

iBelieve: Part Two

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The Command to Believe

Sefer HaMitzvot LaRambam, Mitzvot Ase 1:1

The first commandment is a command to believe in God, and to believe that there is a creator and cause for all that is in existence, and this is what God said: "I am Hashem Your God."

Nachmanides

I saw the Ba'al Halachot (BaHaG) did not count [belief in God] as a mitzvah within the 613 mitzvot...

It appears his logic is that we only count in the 613 mitzvot His decrees to do or not to do certain things, however believing in His existence, which he has revealed to us through signs and miracles and the revelation of His presence – that is the foundation from which all the mitzvot sprout forth. Therefore, it is not counted.

ספר המצוות לרמב"ם, מצוות עשה א'א'

(א) היא הצווי אשר צונו בהאמנת האלהות, והוא שנאמין שיש שם עלה וסבה הוא פועל לכל הנמצאים, והוא אמרו אנכי ה' אלהיך.

רמב"ן שם

ראיתי לבעל ההלכות שלא ימנה אותה מצוה בכלל תרי"ג... והנראה מדעתו שלבעל ההלכות שאין מנין תרי"ג מצות אלא גזירותיו יתעלה שגזר עלינו לעשות או מנענו שלא נעשה, אבל האמונה במציאותו יתעלה שהודיע אותה אלינו באותות ובמופתים ובגילוי השכינה לעינינו הוא העיקר והשורש שממנו נולדו המצות לא ימנה בחשבונן.

1. How can there be a command to believe in God if I first have to believe in a God that commands?
2. I either believe or I don't believe. What is the command to believe?

Rabbi Benjamin Blech, Understanding Judaism (pg. 255)

When scientists speak of proof, they seek to demonstrate with absolute certainty. When theologians use the term with regard to God, they mean simply this: In an area where demonstrable proof is both impossible and, from God's perspective, undesirable, how can one nevertheless "prove" that, where a choice must be made between two ultimately unverifiable options, one is far more logical than the other? "Proofs" in this context refer to the most legitimate alternatives. It is in this sense that Jewish philosophers do not hesitate to offer highly convincing demonstrations – in fact so convincing that to reject them requires a suspension of logic and a "belief" in the unbelievable.

Proving the Existence of God

Cosmological Proof

Bereishit Rabbah 39:1

(1) (1) YHVH said to Abram, "Go you forth from your land..." ... Rabbi Yitzchak said: this may be compared to a man who was traveling from place to place when he saw a bira doleket/castle aglow/lit up (full of light/in flames). He said, "Is it possible that this castle lacks a person to look after it? The owner of the building looked out and said, "I am the owner of the castle." Similarly, because Abraham our father said, "Is it possible that this castle has no guide, no one to look after it?," the Holy Blessed One looked out and said to him, "I am the Master of the Universe." ... Hence, God said to Avraham, Lech Lecha.

בראשית רבה ל"ט:א'

(א) ויאמר ה' אל אברהם לך לך מארצך וגו' (בראשית יב, א), רבי יצחק פתח (תהלים מה, יא): שמעי בת וראי והטי אזניך ושכחי עמך ובית אביך, אמר רבי יצחק משל לאחד שנהיה עובר ממקום למקום, וראה בירה אחת דולקת, אמר תאמר שנהבירה הזו בלא מנהיג, הציץ עליו בעל הבירה, אמר לו אני הוא בעל הבירה. כך לפי שנהיה אבינו אברהם אמר תאמר שנהעולם הזה בלא מנהיג, הציץ עליו הקדוש ברוך הוא ואמר לו אני הוא בעל העולם. (תהלים מה, יב): ויתאו המלך יפגד כי הוא אדוניך. ויתאו המלך יפגד, ליפוטך בעולם, (תהלים מה, יב): והשתחוי לו, הוי ויאמר ה' אל אברהם.

Historical Proof

Rav Tzadok HaKohen from Lublin
And not just through the exodus can a person recognize and know the certainty of faith, rather from all the miracles and wonders that have been done to our fathers and us.

ר' צדוק הכהן מלובלין - ספר הזכרונות מצות עשה אנוכי ולא מיציאת מצרים בלבד יוכל האדם להבחין ולדעת בירור אמונה זו אלא מכל הניסים והנפלאות שנעשו לאבותינו ולנו.

Proof from Prophecy, relationship, and experience

Kuzari, Rabbi Yeshuda HeLevi

The Khazar king: How can I individualize a being if I am not able to point to it and can only prove its existence by its actions?

The Rabbi: It can be designated by prophetic or visionary means. Demonstration can lead astray. Demonstration was the mother of heresy and destructive ideas....

There are differences in the ways of demonstration, of which some are more extended than others. Those who go to the utmost length are the philosophers, and the ways of their arguments led them to teach of a Supreme Being which neither benefits nor injures, and knows nothing of our prayers, offerings, obedience, or disobedience, and that the world is as eternal as He himself. None of them applies a distinct proper name to God, except he who hears His address, command, or prohibition, approval for obedience, and reproof for disobedience. He bestows on Him some name as a designation for Him who spoke to him, and he is convinced that He is the Creator of the world from nothing. The first man would never have known Him if He had not addressed, rewarded and punished him, and had not created Eve from one of his ribs. This gave him the conviction that this was the Creator of the world, whom he designated by words and attributes, and styled 'ה בשם'.

Without this, he would have been satisfied with the name *Elohim*, neither perceiving what He was, nor whether He was a unity or many, whether He was cognizant of individuals or not. Cain and Abel were made acquainted with the nature of His being by the communications of their father as well as by prophetic intuition. Then Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and the prophets called Him intuitively "Lord," as also did the people, having been taught by tradition that His influence and guidance were with men. His influence also being with the pious, they comprehended Him by means of intermediaries called: glory, *Shechina*, dominion, fire, cloud, likeness, form, "the appearance of the bow," (*Yechezkel* 1:28), etc. For they proved to them that He had spoken to them, and they styled it: Glory of God. Occasionally they addressed the holy ark by the name of God, as it is written: "Rise up, O Lord," (*Bamidbar* 10:35, 36), when they made a start, and "Return, O Lord" when they halted, or "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of the trumpet" (*Tehillim* 47:6). With all this, only the ark of the Lord is meant. Sometimes the name "Lord" was applied to the connecting link between God and Israel, as it is written: "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate you?" (*Tehillim* 139:21). By "haters of the Lord" are meant those who hate the name, or covenant, or the law of God. For there exists no connection between God and any other nation, as He pours out His light only on the select people. They are accepted by Him, and He by them. He is called "the God of Israel," while they are "the people of the Lord," and "the people of the God of Abraham." (4:3)

The Khazar king: Now I understand the difference between *Elohim* and the Tetragrammaton, and I see how far the God of Abraham is different from that of Aristotle. Man yearns for the Tetragrammaton as a matter of love, taste, and conviction, while attachment to *Elohim* is the result of speculation. A feeling of the former kind invites its votaries to give their life for His sake, and to prefer death to His absence. Speculation, however, makes veneration only a necessity as long as it entails no harm, but bears no pain for its sake. I would, therefore, excuse Aristotle for thinking lightly about the observation of the law, since he doubts whether God has any cognizance of it. (4:16)

Perhaps this was Abraham's point of view when divine power and unity dawned upon him prior to the revelation accorded to him. **As soon as this took place, he gave up all his speculations and only strove to gain favor of God**, having ascertained what this was and how and where it could be obtained. The Sages explain the words: 'And he brought him forth abroad' (*Bereishit* 15) thus: Give up your horoscopy! This means: Forsake astrology as well as any other doubtful study of nature. (4:27)

“The Source of Faith Is Faith Itself,”: Rav Aaron Lichtenstein

The greatest source of faith, however, has been the G-d Himself...

Encounter, of course, has been varied. In part, it has been channeled --primarily through the learning of Torah (this is no doubt an aspect of "the light within it," of which our Sages spoke) but also through prayer and the performance of mitzvahs; or, if you will, by the halachic regimen in its totality. In part, it has been random-- moments of illumination while getting on a crowded bus or watching children play in a park at twilight.

Obviously, it has also been greatly varied in intensity. In its totality, however, whatever the form and content, it has been the ultimate basis of spiritual life.²⁰

This will obviously provide little guidance for those to whom attaining encounter is precisely the problem. To those "struggling to develop faith" one can, however, proffer first the reassuring assertion of the religious significance of the quest per se, as in the footsteps of Abraham, they have already-become seekers of G-d; second, the prospective hope of successful resolution, as "The Lord is good unto them that yearn for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him" (*Eicha* 3:25); and third, the counsel to focus persistently, in terms of Coleridge's familiar distinction, upon faith rather than belief, upon experiential trust, dependence and submission more than upon catechetical dogmatics. Intellectual assent is normative and essential; but, at the personal level, it is generally not the key. In the final analysis, the primary human source of faith is faith itself.

At the level of rational demonstration, this is, of course, patently circular. I hold no brief for Anselm's ontological proof and I recognized the theoretical possibility of self-delusion long before I had ever heard of Feuerbach. Existentially, however, nothing has been more authentic than the encounter with Our Father, Our King, the source and ground of all being. Nothing more sustaining, nothing more strengthening, nothing more vivifying.



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