

# Chag Ha'Emunah: Does the Obligation of Faith Leave Room for Doubt?

Source Sheets  
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פרק ראשון

**א** יסוד היסודות לעמדו בחכמויות – ליידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון, והוא  
אתנוויל בל ובמיין

וככל הנטעאים, משלמים וארץ ומה שביניהם, לא נמצאו אלא מאמנת במאן.

CHAPTER ONE

1. The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being.

היסודות הראשוֹן (בנין פְּנַסְׁךְ) - RAMBAM - ספֶּרֶת מִלְּוָאָה

**האמון** מוצאות פבורה יתברך – והוא: שישם  
"נמצא" שם בכל-זרכיו' ממציאות. הוא עתת' מוצאות הנמצאים  
בקם, בו קיום ממציאות ומן קיומם. ואל עלה על-הכָּבָד  
העדר ממציאות, כי בהעדר ממציאותו – נתבטלה ממציאות כל-  
המצאים ולא נשאר, "נמצא" שתפקידם ממציאותו: נאם עלה על  
לפנו העדר הנמצאים בhem זותתו – לא מתבטל ממציאות לשם יתברך  
יליא תגרען". (ואין האחדות והאחדות אלא לו לבדוק, יתברך שםוי)

א' בבאו מוציא נח). ב' שם לואי פָנְגָנָא. ג' ירושלמי חגיגה פ"ב, ה"א). מה המקומן היותר מתאים מכל החבירוים האחרים. ח' העיר. ו' התיבה להאמין" אינה במקור הערבי הוצאה הולדר. ובתרגום העברי הוצאה הניל' אוקופת היא בסוגרים - מפני שלרבנו ז"ל לא היה עקר זה דבר שבאמונה. אלא דבר מסויל שהוכח באאות ומופתים. אנחנו לא היכפנוו - מפני שרבים מחכמי ישראל ביארו את אני מאמין באמונה שלמה" מלשון אמרונה אומן יעשה זהה. א) ומלשון הכהני: האמתת דברים (שבועות ५). ופירשו: אני משוכנע וידע כדיעה נאמנה. ב' כלומר: למציאות שאין כמוות: מציאות שאינה מוננה ותלויה באחרים; מציאות שאינה מוגבלת לא מקום - שהרוי הוא מקום של עולם אין העולם מקומו" (בראשית רבה סח, ח'; ליק"ש קיב); ולא בזמן - שהוא ראייתם ובלתי תכלית. ח' סיבת מציאותם, ואלמלה הוא - לא היה שיר

### *Mitzvah I*

To believe in the Divinity - to believe that there is a Cause and a Reason which is the Maker of all the creations, as the Exalted One has said (*Exodus* 20:2, *Deuteronomy* 5:6): "I am the L-rd your G-d." And our sages have stated (*Makkoth* 23a): "Six hundred and thirteen mitzvoth were stated to Moses on Sinai. Whence is this derived? (*Deuteronomy* 33:4): 'Torah was commanded to us by Moses.'" That is, the numerical equivalent [*gematria*] of *Torah* is 613. They then ask: "But is this the *gematria* of *Torah*? Is it not 611?" And they answer: "'I am the L-rd your G-d' and 'You shall not have any other gods before Me' were heard from the mouth of the Omnipotent One." It is clear, then, that "I am the L-rd your G-d" is included in the 613 mitzvoth, and it is the commandment to believe, as we have explained.

**25** to believe that the world has one God, who brought all existence into being; by His power and His will does everything come about—all that was, that is, and that will be for time eternal; and that He brought us out from the land of Egypt and gave us the Torah. For it is stated at the beginning of the giving of the Torah [at Mount Sinai], *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage* (Exodus 20: 2);<sup>1</sup> and its meaning is as if He said, "You shall know and believe that the world has a God"; for the word "I" implies [His very real] existence. And when He said, "who brought you out," etc. He meant that "your heart should not be led astray to take the matter of your emergence (liberation) from the slavery of Egypt and the plagues [that afflicted] the Egyptians [as something that happened] by way of chance. Know rather that it is I who took you out through [My] desire and watchful care"—as He had promised our Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The root purpose of this precept needs no explanation. It is a known matter, apparent to all, that this belief is the foundation of the religion; whoever would not believe in it denies the main principle [of the one God in our faith], and he has no portion or merit within Jewry.

The substance of this faith is that a person should determine in his mind that this is the truth, and nothing else of any sort is possible instead. And should it be questioned, let him answer every questioner that this he believes in his heart and will never acknowledge anything else in its stead, even if others should purpose to kill him [for it]. For all this strengthens and sets the heart's belief firmly, when one transforms the potential [of faith] into something actual, i.e. when he affirms with the words of his mouth what his heart has decided. Then if he should merit to rise in levels of wisdom so that with his heart he understands and with his eyes he sees, by clearcut proof, that this belief which he holds is absolutely true—it could not be otherwise—then he shall have fulfilled this *mitzvah* in the very best way.

The laws of this precept are, for example, that it is incumbent upon us to believe about Him that all ability, all grandeur, power and splendor, all eminence, all blessing, all existence—are through Him; and we have neither the power nor the intelligence to conceive and relate His greatness and benevolence; for on account of His immense degree of eminence and glory He can be apperceived by none but Himself alone.<sup>2</sup> [It is for us] to ascribe to him, with all our ability, no shortcoming whatsoever and nothing which is in any way the opposite of total perfection and total excellence.<sup>3</sup> Then there are those matters which derive from it, such as to know that He is immanent, wholly perfect, without any body or physical power of a body: for physical bodies are ultimately subject to deficiencies and shortcomings, while He (be He blessed) is not subject to any kind of deficiency or shortcoming whatever, as we stated. [These] and many other concepts which were expressed on this theme are all explained in the works of those learned in the wisdom of the Divinity. Fortunate are those who attain this [wisdom], for then they will fulfill this *mitzvah* thoroughly.

It is in force in every place, at every time, for both man and woman. Anyone who transgresses it has no portion or merit with the people Israel, as we have stated. This is one of the precepts for which there is no set time, since all the days of a man's life he is required to live with this concept.

יש ביה שלוש מצות עשה ו/or מצוות לא תעשה

[מצוות האפקנה במצוות השם יתפרק]

**כֵּה** להאמין שיש לעולם אלה אחד שהמציא כל הנטען, וממנו וחתכו היה כל מה שהוא, והנה ולשוניה לעצמי עד, וכי הוא החזיאנו מארץ מצרים ונען לנו את התורה, שוגמר בחלוקת נתינת התורה: אנכי "אלハイ אשר החזאתיך מארץ מצרים וגו". ופרושו כאלו אמר, "פדרוי ותאומינו שיש לעולם אלה", כי מלחת אנכי חורה על המצוות. ואשר אמר "אשר החזאתיך" וככלו לומר שלא ישפט לבבכם לקחת ענן צאתכם מעבדות מצרים ומכוון נטיצרים ורך מקורה, אלא רעי שאנכי שהוזאתיך אתם בחפות ובחשגה, כמו שהבטיט לאבותיכי אברךם יצחק ויעקב.

שרש מצונה זו אין אידך באור, דעתך ודברך ונגלה לכל פ"י קאמונה זו יסוד הרוח, ואשר לא יאמין בזו כופר בעקר ואין לו חלק ונוכחות עם ישראל. הענן האפקנה הוא שיקבע בנפשו שהאמת בן ושאי אפשר חלוף זה בשום עניין. ואם ישאל עליון, ישיב לבן שואל שזה יאמין לבן ולא יודה בחלוף זה אפילו יאמרו לך גנו, שפל זה מתיוקן וקובע האפקנה הלב פשומוציה ורבך מן הפה אל הפעל, רצוני לומר פשיקים בדרכיו פיו מה שלבנו גומר. ואם יזכה לעילו במעלות החכמה ולבבו בין ובעינו יראה במוות ותחק שהפקנה זו שהיא אמת וברור, אי אפשר להיות דבר בלתי זה, או יקיים מצות עשה זו מצעה מן הפוך.

דיברי מצונה זו, בגין מה שמחיב עליינו להאמין עליו שבל הילich ובל הנדרלה והגבירה ותפארת וכל הבוד וכל הברכה וכל תקדים בו, ושאין לנו כתם ושכל להשיג ולהגיד קדלו וטובו, כי לרוב מעלו ורדו לא ישוג רק לעצמו, ולשלל מפנו בכל פחנו כל חסרון וכל מה שהוא הפק כל שלמות וכל מעלה, והענינים היוציאים מזה בגין לדעת שהוא נמצא, שלם, בלתי גוף ולא כתם בגוף, כי הגופים ישיגום החסרנות והו ברוך והוא לא ישיגו מין ממני החסרון, כמו שאמרנו; ושאר דברים רבים הנאים בענינו זה, כלם מבארים בספרי ירושלamic חכמת האלוהות. אשר הוויכים אליך כי אז יקומו מצונה זו על בריה.

ונוחגת בכל מקום ובכל זמן בזקרים ונקבות. ועובדך אליך אין לו חלק ונוכחות עם ישראל, כמו שאמרנו. וזה ממן המצוות שאין להם ומפני דוע שבל ימי הארץ כי לחיות במחשבה זו.

P. N. Vasserman (1874 - 1941)



descendants of the biblical Children of Israel." And so he summoned a Jewish sage, and asked him about his faith.

(11) [1] The Rabbi said to him: "We believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Who took the Jews out of Egypt with great wonders and miracles, Who sustained them in the desert, and Who gave them the land of Canaan as their inheritance after He split both the Red Sea<sup>32</sup> and the Jordan River<sup>33</sup> with great miracles. This God sent Moses to give His Torah, and later thousands of prophets throughout history who exhorted the populace to follow the Torah, and who taught about the great reward for those who observe it and the arduous punishment for those who violate it.

[2] "We believe in everything that is written in the Torah, which is a massive amount of information."

(12) Said the Kuzari: "I was correct in my original resolve not to ask a Jew, because I knew that Jews have lost their connection to their past and have no depth of wisdom. This is no doubt a result of their history of destitution and misery, which has left them without any positive characteristics. You, Jew, should have said that you believe in a Creator, Who organizes and oversees the universe, and Who created you and sustains you, and other such ideas that are universal to all religions. Those ideas are the real reasons to pursue truth and emulate the Creator's righteousness and wisdom, [and not the specific miracles that you mentioned that happened during isolated periods]."

(13) The Rabbi responded: "What you are referring to is religion arrived at through logic and analysis. [But because it is arrived at through these means,] it is subject to much ambiguity. That is why when you ask philosophers their opinion about religion, you find that they are unable to agree on one proper routine of conduct<sup>34</sup> or on one philosophy.<sup>35</sup> This is because philosophers base their religion on logi-

cal arguments, some of which are based on absolute fact, others [that are not proven but] that seem reasonable, and others that are not even intellectually satisfying, let alone based on fact. [I, on the other hand, speak of tangible events as the basis of our religion.]"

14 The Kuzari said: "Your words make more sense now than when you began speaking. I would like to continue this conversation."

15 The Rabbi said: "To the contrary—my opening words are the greatest proof to my religion, and moreover, they require no additional demonstrations or proofs!"

16 Asked the Kuzari: "How so?"

17 The Rabbi answered: "If you give me permission to preface my words, I will gladly explain. I think these introductory remarks are necessary since my words seem a burden to you and are being easily dismissed."

18 The Kuzari said: "State your introductory remarks and I will listen."

19 The Rabbi said: "Let us say you were told that we have evidence that the king of India is a benevolent man, worthy of praise and honor. The proof of this is in the fact that the subjects of his kingdom are all righteous, kind, and upstanding. Would you believe this 'attestation' of the king, and feel compelled to praise him?"

20 Replied the Kuzari: "Why should I? Who can tell—maybe the Indians are righteous without a king at all. Maybe they are righteous because of their king. Or, maybe it's a combination of both."

21 The Rabbi said: "Now, let us say Indian messengers bring you special Indian gifts. You have irrefutable evidence that they could have only come from the king's palace, and they are accompanied by letters clearly bearing the king's distinguished seal and handwriting. Along with the letters are medicines that can cure you of all your maladies and preserve your health. Also included are poisons and chemicals that you can use against enemies, and they are so powerful that you can fight whole battles using just this chemical warfare without any other

32. Exodus 14.

33. Joshua 3.

34. For example, one camp of philosophers may believe that kindness to others is the most important conduct. Others may feel that asceticism is most important, and so on (O.N.).

35. We find, for example, that Plato and his camp believed in a primordial matter, in contrast to Aristotle's belief in eternal existence. See part 67.

weapons.<sup>36</sup> Would you not then feel obliged to pledge your attention and allegiance to this king?"

**22** The Kuzari replied: "Absolutely. My initial doubt as to whether or not the Indians even have a king would be removed, and I would also believe that this king and his interests are of benefit to me."

**23** The Rabbi asked: "And if someone should ask you your opinion about this king, what would you say?"

**24** The Kuzari said: "I would start with praises that describe what I knew about the king based on the evidence of his gifts, and then I would add additional accolades [based on what I had heard about him] that were confirmed [through those gifts]."

\* (25) [1] The Rabbi said: "This is exactly the way I responded to you when you first made your inquiry. This is also how Moses first spoke with Pharaoh when he told him that the 'God of the Hebrews' had sent him.<sup>37</sup> Moses referred to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because it was well-known amongst the nations of that time that God had communicated with these men, guided them, and performed miracles for them. Note that Moses did not say that the 'God of heaven and earth' had sent him, nor did he refer to Him as 'He who created us all.' Similarly, when God first spoke to the Jewish people [at Mount Sinai] He declared, 'I am the Lord your God Who took you out of Egypt,<sup>38</sup> and not 'I am the Creator of the Universe and your Creator.'

[2] "This is how I started to respond when you asked me about my faith. I answered what I and the rest of the Jewish people are obliged to

36. In his parable, the Rabbi lists three good things that the king can do: (1) he can heal your sickness, (2) he can preserve your health, and (3) he can ward off your enemies. This corresponds to three consecutive verses in Exodus 23, in which God states how He will help the Jewish people: (1) Verse 25: "And you shall serve the Lord your God, and He shall bless your bread and water. I shall remove sickness from your midst." (2) Verse 26: "There shall be no woman who miscarries or is barren; I will make the number of your days complete." and (3) Verse 27: "I will send My terror before you, and will confound all nations that you encounter. I will cause all your enemies to put their backs to you" (K.Y.).

37. Exodus 5:3.

38. Exodus 20:2.

believe based on our first-hand encounter with God [at Mount Sinai]. We have passed down this account, without interruption, from generation to generation, and so even today it is as if we are eyewitnesses to the event."

**26** The Kuzari said: "If this is so, it would seem that your Torah was only given to you Jews, and no one else is bound by it."

**27** The Rabbi said: "You are right, but non-Jews who wish to adhere to the Torah will still be rewarded as we are, just not to the same degree.<sup>39</sup> If the requirement to follow the Torah were based on the fact that God created us, then all people—white and black alike—would be obliged to follow it. Rather, we Jews are obliged to follow the Torah because God took us out of Egypt and attached His glory to us. God did this specifically for us, as we are known as the 'choicest' of all mankind."<sup>40</sup>

\* (28) The Kuzari said: "Careful, Jew, you are regressing. Your speech has gone lean after having been copious."

**29** The Rabbi responded: "Lean or copious—just please keep an open mind until I have explained myself."

**30** The Kuzari said: "Say what you wish."

**31** The Rabbi said: "Regarding organic behavior, we find that creatures require nourishment, they grow, reproduce their own kind, and each type of creature has its own necessary qualities and conditions. This is true about the plant and animal kingdoms, to the exclusion of nonliving things in nature such as earth, stone, metals, and pure elements."

**32** The Kuzari said: "An over-simplification, but nevertheless true."

**33** The Rabbi said: "And regarding animal behavior, all animals share the same life force, which provides them with mobility, natural

39. This is based on the talmudic precept: "Greater is he who is commanded and does than he who is not commanded and does." While a gentile who performs the *mitzvot* is rewarded, his level of reward is that of one "who is not commanded," and therefore his reward is less. See par. 111.

40. Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, and 26:18.