

The Intellect and the Exodus
Authentic *Emuna* for a Complex Age



Jeremy Kagan

THE
INTELLECT
AND THE
EXODUS

AUTHENTIC EMUNA
FOR A COMPLEX AGE

Maggid Books

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Authentic Emuna for a Complex Age

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In memory of

HaGaon Rav Moshe Shapiro, zt"l

who brought a unique and much needed light to our world. Rav Moshe added his penetrating insight, dedication, and intellectual honesty to the wisdom of the Sages passed to him by the greats of the previous generation. In so doing, he revealed Torah's depth in a language that spoke directly to the heart of our shallow and orphaned generation, giving us the ability to honestly and genuinely connect with it and bringing meaning and significance to our lives. May his influence live on through his countless students – many of them teachers and leaders in their own right – and the students that they are inspiring and will inspire in the future.

*May the ideas in this sefer serve as an instrument
through which Hashem brings Klal Yisrael closer to Him.
May He bless all of Klal Yisrael, keep us safe, grant us
success, and provide us with an abundance of good.*

Charles Fleischer



לע"נ

ברכה בת חיים יצחק הכהן

In memory of Barbara Kagan
*who through thirty-eight years of dedicated
teaching inspired young people to live as she
did, a meaningful life of caring for others*



*It is our great privilege to have a share in this momentous
work by our dear friend and teacher Rav Jeremy Kagan.
May we merit more works like this from him!*

R. Ely and Rebecca Allen

לע"נ
אהרן בן יששכר
שלמה ברוך בן יצחק אלימלך
חי'ה בת צבי הלוי

*Dedicated by their children
Michael and Suri Kest*



לזכרון עולם ולעילוי נשמת
אלימלך בן דוד ע"ה
מסר נפשו על תורה ומצוות

ורעייתו הנכבדה
מרת שושנה בת יעקב ע"ה
פיה פתחה בחכמה

ולעילוי נשמת מרת דינה רבקה בת צבי ארי"ה ע"ה
רוח הבריות נוחה הימנה

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I first met Rav Zevulun Schwartzman when he sat down next to me on a bus traveling from Beer Sheva to Jerusalem. I was mesmerized and sought out an opportunity to learn with him. Unfortunately for me, he soon left for the States. Thankfully for me, he eventually returned to Jerusalem. He was extremely generous with his time when I was writing my previous book, *The Choice to Be*. And when it became necessary while I was writing this book to clarify the mitzva of *emuna* I turned to Rav Schwartzman who, once again, was very generous with his time. The first chapter was hammered out over the course of about a year peppered by visits to his office. Both the specifics of what I learned and what I gained from the opportunity to learn with him significantly influenced me and the book.

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Harbe sheluḥim leMakom, God has many messengers. All these people that I have mentioned and so many more that cannot be named that are part of my life come from one Source as does life, capability, opportunity, and everything else. I take this opportunity to express my thanks for all that has been given to me.

Part 1

Gateway to the Exodus

Introduction

I have spent much of my life seeking authenticity in Torah. I am not talking about emotional connections to the mitzvot, the commandments. I mean a sense that Torah is true. Had it been my perspective on the world from the birth of my consciousness, its vision would be the filter through which I always experienced my self and, therefore, would naturally seem real. But because I did not grow up religious, that wasn't the case for me.

Rather, I first encountered Torah on a serious level when I was in college. I was introduced to its depth by an Orthodox roommate and my interest was awakened. But, as would be true for anyone discovering Torah at that stage in life, I was acutely aware that its central text, the *Humash*, described a world that bore little resemblance to the one we live in today. After all, we do not see seas splitting and anyone claiming prophecy is headed for a lengthy hospital stay. Torah was intriguing, but it did not seem real.

As a child of Western culture I was trained to give priority to physical reality. Therefore, I could not just dismiss this, as might a person raised from his youth to respect the truth of Torah. So even though the understanding I gained from Torah about myself and my world was

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profound and compelling, I could not embrace Torah without dealing with the issue of its reality.

As it turns out, it is not just latecomers to Torah who are bothered by this. The great Torah Sages were as alive to the world as they were to Torah, so the fact that the two do not mesh smoothly was not lost on them. I explored their views on this topic in my previous books *The Jewish Self* and *The Choice to Be*.¹ Those explorations led me to appreciate that the dissonance between our present experience and Torah's description of the past is actually the key to understanding Torah's vision of history. Torah identifies the primary significance of history with the constant evolution of the nature of human awareness over time – a view we will be reexamining in this book. Torah's depiction of the past is strange to us; yet rather than undermining Torah's legitimacy, this strangeness provides us with essential perspective on the way we experience reality today.

Coming to this understanding did more than address a formidable block on my integration with Torah. It also extended certain ideas I had been working on previously in college² and thus brought a greater continuity to my intellectual journey. Moreover, it opened a new level of depth to my perception of reality. While little questions lend themselves to little answers, the big ones – the kind that call a whole system into question – can only be resolved by reaching a new level of understanding of the entire structure.

My attachment to Torah has grown in part from the times I have experienced these major shifts in understanding. At a certain point I stopped looking at contradictions as problems and, instead, saw them as opportunities. They mark thresholds of understanding which invite us to find the door. I guess that was when Torah changed for me from an idea to reality – at least a level of reality. Reality is never wrong. Our understanding of it might be – contradictions arise signaling that we must dig deeper. But reality itself cannot be wrong. It just *is*, waiting to be understood.

1. Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1998 and 2011 respectively.

2. See appendix.

LIVING IN THE PRESENT

The Torah vision of history that emerged from this investigation is strikingly modern, or at least lends itself to a formulation that resonates strongly with modern views. It closely parallels, at least structurally, the academic understanding of the unfolding of human consciousness over historical time that has been building in philosophical, anthropological, and psychological circles since the time of Kant.

I do not mean by that to say, “Yeah, we always knew that anyway.” Rather, I am suggesting that when we engage the Torah in the context of honest awareness of our present experience while remaining open to the questions that it raises, the understanding we develop is relevant to who we are today.

Not coincidentally, it is also relevant to the rest of mankind. The development of humanity, at least in the context of civilization, is universal; we are all in it together. While Torah gives us our unique slant on the issues, the issues are shared across the board. So an open engagement of Torah allows us who study it to locate ourselves in and communicate with the larger intellectual world if we so choose.

Moreover, through this honest and genuine inquiry we fulfill our obligation to constantly make Torah new³ – that is, to revitalize our understanding of it. The idea is not that we should come to a different understanding so much as to understand what we have always known, but in a new way – a way that genuinely speaks to who we truly are in the generation in which we live. By pressing the self that we are against the Torah and asking the questions that bother us, we develop an understanding of Torah that reflects our concerns, highlighting the aspects of Torah most relevant to our place in history. It is this process that gives exile meaning, as we are forced to explore Torah from all the different vantages afforded by the halting evolution of human culture and experience.

THE CHALLENGE OF EMUNA

This book will explore a different distance between Torah and our awareness of reality – at the very least, my awareness of reality. God is

3. Rashi, Deut. 11:13.

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central to all Torah understanding, yet I am not filled with a sense for the immediacy of God – *emuna* (faith) did not come naturally to me. This didn't concern me, for as I grew in Torah I remained conscious that I was the product of conflicting worldviews, with my Western roots leaving little space or need for God's existence. So my expectations for intuitive conviction were low. But I certainly *wanted* to integrate my *emuna* with my self.

As I worked on the question of how to accomplish this, I found myself returning to the question of why *emuna* is so challenging to the Western mind – why we are so deeply committed to a secular outlook. After all, you cannot solve a problem unless you know what is causing it. This brought me back to the topic of my previous books – the development of human awareness over historical time. I eventually accepted that my project would not be complete without reviewing this material. Initially, I thought I could get away with a synopsis of my previous writing. But as I revisited the issues in the context of my present focus, they came alive for me in a new way.

I was already in the midst of a revived interest in history, but in a different manner than I had approached it previously. In my earlier books I traced the developing nature of human awareness through the successive peoples that have dominated civilization by relating to those peoples and their cultures as abstract entities – I identified the dominant trait of their cultures and little more. But I found myself wanting to extend my knowledge of these peoples to their *actual* history – to understand how they carried and expressed these various forms of awareness and what it was like to be them and live among them. After all, on our journey through time we have not been alone. We are part of mankind. Other peoples experienced their cultures while we were experiencing ours. Their experience affected us just as ours affected them.

Moreover, since the destruction of the First Temple we have found ourselves in exile, living among these peoples and building our national life as part of a much broader cultural entity. The focus of our development has been directed by this environment and by the challenges it raises. Trying to understand ourselves and our history without understanding that of the nations of the world would be like trying to fathom the motions of a swimmer without recognizing that he is in water.

My newfound desire for details pushed me to explore academic sources. This has altered my understanding of these cultures in important ways. And this in turn has forced a more nuanced reading of Torah sources. Though I formulate my views within a midrashic and aggadic framework, the academic perspective now informs my understanding of the particulars of these cultures. This has produced a clearer understanding of the basis of human awareness in the era in which Torah emerged and how that fostered a spiritual perception of reality. It also clarified the process by which abstract reason's growing dominance of consciousness constricted spiritual awareness, eventually leading to the secular mindset characteristic of Western civilization today.

Though the more general understanding found in my earlier books was sufficient for their core project of explaining the Sages' vision of the structure, direction, and purpose of history, this book aims for more precision. Its goal of understanding the challenges that the historical process brings to our *emuna*, how we meet those challenges, and how the nature of our *emuna* has changed as a result, requires that we engage more of the details. This material comprises chapters 2 through 8 of this book.

EMUNA IN THE CREATOR

The examination of *emuna* that eventually grew into this book began when I was exploring the process by which Abraham came to recognize the existence of the Creator.⁴ Because Abraham achieved conviction about this through his own efforts before he received prophecy, I thought he might act as a guide to how I could bring more personal conviction to my own relationship with God. Moreover, since Abraham discovered God specifically in His role as *Creator*, I felt that studying Abraham's journey would accentuate this aspect of God in my own faith. This spoke to my desire for increased integration of my *emuna*.

We tend to isolate our relationship with God in our heads, disconnecting Him from our primary experience, which is material reality. This

4. Midrashim are our only source for the details of the life of Abraham. I will explain the approach toward midrashim followed in this book when we begin working with them directly, as some of the reasons behind it are best understood in that context.

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is because God is not physical. True, He expresses Himself in physical reality. But out of concern for idolatry, we expend extreme effort to guard against associating God with anything physical – we keep our ideas about Him very abstract. This, however, gives God an almost ghostly, unreal quality, leaving us with an *emuna* that seems artificial. *Emuna* in God specifically as Creator, however, develops from direct engagement with physical reality. I felt that reinforcing my awareness of God in this role would give my relationship with Him a concrete anchor while avoiding associating physicality directly with God Himself.

As I was working through this material, I realized that when the commentaries define our Torah obligation of *emuna*, they also speak of God as Creator.⁵ In other words, though we relate to God in numerous capacities that are central to our vision of Him – such as Giver of Torah, Judge, and Savior – our mitzva of *emuna* is to recognize Him specifically in His capacity as Creator.

It occurred to me, then, that by studying Abraham's path I could both enhance the sense of reality in my *emuna* (a personal priority) and also strengthen my fulfillment of the Torah obligation of *emuna* (a priority for all of us). I began developing the material on Abraham's path with this larger project in mind. It forms chapter 9 of this book.

But I also realized that I could not properly help people strengthen their observance of the mitzva of *emuna* without a clear understanding of the mitzva. This required an additional research effort. To give a broad treatment, I focused on the approach of Rambam as representative of the philosophical school and of Ramban as representative of the more mystical school. The results of this investigation are brought in the first chapter.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EXODUS

An important consequence of this research was an appreciation of the centrality of the Exodus to achieving the mitzva of *emuna*. This forced the addition of another layer to the book. I have been working for many years on understanding the plagues of the Exodus and how we are

5. Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Sefer HaMadda, Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:6; Ramban, *Hiddushei Ramban*, Ex. 20:2.

supposed to develop *emuna* from their study. The interpretation which speaks most deeply to me sees each plague directed at a specific facet of character. As each plague purifies a trait, the aspect of reality “seen” by that trait is revealed for what it is: a consequence of God’s act of creation.

An act of creation is accomplished through a series of stages – ones that are internal, ones that are emotional, and actions. Each stage is realized through a specific trait of character. The Exodus structured our personality along the lines of those character traits of creation so that we experienced ourselves as creators. Creators see the world through the lens of creation. This sensitized us to the acts of creation reflected in the world around us and, therefore, to the Creator.

This approach to the Exodus brings the concept of integrated *emuna* to an entirely new level. *Emuna* becomes something that is embedded in our personality and emanates directly from our experience of reality, rather than an isolated concept that fits uncomfortably within the complex of our general understanding of the world.

The Exodus thus speaks directly to the desire for integration that launched the book in the first place, closing the circle. I come to a conclusion that was anything but intuitive at the beginning of the project, which is that the path to genuine, integrated *emuna* is not only through personal meditation but also through assimilation of this event from our distant past. This material forms the second half of the book.

Before we begin, a note on translations. All translations herein, unless otherwise stated, take as their starting point the Soncino Press translations. I have, however, liberally altered them both to modernize the language and, in numerous cases, to focus on a meaning of the text different from that found in the Soncino, one that is more appropriate to the context in which I am citing the source.

The structure of the book is as follows: First we will examine the mitzva of *emuna* and what is required to fulfill the obligation (chapter 1). Then we will explore the development of human consciousness in the context of civilization to appreciate the difficulties we face in trying to achieve *emuna*. This will include a discussion of the mechanisms the Sages have instituted to overcome these difficulties (chapters 2–8). Based on this exploration I will suggest that, beyond our traditional halakhic obligations, each individual needs to independently pursue personal

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conviction about the existence of the Creator. We will then turn to Abraham for guidance on how to do that, analyzing the path by which he came to his *emuna* (chapter 9).

For reasons that we will discuss, the *emuna* that can be achieved in this way is both incomplete in its conviction and limited in scope. So in the second half of the book we will turn to the Exodus. We will learn how the plagues can guide us to full *emuna* by structuring our personality and perception in such a way that our recognition of the Creator becomes integral to our experience of self and our vision of reality.

For all its power, however, we cannot make this vision a part of ourselves without some internal awareness to testify to its truth and anchor it in the self. We therefore conclude with an analysis of how the Jews developed exactly this in their journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai, where *emuna* became the eternal foundation of Jewish identity.

Chapter 1

The Mitzva of *Emuna*

When the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai, they experienced a revelation of unprecedented clarity that immediately became the foundation of our national relationship with God.¹ That relationship had begun earlier with our salvation from Egypt, an event that already obligated us to God's service and even included several specific commandments. That Exodus experience was so critical that when God revealed Himself at Sinai He identified Himself as the One responsible for it: "I am the Lord your God that took you out of Egypt..."² Still, at Sinai the process of revelation that began in Egypt came to its completion and was of such depth that it formed the essential core of the Jewish people, shaping not only that generation but also their descendants.³ While the Exodus is vital, it is through Sinai that we connect to the Exodus.⁴

"I am the Lord your God..." was actually the opening line of the Sinai revelation. It commands us to have *emuna* (faith) in God's

1. See Rashi, Deut. 4:35; Ramban, Deut. 4:9.

2. Ex. 20:2.

3. Ex. 19:9; *Tanḥuma, Pekudei* 3.

4. We will discuss this further in the final chapter of the book.

existence.⁵ Since Sinai is the basis of our relationship with God and *emuna* was the first command we heard there, it is conceptually the beginning and the root of all our obligations. All mitzvot extend from this command and serve to actualize it.⁶

This makes sense, since the commands of the Torah are all elements in a relationship with God. The prerequisite and foundation of any genuine relationship is the true recognition of the other – a statement that is not as trivial as it sounds. In our relationship with God we call this *emuna*.

Our goal in this book is to learn how to achieve this mitzva. That is not a simple task, for while *emuna* is the most fundamental of the mitzvot, in our age it is also among the most challenging. There are many reasons for this, which we will discuss in the coming pages as we try to figure out how to overcome them. First, however, we need to understand the mitzva. To do that we begin by analyzing the verse from which the mitzva is derived.

THE BASIS OF EMUNA

The verse we mentioned as obligating us in *emuna* is, in full: “I am the Lord your God that took you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”⁷ At first glance this is a surprising source from which to derive our obligation of *emuna* as it focuses on God in His capacity as redeemer of Israel. Though obviously the Exodus is central to our discovery of and unique national relationship with God, this should not determine the identity or defining characteristic of the God we are obligated to recognize. Surely the significance of His role as redeemer pales in comparison to that of His being the basis of existence. We expect the mitzva to be directed at God as the Creator.

In fact, as we mentioned in the introduction, this is the case. The major commentaries understand that the mitzva of *emuna* is directed

5. Rambam, *Hilkhos Yesodei HaTorah* 1:6; *Hiddushei Ramban*, Ex. 20:2.

6. *Zohar* II 82b. See Rav Moshe Chaim Efrayim, *Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim*, *Parashat Tzav V’Ata*.

7. Ex. 20:2.

at the Creator. What, then, do they do with the part of the verse that references the Exodus?

If the verse is obligating us to believe specifically in the Creator, then the phrase “that took us out of Egypt” is not defining whom we are to believe in. Presumably, then, it is identifying the event through which the Jews came to recognize the Creator. But by including the process by which the first generation of Jews came to their *emuna* as an integral part of the eternal command, the verse obligates us to come to our *emuna* through that same process as that first generation.

According to this reading, the verse requires us to build our *emuna* on the Jewish people’s historical experience of the miracles of the Exodus. Such a reading would exclude personal investigation from building *emuna* – at least in pursuit of the mitzva – severely narrowing our options as we search for ways to strengthen its fulfillment. This concern is parried by Rambam’s understanding of the verse.⁸

EMUNA ACCORDING TO RAMBAM

Surprisingly, Rambam makes no mention of the Exodus at all in his description of the mitzva of *emuna*.⁹

To understand this omission we first have to realize that when discussing Rambam’s view of this mitzva, the term *emuna*, which translates as “faith,” is misleading. He actually speaks of an obligation “*leida* that there is a First Reality Who brings into being all that exists.”¹⁰ *Leida* means “to know.”¹¹ Rambam’s position is that what most commentators

8. The treatment of Rambam’s and Ramban’s approach to the mitzva of *emuna* that follows was developed with the kind assistance of Rav Zevulun Schwartzman, who generously gave of his time to answer my many questions and direct me. Though I take sole responsibility for my words, I think they accurately reflect what I heard from him on this topic.

9. *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1–6. When Rambam cites the verse that obligates us to have *emuna*, he leaves out the part referencing the Exodus, quoting only the first half of the verse: *Ani Hashem Elokekha*, “I am the Lord your God.”

10. *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1.

11. In the classic translation from the Arabic original of *Sefer HaMitzvot* and *Moreh Nevukhim*, Rambam tells us we are commanded to *naamin*, “believe,” in the existence of God. However, the term translated from the Arabic as “*naamin*” is in dispute. Rav Kapach in his translation of *Moreh Nevukhim* states that in these places the appropriate

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understand to be a mitzva of *belief* is actually an obligation to come to *rational certainty* of the Creator's existence.¹²

Rambam's view of this mitzva has its roots in the specific nature of our experience at Sinai. Though eight of the Ten Commandments were relayed to us by Moses, the Jews heard the first two, including "I am the Lord your God," directly from God.¹³ At the moment He spoke to us we did not *believe* that God existed, we *knew* it!¹⁴ We were not *ordered* to recognize God; rather, hearing the statement brought us to absolute clarity about His existence! For this reason there is no actual command in the verse. Rather, it is a statement of fact: "I am the Lord your God."

Yet Rambam, like most other commentators, derives a mitzva from the verse.¹⁵ What, then, is our mitzva in this regard?

Having had this experience of clarity at Sinai, the collective "we," the Jewish people, know that God exists. We are forever obligated to recognize that truth, not because we are commanded to do so by God – we are not – but rather because an overarching necessity to "accept the truth because it is true" is woven into the structure of existence.¹⁶ This makes clear why Rambam insists that our obligation is to "know" that God exists, rather than to "believe" it. And if we as individuals don't know this truth of God's existence, we must come to know it – because it is true. And if we know it but our knowledge is unsure, we have to strengthen it.

translation is "*ladaat*," "to know" (Rav Yosef Kapach, *Moreh Nevukhim* [Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1977], p. 5, note 7). The only source where the Hebrew is directly from Rambam is in *Mishneh Torah* (see previous note). There, as we said, he uses the language of *leida*, "to know," rather than *l'haamin*, "to believe."

12. This is not an exclusively intellectual process; we will learn later that Rambam considers perfection of character to be a prerequisite to clarity of thought and integration of understanding with the self (Rav Zevulun Schwartzman).

13. Makkot 23b. See introduction to part 2, note 4.

14. *Moreh Nevukhim* III:22.

15. *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:6.

16. *Ibid.* The phrase "accept the truth because it is true" is Rav Schwartzman's and echoes the Rambam's statement that we must do the mitzvot not out of a desire for reward but, rather, to "do the truth because it is true." See *Hilkhot Teshuva* 10:2; see also *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Kiddush HaHodesh* 17:24.

Though we must accept every truth, this does not mean that recognizing every truth is a mitzva. I do not have a Torah obligation to acknowledge the existence of the Swiss Alps. But the truth of God's existence was revealed to us by God. Thus without commanding it, He is the One that caused there to be the obligation to recognize His existence. The force of necessity behind the obligation is, at least for man, *a priori*. But God, through His revelation, is the One who caused this knowledge to enter this category of *a priori* necessity, elevating the acknowledgment of this truth to a mitzva. In fact, it is *the* mitzva.

The distinction between being obligated and being commanded in the mitzva of recognizing God is an important one, as it answers several critical difficulties. First, how can God command us to believe in His existence? He is talking to us – obviously He exists! Answer: He is not commanding. He is revealing His existence through the statement, “I exist”; the obligation is a consequence of the revelation. This also explains how we derive a mitzva from a statement. Rambam's approach circumvents another problem as well. This “command” is prior to the full establishment of the king-to-subject relationship between God and the Jewish people.¹⁷ Yet a command only obligates when the commander has a prior basis of authority. According to Rambam this is not an issue because the *necessity* to recognize the truth being revealed is not from God's command; it is *a priori* to us from the creation.

When Rambam obligates us to “know,” he does not mean some inexplicable feeling. The ongoing mitzva is to bring ourselves to a certainty in God's existence that echoes the clarity we experienced at Sinai. Since *reason is man's only vehicle to genuine certainty*, and the existence of God is susceptible to logical proof, we are obligated to use our rational intellect to achieve conviction that God exists.

In line with Rambam's philosophical approach to Torah in general, the highest level of “*emuna*” – for Rambam, knowledge – comes through philosophical inquiry. This is because the strength of the logic employed, along with the pure submission to intellect that individuals trained in genuine philosophical thought achieve, compels the most forceful and legitimate certainty about God. But obviously this most

17. See Maharal, *Tiferet Yisrael*, chapter 37.

basic of mitzvot is not the exclusive preserve of philosophers. Every individual has a rational capacity. According to Rambam the obligation is to harness that capability to achieve personal certainty in the existence of the Creator, each person on his own level.¹⁸

THE MEANING OF “CREATOR”

We have said that our obligation of *emuna* is directed at God in His capacity as Creator. That Rambam requires us to achieve a certainty in our *emuna* that can only be achieved through rational proof, forces us to be more discerning in our understanding of this. For not all aspects of our understanding of God are susceptible to proof.

Rambam agrees with the Greek philosophers that though it can be demonstrated logically that there is an Entity standing outside of physical existence that is its basis, it cannot be proven that reality has a specific beginning – that is to say, that it came into being through a distinct act of creation that began time. An alternative is possible – that while supported by God, physical reality has always existed with no beginning to time. This position, which we call *kadmut*, was the position of Aristotle. So Rambam, who requires us to achieve *emuna* through rational proof, can only have in mind *emuna* in God with respect to His role in underpinning existence, not in creating it.¹⁹

Once we are sensitive to this distinction, we can see that this is exactly what Rambam states in describing the mitzva: “The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is that there is a first Existence that is bringing into being all that is...”;²⁰ Rambam makes no mention of a past act of creation.

18. There are levels and levels of achievement to this mitzva. Less-developed or less-capable individuals may be satisfied with “proofs” that are weak. Whatever argument someone uses to strengthen this certainty of the existence of God, so long as it is processed through his rational faculty, produces some level of meaningful conviction. If he reaches some level of logical certainty of God’s existence, he “knows” that there is a God and fulfills the mitzva (Rav Schwartzman).

19. See *Moreh Nevukhim* II:13, 25. Rav Zevulun Schwartzman made the significance of this point in Rambam clear to me

20. *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1.

Rambam's description of the mitzva captures the precise meaning of the verse commanding us in *emuna*. Though we translate the first of the commandments at Sinai as "I am the 'the Lord'...", the actual text is "I am 'יהוה' ...". This four-letter name of God is a composite of the verb "to be" in past tense (היה), present tense (הוה), and future tense (יהיה).²¹ It conveys that God *is* being. If God is being, then nothing can exist except as a manifestation of God – and God is reality's basis and support. The command "I am יהוה ..." then commands us to believe in God as the basis of existence without reference to God having created it in a unique act.

Torah tells us through revelation that the world was created. Based on that, Rambam accepts that God created reality. But this fact of the past is far less significant than that God is the ongoing basis of existence now, always was, and always will be. This was what was revealed at Sinai, is logically provable, is directly relevant to our present awareness, and is the focus of our mitzva of *emuna* according to Rambam.

It is still reasonable – and simplifies our discussion considerably – to describe our mitzva of *emuna* as directed at the Creator even according to Rambam. Once we recognize that God *is* being, even having created reality He could not give it existence independent of Him – for *He* is being. Attributing to God an act of creation, then, requires that He remain the basis of that creation – Creator implies Basis.²²

That we conflate these two aspects of God in our minds is reflected in common usage. We sometimes refer to God as the Creator in the specific sense of the One who initiated existence through a specific act of creation. But generally our primary intent is to convey the idea that God underlays existence. We use the term Creator because we take for granted that the first concept implies the second, while we intend the second because that is the far more fundamental and pressing realization.²³

21. Rabbenu Yaakov ben Asher, *Tur Oraḥ Ḥayim* 5.

22. *Tehillim* 136:7. See Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin, *Nefesh HaḤayim* 1:2.

23. In the ancient world the concept of Creator did not imply a need for continuous support. However Abraham's discovery of the utter transcendence of the Creator – what we have identified with the name יהוה – was synonymous with an appreciation of physical reality's dependence on the Creator for ongoing existence. See chapter 9.