

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Simchah *ben Yonah a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

What is *Emunah*?

To Believe or to Know

At the very beginning of his monumental *halachic* treatise (*Yad Hachazakah*), the Rambam presents a concise list of the 613 *mitzvos*. The first item is the mitzvah of *emunah* (faith):

“The first of the positive commandments is to **know** that G-d exists...”

The *Ma'aseh Rokeach* (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 1:1*) points out that the Rambam's choice of wording was quite deliberate. He specifically stated to “know” as opposed to “believe,” as this is the guideline for the mitzvah. A person doesn't “believe” that he has two hands; he *knows* it. Such should be his perception of Hashem's existence as well.

However, looking to another of the Rambam's works, the *Sefer Hamitzvos*, we find a significant change in the wording. In the first mitzvah there, the Rambam writes:

“He has commanded us with the mitzvah of **belief** in G-d: that we should **believe** that there exists One Who is the Creator and Cause of everything in existence.”

Here, the Rambam seems to stress that the mitzvah does not demand a level of actual knowledge of Hashem's existence but rather, obligates a person only to “believe” in Him. Is this a contradiction?

Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein (*Borchi Nafshi*, pp. 634-5) contends that, in fact, there is no discrepancy. If anything, the Rambam's two statements complement and elucidate one another. The goal and zenith of the mitzvah is to arrive at the level of “knowing” Hashem; at the very least, however, one fulfills the basic obligation by merely “believing.”

The matter can be compared to the mitzvah of *talmud* Torah (Torah study). A well-known Mishnah (which has been incorporated into the daily morning blessings) speaks about the parameters of this mitzvah. The Mishnah states (*Pe'ah 1:1*):

“The following items have no specific amount: *pe'ah* (a certain obligatory present for the poor), *bikkurim* (first fruits brought to the Beis Hamikdash), *rei'ayon* (sacrifices associated with the pilgrimage), acts of kindness and Torah study.”

According to the Mishnah, the above-mentioned *mitzvos* do not have any biblically mandated minimum amount. The mitzvah of *pe'ah*, for example, could be fulfilled with even a small amount of grain. The bare obligation of *talmud* Torah can be discharged even without learning for hours and hours. Hence, the Gemara tells us (*Menachos 99b*) that – technically speaking –

one could fulfill his obligation of daily and nightly Torah study by merely reciting the Shema in the morning and the evening (as by doing so he is reciting and “learning” these *pesukim*).

However, as the Ran points out (*Nedarim 8a*), the real mitzvah does not end there. Although one has technically fulfilled the bare bones minimum of his obligation by merely saying Shema, he is not completely exempt. Rather, to perform the mitzvah of learning Torah in its most complete sense, one must exert himself to learn constantly – day and night – according to his true abilities.

And so it is with *emunah*. By merely acknowledging and having “faith” in Hashem, one does, technically, fulfill his obligation. Comparatively speaking, however, that is the “easy part.” For the rest of his life, he must strive to work on and increase the strength and conviction of his belief, to the extent that he’ll actually *know* that Hashem is here.

The trick is, how to get there. This brings us to our second set of seemingly contradictory passages in the Rambam.

Sour Milk

This week’s *parshah* deals with some *mitzvos* that share some common threads with *emunah*. “And now, Yisrael, what does Hashem ask of you, other than to fear Hashem your G-d... and to love Him,” (*Devarim 10:12*).

How does one gain these attributes of fear and love of Hashem? According to the Rambam, the way to do so is through contemplating the wonders of Hashem’s Creation. By observing the myriad marvels around him, “He immediately comes to love, praise, glorify, and yearn with a burning desire **to know** the Great Hashem...” (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 2:1*).

In the *Sefer Hamitzvos*, however, the Rambam seems to offer different advice. To gain knowledge of and love for Hashem, he directs one to employ “contemplation and careful study of the *mitzvos* and Words of Hashem... until one attains understanding, which brings immense pleasure...” (*Mitzvah 3*). From here, it appears that Torah study is the catalyst.

Once again, there really is no inherent contradiction. R’ Mottel Progomansky (*see Peninim Mishulchan Gavo’ah, parshas Eikev*) explains the Rambam’s intent through the following illustration:

A highly acclaimed intellectual was once shown one of the classic works of art of all time. The crowd waited in anticipation of this critic’s opinion: what pearls of ingenuity and deep meaning would he perceive and reveal about this famous painting? After several moments of peering carefully at the work, this savant was ready to render his judgment.

“Well?” they asked him. “What do you think? What do you see?”

“Sour milk,” was his reply.

The onlookers were mystified. What, indeed, was he talking about?

Suddenly, one of them approached the critic. “May I see your glasses?” asked the questioner. The critic obliged.

Observing the intellectual’s pair of glasses, this brave individual announced his discovery. “You see,” he explained to the others, “there are stains of sour milk on his lenses.”

The same – concluded R’ Mottel – applies to those who view the world. Of course, by observing Creation one can gain a true appreciation of the Creator. But only if his view is not blurred or tainted by foreign or biased tendencies. By first donning “Torah-glasses,” his vision will be unobstructed.

And so Hashem can be “found” by examining the work of His Hands. But to ensure that his vision is clear enough to do so, one must first delve into the Torah, which will purify his outlook.