

Parshat Vayera - What is Faith?

1. Nechemiah 9:7-8

אתה-הוא, ה' ה-לקים, אשר בחרת באברם, והוצאתו מאור כשדים; ושמת שמו, אברהם. ומצאת את-לבבו, נאמן לפניך...
You are He, Eternal, G-d, Who chose Avram and brought him out from *Ur Kasdim* and gave him the name Avraham. You found his heart faithful before You...

2. Makkot 23b-24a

דרש רבי שמלאי שש מאות ושלש עשרה מצות נאמרו לו למשה שלש מאות וששים וחמש לאוין כמנין ימות החמה ומאתים וארבעים ושמונה עשה כנגד איבריו של אדם אמר רב המנונא מאי קרא (דברים לג) תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה תורה בגימטריא שית מאה וחד סרי הוי אנכי ולא יהיה לך מפי הגבורה שמענום... בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת שנאמר (חבקוק ב) וצדיק באמונתו יחיה
Rabbi Simlai expounded: 613 mitzvot were said to Moshe; 365 negative mitzvot, the same as the number of days of the year, and 248 positive mitzvot, corresponding to the limbs of the body. Rav Hamnuna said, "What is the proof text? "Moshe commanded us Torah..." (Devarim 33). 'Torah' in gematria is 611, 'I am the L-rd, your G-d' and 'You shall have no other gods' were heard from the Almighty... Chavakuk came and established them all on a single mitzvah, as the verse states, "the righteous shall live by his faith" (Chavakuk 2).

3. Shabbat 104a

נר"ן כפופה נר"ן פשוטה נאמן כפוף נאמן פשוט
Bent *nun*, simple *nun* – bent believer, simple believer.

4. Bertrand Russell *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* p. 15 (1918) **Feedbooks**.

"Are there two ways of knowing, which may be called respectively reason and intuition? And if so, is either to be preferred to the other?"

5. Based on *Avi Ezri Hilchos Teshuva* 5:5

Rav Shach once asked his teacher, the Brisker Rav the following question:

"Recognition of the Creator is so obvious – a person can see with his own two eyes that the Creator exists. What is the alternative? Why is the knowledge of God considered 'faith'?"

The Brisker Rav replied that he had asked his father, Rav Chaim of Brisk, the same question. Rav Chaim answered that it is true that knowledge of God through the clear evidence of creation is not considered 'faith.' However 'knowledge' and intellectual awareness of God is only the first step. The place where the intellect stops is where faith begins."

The Brisker Rav continued to explain: "A person's intellect is limited – each person at their own level. The brain cannot understand concepts that are outside space and time. It is impossible to recognize things that are outside the conceptual vision and understanding. The human intellect is limited. Therefore, where the intellect ends is where faith begins."

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6. *Beis HaLevi Shemos 12:43 (Parshat Bo p. 14a)*

הרי עיקר מצות אמונה הוא שנאמין בכל דברי התורה וכפי הקבלה מרבתינו גם מה שאי אפשר לנו לבררו על ידי מופת חותך. דהרי כל מה שנתברר להאדם במופת זה נקרא ידיעה ואינו בכלל אמונה עדיין ואנחנו מצוים להאמין וזהו בדברים שאין השכל משיג אותם במופת, וכל זמן שלא יאמין רק במה שנתברר לו במופת אין לו חלק במצות אמונה כלל.

The mitzvah of faith is to believe in all the words of the Torah and the explanations that we have received from our Rabbis, even those things that are impossible to prove based on evidence. Everything that is clearly proven is called 'knowledge,' not faith. The commandment to believe applies to those things that cannot be proven rationally. If a person only believes in the things that are demonstrably true, he has not yet fulfilled the mitzvah of 'faith'.

7. Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, p 50

Now it is such a bizarrely improbably coincidence that anything so mind-bogglingly useful [the Babel fish] could have evolved by chance that some thinkers have chosen to see it as a final and clinching proof of the non-existence of God.

The argument goes something like this: "I refuse to prove that I exist," says God, "for proof denies faith, and without faith I am nothing."

"But," says Man, "the Babel fish is a dead giveaway isn't it? It could not have evolved by chance. It proves you exist, and so therefore, by your own arguments, you don't. QED"

"Oh dear," says God, "I hadn't thought of that," and promptly vanishes in a puff of logic. Then Man says, "my, that was easy" and goes on to prove that black is white, and gets killed on the next zebra crossing.

8. Sefer HaMitzvot 1

המצווה הראשונה היא הציווי שנצטוונו להאמין באלהות, והוא: שנאמין שיש עילה וסיבה, שהיא הפועל לכל הנמצאים. וזהו אמרו יתעלה: "אנכי ה' אלקיך" (שמות כ, ב ודברים ה, ו).

The first mitzvah is the commandment that we are commanded to believe in G-d. This is that we are commanded to believe that there exists a first cause and reason, which animates everything that exists. This is the meaning of the verse, "I am the L-rd, your G-d" (Shemot 20:2 and Devarim 5:6).

9. Mishneh Torah Yesodei HaTorah 1:1

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות, לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון.

The foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there exists a Prime Mover.

10. Kapach on Ramban's Commentary to Mishna vol. 2 p. 133 footnote 2

The correct meaning of this word is 'knowledge', 'worldview' or 'logic' that a person holds to be correct and true, whether he reached that knowledge through investigation or received wisdom. I have translated it here as 'faith' since that is how most of the Rishonim translated it, even though in other places I avoided this word for the sake of clarifying the matter.

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The first time that *Ani Maamin* was printed in the siddur was only with the fifth edition of the siddur in Prague, in 1536.

11. *Guide for the Perplexed* Section I chapter 50¹

When reading my present treatise, bear in mind that by "faith" we do not understand merely that which is uttered with the lips, but also that which is apprehended by the soul, the conviction that the object [of belief] is exactly as it is apprehended. If, as regards real or supposed truths, you content yourself with giving utterance to them in words, without apprehending them or believing in them, especially if you do not seek real truth, you have a very easy task as, in fact, you will find many ignorant people professing articles of faith without connecting any idea with them.... For belief is only possible after the apprehension of a thing; it consists in the conviction that the thing apprehended has its existence beyond the mind [in reality] exactly as it is conceived in the mind. If in addition to this we are convinced that the thing cannot be different in any way from what we believe it to be, and that no reasonable argument can be found for the rejection of the belief or for the admission of any deviation from it, then the belief is true. Renounce desires and habits, follow your reason, and study what I am going to say in the chapters which follow...

12. *Sefer HaChinuch* Mitzvah 25

ענין האמנה הוא שיקבע בנפשו שהאמת ושאי איפשר חלוף זה בשום פנים. ואם יושאל עליו ישיב לכל שואל שזה יאמין לברו ולא יודה בחלוף זה אפילו יאמרו להרגו.

The concept of faith is that a person should fix in his soul that it is true, and the opposite is completely impossible. If someone asks him he will answer that this is what his heart believes and he will not admit to the opposite, even on the pain of death.

13. *Chovot HaLevavot* Shaar HaYichud chapter 3

אך לדעת אם אנו חייבים לחקור על הייחוד בדרך העיון אם לא, אומר: כי כל מי שיוכל לחקור על העניין הזה והדומה לו מן העניינים המושכלים בדרך הסברה השכלית, חייב לחקור עליו כפי השגתו וכוח הכרתו. וכבר הקדמתי בתחילת הספר הזה מן הדברים המראים חיוב העניין מה שיש בו די. והמתעלם מחקור הרי זה מגונה, ונחשב מן המקצרים בחכמה ובמעשה.

Are we are obligated to investigate G-d's unity using reason or not? I say that as much as a person is able to investigate using reason or similar concepts of logic using the intellect he is obligated to do so to the best of his ability and the limit of his knowledge. I have already written at the beginning of this book about things which demonstrate the obligation to investigate sufficiently. Someone who avoids investigation is despicable, and is considered of little wisdom and little action.

¹ Translation by Friedländer (1904), at sacred-texts.com

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14. Rav Moshe Cordovero *Ohr Neerav* section 2 chapter 1

אין ספק כי א' מן הדברים שצותה עליו התורה היא היות האדם מכיר את בוראו כפי השגתו כמו שנאמר אנכי ה' א-לקיך וגו'. והנה בפי' מצוה זו פירש הרמב"ם ריש ספרו יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון... ואין ספק היות כונת הרב כי בכלל המצוה הזו הוא להשיג סדר הנמצאים ממנו כפי השגת האדם... ירצה כי בכלל מצוה זו צריך לידע ג"כ סדר המצאת הנמצאים.

There is no doubt that one of the things which the Torah commands is for a person to recognise his Creator according to his perception. As the verse states, "I am the L-rd, your G-d." In his explanation of this mitzvah Rambam writes (beginning of *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah*) "the foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a prime mover..." There is no doubt that Rambam's intention is that this mitzvah contains the requirement to understand the order of created things to whatever degree a person is able... this means that included within this mitzvah is the obligation to know how things came to be.

15. Chazon Ish *Hitorerot* p. 41

אם כי העיקרים של אמונות ודעות המקובלות וקבועות לנו, יסודותם בעומק החכמה, ומחקר המדע, אבל הדרך הישרה לפנינו, היא ללכת בתום לב, ולהאמין אמונה שלמה ופשוטה, וחובתנו להתרחק ממחקר, ולאמת בלבבנו את כל העיקרים בפשוטם השגור בפי כל, כחכם כהדיוט.

Even though the principles of faith and the opinions which are accepted and established for us are based in deep wisdom, and scientific investigation, but the correct path before us is to walk with a pure heart, and to believe with complete and simple faith. It is our obligation to distance ourselves from investigation, and to make all the principles true in our heart with simplicity, as they are common in everyone's mouth. This applies equally to wise people and to fools.

16. *Yalkut Shimoni Lech Lecha* (chapter 12)

אמר ר' יצחק משל לאחד שהיה עובר ממקום למקום וראה בירה אחת דולקת אמר תאמר שהבירה הזו בלא מנהיג הציץ עליו בעל הבירה ואמר אני בעל הבירה כך לפי שהיה אברהם אבינו אומר תאמר שהעולם בלא מנהיג הציץ עליו הקב"ה ואמר אני הוא בעל העולם.

Rabbi Yitzchak said: This is comparable to someone who was travelling from place to place. He saw a castle that was lit up. He said, "How can it be that this castle is lit up without someone controlling it?" The owner of the castle looked out at him and said, "I am the master of this castle." Similarly, Avraham Avinu would ask, "Is it possible for this world to be without someone controlling it?" God looked out at him and said, "I am the Master of this world."