

WALKING THE WALK

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

"I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt" (Shemos 20:2)

The Rambam cites the first commandment as the basis for his opinion that "emunah" - belief in Hashem, is a precept.[1] This disputes the position of the Behag (Ba'al Halachos Gedolos) who does not record belief in Hashem as one of the six hundred thirteen mitzvos. In the Behag's defense, the Ramban explains that by definition a "mitzva" - "commandment" presupposes that there is a G-d who commands. Therefore, belief in Hashem cannot be a mitzva; a person must believe that Hashem exists before he can observe His commandments.[2] How does the Rambam address this problem?

The Sefer Hachinuch records "shisha mitzvos temidios" - "six commandments which a Jew has a constant obligation to perform". Among them, he includes the mitzva of believing in Hashem.[3] Once a person has determined that Hashem exists and that He is eternal, how does he fulfill the mitzva of believing in Hashem with every passing day? It is illogical to assume that a person continues to receive credit for something which he has already accomplished.

While a person may intellectually know something to be true, that knowledge does not automatically become part of the reality of his life. Knowing that Hashem exists and that nothing in this world occurs without His direction and will, does not ensure that this knowledge is part of our immediate reality, and may have no bearing on the manner in which we conduct our lives. Hence, it is possible to be both a believer and a sinner by failing to live with the reality of Hashem's existence. Consequently, even though the a priori knowledge of Hashem's existence is required prior to the existence of a mitzva, we can be commanded to make this knowledge part of our conscious reality. Our actions and behavior should reflect our knowledge that Hashem exists. Thus, making Hashem a greater part of our conscious reality is an ongoing process. It is therefore possible, as the Chinuch states, to be obligated in the belief of Hashem on a constant basis.

1. Sefer Hamitzvos #1 2. Ramban ibid. See Ibn Ezra Parshas Va'eschanan 3. Introduction to Sefer Hachinuch. See Biur Halacha Orech Chaim #1

Protectsia Defined

In his commentary on the Mishna, the Rambam introduces Thirteen Principals of Faith which a Jew is required to observe.[1] The Chasam Sofer, in his responsa opposes elevating particular portions of the Torah over others; a person is required to believe in every word of the Torah. How then, he asks,

can the Rambam submit thirteen required principals which take precedence over all other aspects of Torah?[2]

The Midrash states that Hashem offered the Torah to the nations of the world prior to offering it to Bnei Yisroel.[3] This implies that the Patriarchal relationship which Bnei Yisroel enjoy is not a prerequisite to receiving the Torah. Why then is it necessary to begin the Torah with Sefer Bereishis, which details the Patriarchal relationship, and not with the Sinaitic revelation?

The Mishna states that a love relationship which is dependant upon a particular reason will dissipate when the reason ceases to exist. If the relationship is not dependant upon a reason it will endure. The Mishna offers as an example the relationship between Dovid and Yonason.[4] How does a person love another for no reason? If no specific qualities were needed to inspire Dovid's love for Yonason what made the relationship unique? Why did Dovid not exhibit this love for everyone?

At its inception, the formation of every relationship is dependant upon a reason. Whether it is physical or emotional, this reason allows the relationship to flourish. What the Mishna is describing as a relationship that is not dependant upon a reason is one which continues to develop until it transcends into a union which no longer requires the initial reason that was the prerequisite for the relationship. The entire Sefer Bereishis is a record of how our forefathers, who were chosen by Hashem for their exemplary qualities, were able to transform their relationship with Him into one that would endure even when they would no longer exhibit these qualities. This enabled the Sinaitic covenant to be forged as a relationship which would endure eternally, even at times when Bnei Yisroel would not adhere to the precepts contained within the Torah. The obligations that a father and son have to each other are not the basis for their relationship, rather what binds the son to his father is the fact that he is his son. Similarly, what binds Bnei Yisroel to Hashem is that through the efforts of the Patriarchs we are elevated to the status of His children. This became evident after the sin of the Golden Calf when Moshe called upon Hashem to remember the efforts of the Patriarchs; their efforts serve as the underpinnings of Bnei Yisroel's relationship with Hashem.[5] Had the nations of the world accepted the Torah their relationship with Hashem would have been one based upon the mutual exchange of promises and commitments which would be subject to revocation in the case of either party reneging upon those commitments.

Even though this relationship no longer requires any particular reason in order for it to endure, there are certain criteria which define the very fabric of the relationship. These are the fundamental principles of faith. Although, as the Chasam Sofer states, a person who denies any portion of the Torah is a heretic, if one is unaware of a certain precept or even violates the precept willingly, he is still within the parameters of the relationship and cannot be classified as a non-believer. However, if a person denounces one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith or is simply unaware of its existence, he has excluded himself from any relationship with Hashem for he does not adhere to the criteria which form the basis of the relationship. This notion is supported by the Shelah HaKadosh who comments that the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy which reflect Hashem's relationship with Bnei Yisroel

correspond to the Thirteen Principles of Faith; they define the essence of the relationship itself.[6] After the sin of the Golden calf Hashem instructed Moshe to teach Bnei Yisroel the Thirteen Attributes, for by reciting them they focus upon the very nature of the relationship. Thus, their prayers do not go unanswered.[7]

1.Introduction to 13th chapter of Sanhedrin

2.Yoreh De'ah 356

3.Sifri 343

4.Pirkei Avos 5:19

5.Shemos 32:13

6.Sha'ar Ha'osios Sha'ar Aleph

7.Shemos 34:7, Rosh Hashana 17b