, that is most simple, whose existence is absolute, and not due to any cause, to whose perfect essence nothing can be superadded, and whose perfection consists, as we have shown, in the absence of all defects..... In the contemplation of His essence, our comprehension and knowledge prove insufficient; in the examination of His works, how they necessarily result from His will, our knowledge proves to be ignorance, and in the endeavor to extol Him in words, all our efforts in speech are mere weakness and failure!

Moreh Nevuchim 1:58

- As such, our excitement after the First Ikar is short lived! The mitzva of 'Anochi' - to develop knowledge of God through intellectual thought - appears to be doomed to failure, since we cannot actually define any element of God!
- The answer, as we will now see, lies in the 3rd Ikar - that we did not perceive any physicality in God at Sinai.

G] THE THIRD IKAR - GOD'S INCORPOREALITY

18.

והיסוד השלישי – שלילת הגשמות ממנו. והוא, שגם האחד אינו גוף ולא כח של גוף,⁸ ולא יארעוהו מארעות הגופות, כמו התנועה והמנוחה, לא בעצם ולא במקרה. ולפיכך שללו ממנו, עליהם השלום, החבור והפרוד, ואמרו:⁹ "לא ישיבה ולא עמידה, ולא ערף ולא עפוי", רצונם לומר: לא פרוד, והוא ערף, ולא חבור, לפי שעפוי מאמרו¹⁰: "ועפו בכתף פלשתים", כלומר: ידחפום בכתף, להתחברם בהם. ואמר הנביא: "ואל מי תדמיון אל" וכו'¹¹, "ואל מי תדמיוני ואשנה" וכו'¹², ואלו היה גוף – היה דומה לגופים. וכל מה שבא בכתבי הקדש מתאורו בתאורי הגופים, כמו ההעתק¹³, והעמידה, והישיבה, והחבור וכיוצא בזה – הכל דרך השאלה, וכמו שאמרו¹⁴: "דברה תורה כלשון בני אדם". וכבר דברו אנשים¹⁵ בזה הענין הרבה. וזה היסוד השלישי, הוא שמורה עליו מאמר¹⁶: "כי לא ראיתם כל תמונה", רצונו לומר: לא השגתם אותו בעל תמונה, לפי שהוא, כמו שאמרנו, אינו גוף ולא כח של גוף.

רמב"ם - הקדמה לפ' חלק, משנה סנהדרין

The third principle: that He has no physicality. This means that the 'Oneness' [in Ikar 2] is not physical and has no physical strength, and is not affected by physical qualities, such as rest or movement, neither in essence nor incidentally. Therefore the Rabbis negated in relation to Him any connectedness or separateness The prophet said (Isaiah 40:18) 'To whom could you compare God?'For if He were physical then He would be like any other physical body. All that is written in the holy books regarding physical descriptions of God, such as walking, standing, sitting, speaking etc is allegorical. Thus the Rabbis said, "**The Torah spoke in human language**"; people have already spoken at length on this issue. This is the third principle and is attested to by the verse, "*For you saw no image*" (Devarim 4:15) i.e. you did not comprehend Him as a Being with an image for, as we have mentioned, he is not physical nor has physical strength.

H] WHAT DID THEY 'SEE' AT SINAI?

H1] THE PEOPLE

19. **יט** (יה) ויוצא מנִּיחָה אֶת־הָעַם לְקִרְאת הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְיַצְבוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר: (יח) וְהָרַ סִינַי עָשָׂן בָּלֹו מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו ה' בְּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עָשָׁן כְּעָשָׂן הַכֹּבֵשׂוֹ וַיִּחַרְדוּ כָּל־הָהָר מֵאֵד: (יט) וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחֹזֵק מֵאֵד מִשְׁעָה יְדַבֵּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל: **כ** (טו) וְכָל־הָעַם רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת־הַלַּפִּידִם וְאֶת־קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת־הָהָר עָשָׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעַם וַיִּזְעוּ וַיַּעֲמָדוּ מֵרָחֵק:

שמות פרק יט, כ

The people experienced God at Sinai through smoke, fog and fire. There was no vision of an image, just a terrifying and undeniable realization of God's immanent presence.

H2] THE COHANIM AND THE ELDERS

20. (א) וְאֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עֲלֶה אֵלַי וְאֶהְרֹן נָדָב וָאֶבְיָהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מִרְחֹק: (ט) וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶהְרֹן נָדָב וָאֶבְיָהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (י) וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת כַּגְּלוֹי כָּמַעֲשֵׂה לְבַנְת הַסַּפִּיר וַיַּכְעֲס הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר: (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲלֶה אֵלַי הִקְרָה וְהִיחֵ־שָׁם וְאֶתְנֶה לָּךְ אֶת־לַחַת הָאָבֶן וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי לְהוֹרֹתָם: (יג) וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה וַיְהוֹשֶׁעַ מִשְׁרָתוֹ וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים: (יד) וְאֶל־הַזִּקְנִים אָמַר שְׁבוּ־לִנּוּ בְּזֶה עַד אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁוֹב אֲלֵיכֶם וְהִנֵּה אֶהְרֹן וְחֹרֵר עִמָּכֶם מִי־בַעַל דְּבָרִים וַיִּגַּשׁ אֲלֵהֶם:

שמות פרק כד

74 of the people had a much more direct revelation. Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and the 70 elders saw the pure sapphire blue⁹ paving under God's throne.

H3] MOSHE

21. **לג** יג וַעֲתָה אֲסִנָּא מִצְאֵתִי חֹן בְּעֵינַיִךְ הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת־דְּרָכְךָ וְאֶדְעָךָ לְמַעַן אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינַיִךְ וְרָאִיהָ כִּי עִמָּךְ הִגּוּי הִזָּה: יד וַיֹּאמֶר פְּנֵי יַלְכוּ וְהִנַּחְתִּי לָךְ: טו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵינוּ אֲסִינּוּ פְּנֵיךְ הַלְכִים אֶל־תַּעֲלֵנוּ מִזָּה: טז וּבִמָּה יִנָּדַע אֲפֹא כִי־מִצְאֵתִי חֹן בְּעֵינַיִךְ אֲנִי וְעִמָּךְ הַלּוֹא בְּלִכְתָּךְ עִמָּנוּ וְנִפְלִינוּ אֲנִי וְעִמָּךְ מִכָּל־הַעֹלָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה: פ יז וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה גַם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֲעֲשֶׂה כִּי־מִצְאֵתִי חֹן בְּעֵינַיִךְ וְאֶדְעָךְ בְּשֵׁם: יח וַיֹּאמֶר הַרְאֵנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ: יט וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעֱבִיר כָּל־טוֹבֵל עַל־פְּנֵיךְ וְקִרְאֵתִי בְשֵׁם ה' לְפָנֶיךָ וְחִנַּתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲחֹן וְרַחֲמֵתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם: כ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאֹת אֶת־פָּנַי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחִי: כא וַיֹּאמֶר ה' הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֲתִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל־הַצּוּר: כב וְהִיָּה בְּעֵבֶר כְּבֹדִי וְשָׁמַתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוּר וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד־עֲבָרִי: כג וְהִסְרַתִּי אֶת־כְּפֹי וְרִאִיתָ אֶת־אַחֲרֵי וּפְנֵי לֹא יִרְאוּ:

לד (ה) וַיִּרְדַּ ה' בָּעָנָן וַיִּתְחַבֵּב עִמּוֹ שֵׁם וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם ה': (ו) וַיַּעֲבֵר ה' עַל־פְּנֵי וַיִּקְרָא ה' ה' אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אַרְבָּע אַפְסִים וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת: (ז) נִצַּר חֶסֶד לְאֵלִים נִשְׂא עֹן וְנִפְשַׁע וְחִסְאָה וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה פִקְדוֹ עֲוֹן אֲבוֹת עַל־בְּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בְנִים עַל־שֹׁלְשִׁים וְעַל־רַבְעִים: (ח) וַיִּמְהַר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְדַּ אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה:

שמות פרק לג-לד

Moshe had the most intense vision of God at the top of the mountain. He perceived the 'back' of God but not his face.

22. מהו זה שִׁבְקֵשׁ מֹשֶׁה רְבִנוּ לְהַשִּׁיג כְּשֶׁאָמַר (שמות לג:יח) הַרְאֵנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ? בְּקֵשׁ לִידַע אֱמֶת הַמִּצְאָו שֶׁל הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַד שְׁיִהְיֶה יָדוּעַ בְּלִבּוֹ כְּמוֹ יָדִיעַת אֶחָד מִן הָאֲנָשִׁים שֶׁרָאָה פְּנֵיו וְנִחַקְקָה צוּרְתוֹ בְּלִבּוֹ, שֶׁנִּמְצָא אוֹתוֹ הָאִישׁ נִפְרָד בְּדַעְתּוֹ מִשְׁאֵר הָאֲנָשִׁים. כִּד בְּקֵשׁ מֹשֶׁה רְבִנוּ לְהִיּוֹת מִצִּיאוֹת הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נִפְרָדֶת בְּלִבּוֹ מִשְׁאֵר הַנִּמְצָאִים, עַד שְׁיִדַּע אֱמֶת הַמִּצְאָו כְּאֲשֶׁר הִיא. וְהַשִּׁיבוּ בְרוּךְ הוּא שְׂאִין כַּח בְּדַעַת הָאָדָם הַחַי שֶׁהוּא מִחֻבֵּר מִגּוּף וּנְפֶשׁ לְהַשִּׁיג אֱמֶת דָּבָר זֶה עַל בְּרִיו. וְהוֹדִיעוּ בְרוּךְ הוּא מַה שֶׁלֹּא יָדַע אָדָם לְפָנָיו וְלֹא יָדַע לְאַחֲרָיו. עַד שֶׁהַשִּׁיג מֵאֱמֶת הַמִּצְאָו דָּבָר שֶׁנִּפְרָד הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּדַעְתּוֹ מִשְׁאֵר הַנִּמְצָאִים. כְּמוֹ שֶׁיִּפְרָד אֶחָד מִן הָאֲנָשִׁים שֶׁרָאָה אַחֲרָיו וְהַשִּׁיג כָּל גּוּפוֹ וּמְלִבוֹשׁוֹ בְּדַעְתּוֹ מִשְׁאֵר גּוּפֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים. וְעַל דָּבָר זֶה רָמַז הַכְּתוּב וְאָמַר (שמות לג:כג) וְרִאִיתָ אֶת אַחֲרֵי וּפְנֵי לֹא יִרְאוּ.

רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק א הלכה י

Moshe requested from God at Sinai that He show him His 'Kavod'. The Rambam explains that Moshe was seeking an understanding of God in a **specific** sense which would enable him to see God as a **separate** entity. He was granted a limited experience, being able to see God 'from behind' - i.e. somewhat distinguishable but not clear.

23. THE wisest man, our Teacher Moses, asked two things of God, and received a reply respecting both. The one thing he asked was, that God should let him know His true essence. The other, which in fact he asked first, that God should let him know His attributes. In answer to both these petitions God promised that **He would let him know all His attributes, and that these were nothing but His actions**. He also told him that His true essence could not be perceived, and pointed out a method by which he could obtain **the utmost knowledge of God possible for man to acquire**

His petition to know the attributes of God is contained in the following words: "Show me now Your way, that I may know You, that I may find grace in Your sight" (Ex 33:13). Consider how many excellent ideas found expression in the words, "Show me Your way, that I may know You." We learn from them that God is known by His attributes, for Moses believed that he knew Him, when he was shown the way of God.

Consequently the knowledge of the works of God is the knowledge of His attributes, by which He can be known. The fact that God promised Moses to give him a knowledge of His works, may be inferred from the circumstance that God taught him such attributes as refer exclusively to His works, viz., "merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness," etc., (Ex 34:6). It is therefore clear that the ways which Moses wished to know, and which God taught him, are the actions emanating from God. Our Sages call them *middot* (qualities), and speak of the thirteen *middot* of God (Rosh Hashanah 17b)

9. Note the relevance of blue as the symbol of infinity and spirituality - techelet/sea/sky etc.

..... They do not mean to say that God really possesses middot, but that He performs actions similar to such of our actions as originate in certain qualities, i.e., in certain psychical dispositions not that God has really such dispositions.

Whenever any one of His actions is perceived by us, we ascribe to God that emotion which is the source of the act when performed by ourselves, and call Him by an epithet which is formed from the verb expressing that emotion. We see, e.g., how well He provides for the life of the embryo of living beings Similar acts, when performed by us, are due to a certain emotion and tenderness called mercy and pity. God is, therefore, said to be merciful Such instances do not imply that God is influenced by a feeling of mercy, but that acts similar to those which a father performs for his son, out of pity, mercy and real affection, emanate from God solely for the benefit of His pious men, and are by no means the result of any impression or change [produced in God].....

The same is the case with all divine acts: though resembling those acts which emanate from our passions and psychical dispositions, they are not due to anything superadded to His essence.

The principal object of this chapter was to show that all attributes ascribed to God are attributes of His acts, and do not imply that God has any qualities.

Moreh Nevuchim 1:54

24. The prophet does not content himself with explaining that the knowledge of God is the highest kind of perfection. He says, however, that man can only glory in the knowledge of God and in the knowledge of His ways and attributes, which are His actions, as we have shown (1:54) in expounding the passage, "Show me now Your ways" (Exod. 38:13). We are thus told in this passage that the Divine acts which ought to be known, and ought to serve as a guide for our actions, are, *chesed* - loving-kindness, *mishpat* - judgment and *tzedaka* - righteousness.

In a similar manner we have shown (1:54) that the object of the enumeration of God's thirteen attributes is the lesson that we should acquire similar attributes and act accordingly. ... Having acquired this knowledge he will then be determined always to seek loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, and thus to imitate the ways of God. We have explained this many times in this treatise.

God is near to all who call Him, if they call Him in truth, and turn to Him. He is found by every one who seeks Him, if he always goes towards Him, and never goes astray. AMEN.

Moreh Nevuchim 3:54

Rambam ends the Moreh Nevuchim with the understanding that the purpose of life is NOT simply to gain knowledge of God, but to achieve knowledge of his Middot so that we can emulate them and create a world of chesed, mishpat and tzedaka!

In summary:

- Yichud Hashem - God's ultimate Oneness means that we cannot ever have and definitive knowledge of the true essence of God.
- As such, we cannot describe God in positive terms, only in negative.
- This 'negative theology', whilst intellectually accurate, is emotionally unfulfilling. One certainly cannot develop a relationship¹⁰ with a Being only defined in negative terms.
- Therefore God has revealed to his his Middot - attributes through which we perceive His ACTIONS in our world. To define these is NOT to define God but our perception of God.
- Through the mitzva of Vehalachta Bidrachav - copying these Middot - we can then develop a fundamental religious ethic which precedes and underpins even Torah and Mitzvot.

I] OTHER APPROACHES TO DEEPENING AND UNDERSTANDING EMUNA

- Rav Kook has much to say on issues of Emuna in the modern world.

25. האמונה אינה לא שכל ולא רגש, אלא גילוי עצמי היותר יסודי של מהות הנשמה, שצריך להדריך אותה בתכונתה. וכשאיך משחיתים את דרכה הטבעי לה, איננה צריכה לשום תוכן אחר לסעדה, אלא היא מוצאה בעצמה את הכל. בעת החלש אורה, אז בא השכל והרגש לפנות לפניו דרך.

מאמרי הראיה/מאורות האמונה

Rav Kook sees Emuna as an innate and natural force in the Jewish soul. Where there are outside forces which disturb the equilibrium of the soul and prevent the expression of that emunah, intellectual and psycο-emotional routes to emuna may be needed to restore emuna to its natural state.

- Useful reading on Rav Kook's approach to Emuna: Da Ma Shetashiv Le'atzmecha - Rav Zev Karov (1995).

10. Remember that, for the Rambam, this emotive and personal relationship IS required in the mitzva of Ahavat Hashem - see Hilchot Teshuva Chapter 10.

- In Part 1 we discussed Rabbi Norman Lamm's Faith & Doubt.
- Another highly recommended recent (2017) book is Reason to Believe by Rabbi Chaim Jachter. Like Rabbi Lamm's work, this book is also directed towards the observant community and issues of Emuna for people with that background. He deals with many contemporary issues such as archeology, Torah and science and the miracles of modern day Israel, as well as classic issues of morality, theodicy and humanistic objections to Emuna. Rabbi Jachter divides rational connection to Emuna into 5 'portals'
 - #1 - Arguments from Design, the Anthropic Principle and Nature as a Source of Love of God.
 - #2 - The Tradition of Torah - Ramban and Kuzari.
 - #3 - Jewish History and the Aruch HaShulchan's argument for Emuna.
 - #4 - Rav Soloveitchik's Argument from Halacha.
 - #5 - Prophecies which have been fulfilled in our times.
- For classic kiruv-focused arguments and discussions aimed more at the non-observant Jewish world see:
 - Permission to Believe - R. Lawrence Keleman (1991)
 - Reason to Believe - R. Dr. Dovid O (2017)