

THE
EZRA & LAUREN
KEST
TEFILLAH PROJECT

LESSON #1 - LOOKING FOR THE TRUTH

A JOINT PROJECT WITH



TorahLive

A NOTE FROM THE PRODUCER



You hold in your hands the product of more than one person – as of course has been noted in the list of acknowledgments. But I feel it essential to single out two very special individuals who initiated the entire project: Ezra & Lauren Kest.

These two outstandingly devoted visionaries spearheaded the creation of this entertaining yet informative series, one easily absorbed by young Jewish souls.

Filled with concern for the Jewish people, they saw a problem and took responsibility to try and correct that problem on a global scale. This brand-new video series, dedicated in memory of Ezra's parents - Sol & Clara Kest, starts from the most basic questions in Judaism. It then builds a complete hashkafah, in language that teenagers are easily able to learn from. Using animation, humor and the talents of a Hollywood filmmaker, this series will engage youngsters and leave them with a deeper love and appreciation of the gift we take for granted: Judaism.

The problem the series comes to address is that people do not relate to davening. They do not understand the words they are saying, find it boring and irrelevant, and therefore would much rather be doing some other activity. This is extremely sad, as the entire basis of Judaism is having a connection to God. Without *tefillah*, what hope is there for a vibrant and healthy generation of Jews?

The Kest's answer to this problem was to encourage and support the creation of gripping multimedia material to capture young people's minds and reveal to them the treasures contained in the siddur. They understood the need to take advantage of the power of technology, using the combined strengths of visuals, interaction, and imagination, to restore the siddur to its pristine place.

Using state-of-the-art graphics, this series of videos and multimedia classes on Emunah & Tefillah, with accompanying teacher guides and student workbooks, will surely be utilized by you with great pleasure. You will delight in seeing your students learn with ease and joy. I look forward – as I am sure you do – to the production of many more such presentations for the benefit of our youth.

You – who are out in the field – are the best guides – and can help bring about our mutual goal of succeeding in educating the next generation to continue our heritage. Please - don't hesitate to email your feedback and tips for improvement.

I look forward to hearing from you personally and working together for a better tomorrow.



Rabbi Dan Roth

Founder, Torah Live

d.roth@torahlive.com

13 Teves, 5778, Jerusalem, Israel

THANK YOU



- Thank you Lauren & Ezra Kest for both conceiving this project and making it possible
- Rabbi Pini Dunner of the Young Israel of Beverly Hills for getting the project off the ground in the first place, by creating the partnership between the Kest's and Torah Live
- Rabbi Aharon and Raizy Wilk of Maimonides School for the incredible ideas and guidance. You were the best educational consultants I could have dreamed of working with.
- Elchanan Schnurr for creating a gripping and moving script that captures the hearts and minds of young and old alike
- Rabbi Nochum Stilerman for the sage advice that made this project a reality. Your ongoing direction and guidance has made this, and all Torah Live projects, a smashing success.
- Mrs. Denah Stilerman for editing and proofreading the proposals, instructors' guides, student workbooks, as well as being on call night and day with creative ideas and suggestions
- Eli Veffor for managing the entire project and making the video and animations come together so wonderfully
- Ben Katz for directing the shoots and helping perfect the edits
- Ronen Zhurat for Hollywood level animations and cartoons
- Sharon Katz for scheduling and arranging the shoots, acquiring the now-famous Siddur and other props, and taking care so positively of all the behind the scenes needs of the project
- Yael Knochen for your stunning artworks and incredible graphics
- Yisroel Porath for providing customer support, and being such a friendly and helpful school liaison, interacting with the many educators and schools now using the material
- Daniel Movsas for managing the finances and making sure Torah Live runs smoothly and efficiently

- Rabbi Rietti for sharing many years of experience in teaching Jewish children about Emunah & Tefillah. Your educational material - <https://www.breakthroughchinuch.com/> - truly breaks through to the hearts and souls of today's consumer.
- Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky for the entertaining and genius Rabbi Siddur voice-over
- Eliav Markowitz for playing the role of "Josh" so genuinely and convincingly
- Rabbi Dovid Solomon for researching the material and providing accurate sources and translations
- Rabbi David Aaron, Rabbi Yitzchok Berkovits, and Rabbi Reuven Leuchter for sharing their vast experience and wealth of wisdom on how to best teach this generation the delicate topic of Emunah & Tefillah
- Shoot East team for running the shoots, allowing us to film in your home, and taking care of many of the editing and technical issues in creating this final series
- Rabbi Eliezer Kessler for masterfully researching and putting together the teachers' guides and student workbooks
- Rabbi Yisrael Stilerman for his halachic advice and guidance
- Meir Roth for his great photography of behind the scenes and blog pictures
- Thank you to my dear wife, Becky, for your self-sacrifice and dedication to the whole Torah Live project and to our family. **שלי ושלכם שלה היא**
- And, **אחרון אחרון חביב**, thank you Hashem for Your Infinite kindness.

אלו פיננו מלא שירה בים. ולשוננו רנה בהמון גליו. ושפתותינו שבח כמרחבי הרקיע. ועינינו מאירות כשמש וכירח. וידינו פרושות כנשרי שמים. ורגלנו קלות כאילות. אין אנו מספיקין להודות לך יי אלקינו. ולברך את שמך מלכנו. על אחת מאלה אלפי אלפים ורוב רבי רבבות פעמים. הטובות שעשית עמנו ועם אבותינו:

May You enjoy much nachas from all Your children and please continue to bless us all with the most sacred gift of all – a real and meaningful relationship with You, our Father.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Lesson Objectives:	2
For the Teacher	3
Introduction to Lesson:	5
Video	7
The Obligation to Search.....	8
How Did the World Come Into Being?	10
Avraham Avinu.....	12
The Power of Emunah	13
Living a Life of Truth	15
Supercharging Your Emunah.....	17
The Wonders Of Nature.....	18
Personal Experience.....	20
National Experience.....	22
Sources.....	24
Resource Material	27

LESSON OBJECTIVES



1. To engage the students in the upcoming emunah and tefilla series.



2. The student will learn the first of the thirteen principles of faith: There is a God Who is the Creator and maintainer of the world.



3. The student will understand how living a life of emunah is essential in order to weather life's storms.



4. The student will learn different strategies to enhance and strengthen their emunah.

FOR THE TEACHER



We have provided an introduction complete with sources to enable you, the teacher, to appreciate the depth of the lesson. We feel it is worthwhile to review these classic sources in order to best give over the material and answer the students' questions properly. The sources, as well as other resources to help you, are at the end of the lesson.

1. The tefilla series begins with some basic tenets of emunah or Jewish belief: proof that there has to be a Creator, He has no physical body, He is infinite and as Jews we can connect to something that is beyond this world by doing mitzvos. These lessons are crucial to learning about tefilla, as tefilla is about building a relationship with God. A person who is missing fundamental aspects of emunah will have difficulty building this relationship.

On one hand our rabbis tell us that belief in God is a very simple thing and any person can and should recognize there is a Creator. In fact, our purpose in life is to do His will. (See Rav Elchonon Wasserman in *Kovetz Maamarim* page 15, *Source #1*.) On the other hand, our rabbis tell us that one must search out the Creator on his own and be clear in his knowledge of Him. We see this from several sources. No lesser a personality than Dovid Hamelech instructed his son Shlomo, the wisest of all men, that he should know the God of his fathers, but not because he learned from Dovid, his father, but rather to come to this realization on his own. (See *Source #2*.)

2. Similarly, we see in the Sefer Eitz Yosef on the siddur, on the words of **אלקי אברהם, אלקי יצחק, ואלקי יעקב** in the shemoneh esrei, where he says that the reason why we say **אלקי** in front of each of the Avos is to show that both Yitzchak and Yaakov didn't only rely on what their fathers' had taught them for their belief in God. Rather they investigated and came to the conclusion on their own. (See *Source #3* and the *Maharsha Source #4*.)

3. Proof of God can be brought in many different ways and we have only brought one. In the Teacher Resources section we have cited an article from Rabbi Chaim Jachter called “Strengthening Our Belief in God and His Beautiful Torah” in which he lists five different convincing approaches to belief in God.
4. Emunah is our foundation for the building of life. No one lives a life of tranquility. Everyone has trials and tribulations. When a person has a strong belief that God loves him and everything is for the best, even if he cannot see the big picture, he will be able to live a life of purpose, meaning and happiness, This is so because he is deeply connected to something much greater and more meaningful than life itself. He even has a manual for a successful and a happy life: the Torah, which was given to him by God Himself.
5. The Rambam brings as a halacha: “And what is the way to attain love and awe of Him? When one observes the great and wondrous works of His creation, and sees the unfathomable and infinite majesty, he will naturally come to love and praise Hashem, and be filled with a great desire to know Him.”

We have based our section “Supercharging Your Emunah” on this Rambam, encouraging students to contemplate three areas in order to strengthen their own emunah: The Wonders of Nature, Personal Experience (or Hashgacha Pratis) and Jewish History. (See Source # 5)

6. We live in a world where we are surrounded by people who do not believe in God and they bombard us with their type of thinking. It is important for the student to see and understand that these people are biased by their desires. If they believe in God, they will have to admit there is purpose for their creation and then they will have to fulfill their Creator’s will. (Rav Elchonon Wasserman explains this in Kovetz Maamarim page 16, Source #1)

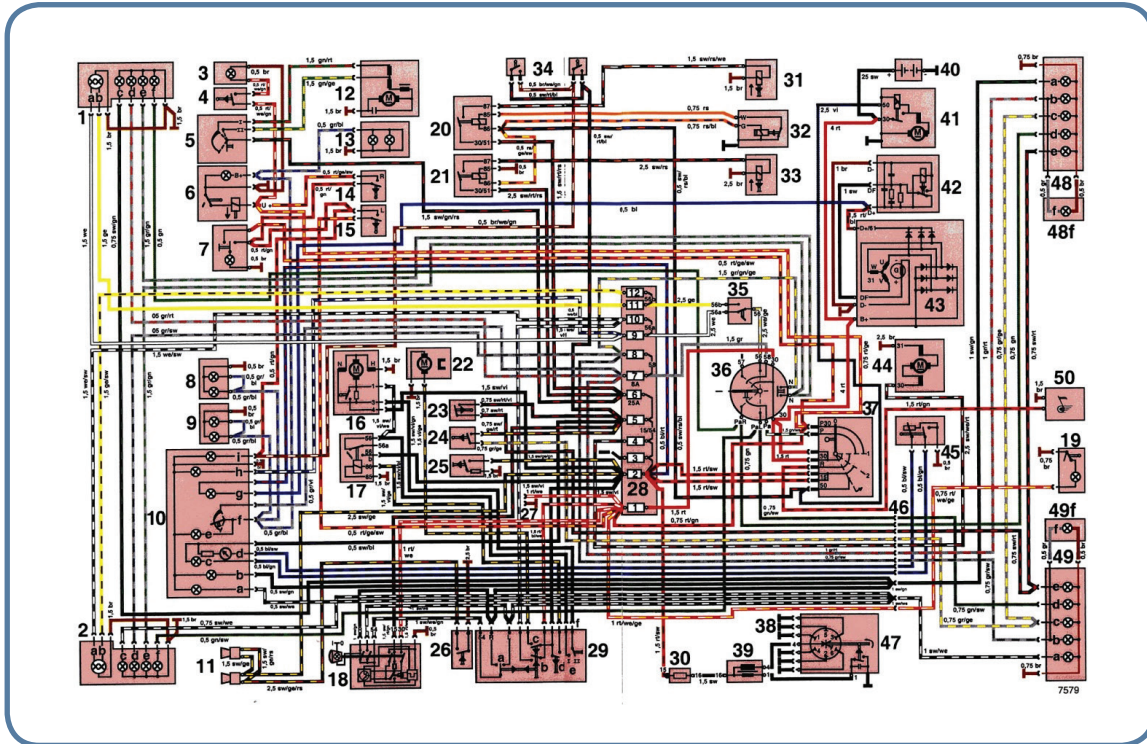
INTRODUCTION TO LESSON



Teacher should guide the students into realizing that they should think about Hashem and prove to themselves that He exists.

Could you live a life that wasn't true? Since you have been a child you have learned about Hashem. Think, "Hashem is here, Hashem is there, Hashem is truly everywhere..." What if all you have been told about Hashem creating the world wasn't true? What if the Earth just randomly came into being? It randomly started with one cell and here we are today many years later?

Nobody wants to live a life of lies, so what is the truth? Have you ever thought about it?



Teacher pulls out cell phone and shows to class. The idea is to show the basic emunah concept that the world had to have had a Creator. We all agree that it is ludicrous to say a cell phone randomly came into being. We certainly should agree that this complex universe, that God created, needed a Creator. Teacher should guide the students towards this conclusion.

What if I were to tell you that this cell phone randomly came into being without any help from any person? It started out as a microscopic molecule of plastic and it evolved, all by itself, over the course of many, many years? Would you believe me? Would you say I was delusional?

VIDEO



THE OBLIGATION TO SEARCH



Our rabbis tell us that it is every Jew's obligation to search out and use his or her own logic to know and recognize God's existence. We have faith, but it should not be blind faith, just relying solely on what we were taught when we were younger. Rather, each one of us has to use our strengths and logic to examine and investigate the existence of God, His Oneness, His strengths and His abilities. Only then, when we have expended the energy to make it crystal clear to ourselves, will we have unshakeable emunah or faith.

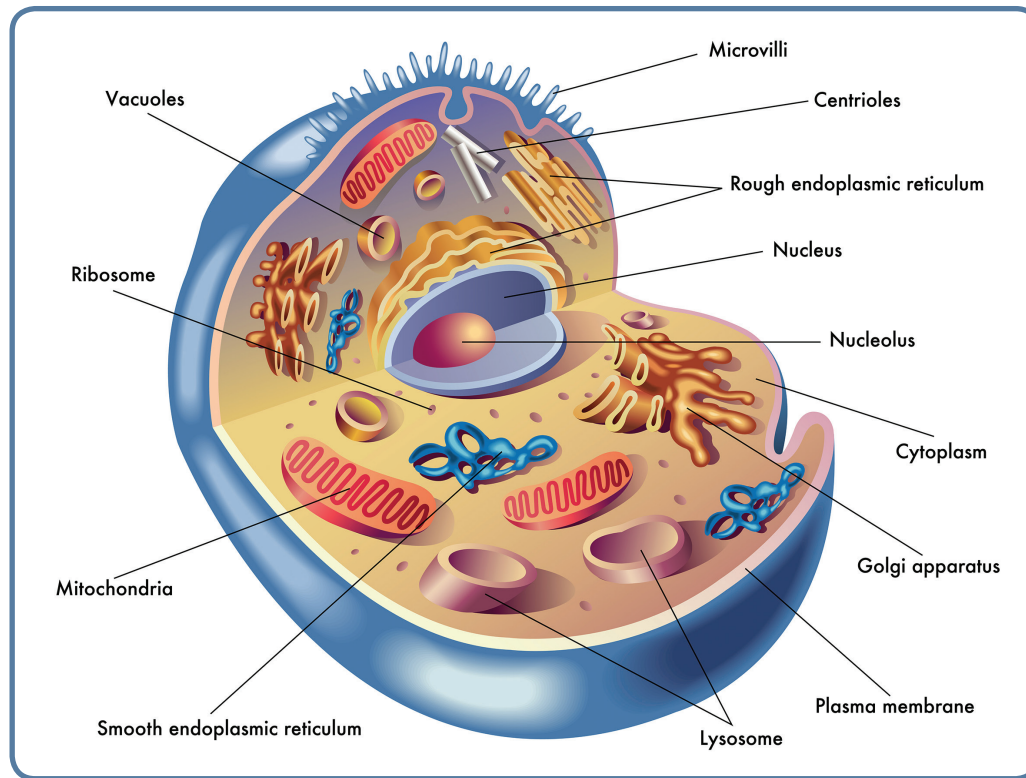
This is not a new concept, Moshe Rabbeinu asked God to show him His ways. Who in Jewish history knew God better than Moshe? He spoke to God, *peh el peh*, face to face! This was something no other human being in the history of the world experienced. Yet Moshe needed and desired to increase his knowledge of God.

Dovid Hamelech told his son Shlomo, "Search out and know the God of your fathers." He was telling him, "Don't just rely on what I taught you, search out God and

prove His existence and attributes to yourself.” Surely Shlomo, whom our rabbis call the wisest of all men, knew about God. So what was his father, Dovid Hamelech, telling him? There are many levels of understanding, there are many levels of emunah. Use your own strengths, use your own wisdom to clarify and increase your knowledge of God.

What we see is when it comes to the knowledge, understanding and faith in God, it is not just a matter of is there a God or not, but how deep we know and feel His presence inside of us. This is a very great obligation that we have before us: to use our own strengths and thought processes to strengthen and fortify our emunah and understanding of God. So let us begin.

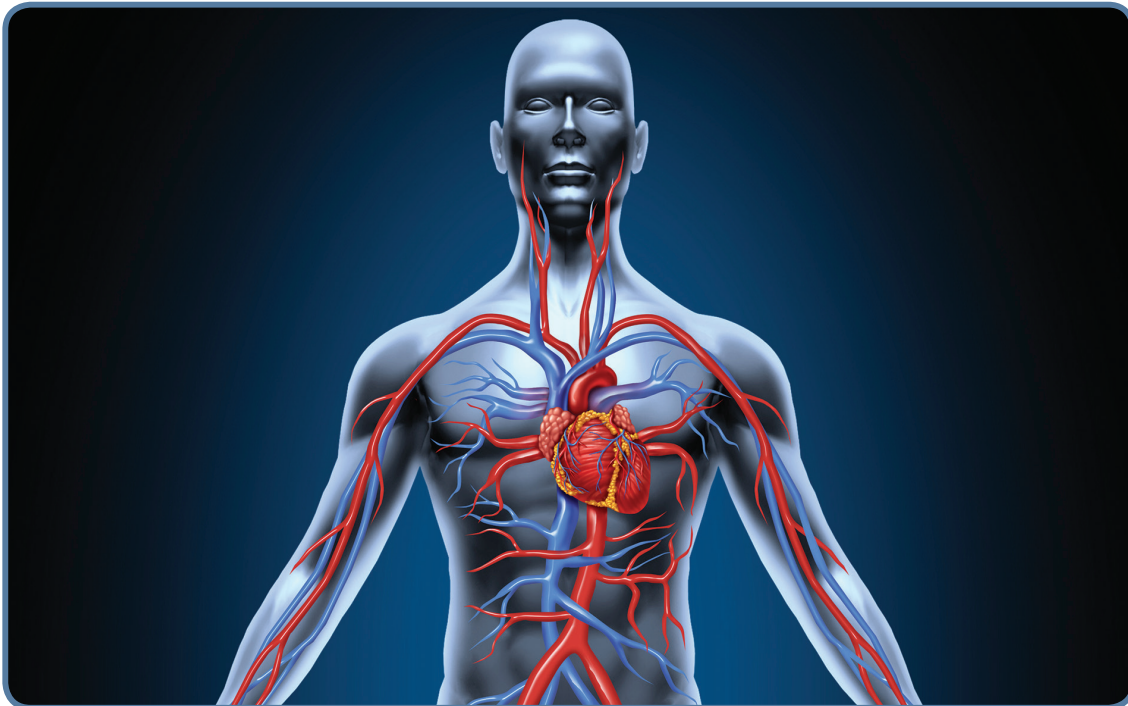
HOW DID THE WORLD COME INTO BEING?



How did the world come into being? If we examine this closer, there are only two real choices: Either the world and everything in it was created by a Creator, namely God, or it all randomly came into being. Maybe someone would want to throw in a third choice that aliens came, created the world and left...but we know that won't hold-up. Seriously, let's examine the two options.

This world is complex, from the smallest cell in the tiniest little bug to the great big blue whales and everything in-between. And don't forget about us thinking and speaking humans, the most complex of all. There are oceans and mountains, stars and galaxies, huge vast places. Could they have randomly come into being? We all agreed that saying that the chips and plastic of the cell phone randomly coming together and forming a cell phone was delusional. How then could a human being evolve?

Let's look at the smallest building block in life: the cells. There are 200 different types of cells, totalling an estimated 37.2 trillion cells in the human body. There are about 2 billion heart muscle cells in the heart alone! Each cell produces roughly 3,000 different enzymes, and alteration or absence of a single one of these enzymes can have potentially life-threatening effects. Could this have come about randomly? Certainly not. Just a basic look at the human being is proof of a Creator.



You have all learned some biology. Turn to your neighbor. Each person take two minutes to explain to each other the way a particular part of the body works, be it the eyes, ears, circulatory system etc. To the best of your ability describe how this body system works in the greatest detail you can.

Teacher should ask two or three students what they spoke about and show the class how wonderous these functions are and that they surely could not have developed randomly.

AVRAHAM AVINU



What you have done is what Avraham Avinu did. The medrash tells us that Avraham was hiding in a cave. According to some, he was 3 years old, others say that he was 40. He looked around and he saw the moon out all night and he worshiped the moon. When the morning came and the moon left, there was the sun. So he said it is fit to worship the sun. When day ended and the moon and stars came back, he knew there was something bigger and greater guiding the world. Avraham Avinu looked at the world and saw there were great wondrous things happening. He thought deeply about it and realized something that was totally against conventional thinking of the time. These things could not have happened on their own. There had to be a great power that created and continues to guide the world. There had to be a God.

The medrash compares it to a traveler who passes a large lit up palace and says, "Is it possible that this palace lacks a person to look after it?" The owner of the building looked out and said, "I am the owner of the castle." The traveler obviously was Avraham Avinu, looking around this beautiful, complex world and wondering who is looking after it. He discovered God. It is now our turn to look around and see our Creator in everything He created.

THE POWER OF EMUNAH



You might be thinking now, so I believe in God and believe that He created the Universe, but how does that help me? What does it do for me? What is this emunah?

When a skyscraper is built, such as the Empire State Building or One World Trade Center, great care is taken to build a strong foundation. There are many forces that a tall building has to withstand and a correctly built foundation will absorb them. It has to be built deep into the ground, 5 or 7 stories down, in such a way that it rests on the bedrock. In this way the building will be rock solid and nothing will be able to shake it.

Eemunah is our foundation for the building of life. The deeper and stronger the foundation we have, the better prepared we are to pass whatever tests life brings us. Having emunah doesn't just mean believing and having faith that God created the world, it is knowing with every stitch of our being, that God loves and cares about us. Eemunah means God is intimately involved in my life, and although it is sometimes difficult to comprehend or see, everything He does is for my benefit. A person who has emunah lives a life of purpose, meaning and happiness, as he is deeply connected to something much greater and more meaningful than life itself. He even has a manual with instructions on how to achieve a successful and happy life: the Torah, given to him by God Himself.

However, on the other hand, a person who believes the world randomly came into being is leading a random, haphazard life where everything happens by chance. He does not believe that his difficulties in life have meaning and he becomes frustrated and depressed when things don't go the way he imagined they should. His happiness is dependent on honor and material things and when they do not come to fruition he cannot feel fulfilled.

A person who lives a life of emunah has a connection to God that gives him the power and strength to withstand life's challenges. It is the foundation that keeps his building rock solid, no matter what life throws at him.

It is this emunah that gave Avraham Avinu the strength to stand up against the entire world and be ridiculed, abused and threatened. The idea that there is a Creator and He is involved in my life, gave Avraham the fortitude to be thrown by Nimrod into the kivshan ha'eish, the fiery furnace, even though he was not assured a miracle would happen. It is the bedrock that gave Avraham the strength and courage to enter into the war with the superpowers of the world to save his nephew Lot. And his incredible emunah gave him the power to heed God's command to bring his only beloved son up as a sacrifice, when doing so went against every fiber in his body!

Avraham Avinu's emunah has been passed down through his spiritual DNA to his grandchildren and great grandchildren until today. It has kept the Jewish people around for thousands of years through all sorts of trials and tribulations, as the nations that oppressed us all faded away.

LIVING A LIFE OF TRUTH



This very important section is for schools that have a least a 40 minute class period. Schools that have less class time should skip it in order to finish the lesson in one class period.

We have just explained that it is so obvious and basic, that there is a Creator of this World, so why are there so many people who do not believe? Wherever we turn, whether it is the scientist, the politician, the celebrity, or even the textbook writer, everyone seems to believe the world just came into being and evolved to produce life. Why do these people deny what is glaringly obvious as the simple truth and turn to something that has no basis and that all evidence points to an opposite understanding?

The Torah gave us a mitzvah to know and believe in God. This means that a boy or girl who was just celebrated a bar or bas mitzvah has a mitzvah to believe in God. You might ask, how could the Torah command a person to believe? Believing is such a personal thing; you either believe or you don't. Furthermore, could the Torah command a person, who has not yet had the opportunity to learn all the deep philosophical proofs, to believe in God? There were many great philosophers, such

as Aristotle, who did not recognize God. How could the Torah require this of a person with so little life experience?

There are certain inborn middos or traits that God created innately in every human being. One of these is the middah or attribute of emes or truth. Every person has an internal compass of truth. When we look around and see the wonderful and complex world, it is easy to recognize the truth; that God created the World. It is easy for anyone, no matter their age, to believe in God. It does not take any life experience. Then why don't these people see the truth?

If there is time in the lesson, it is worthwhile to have the students offer answers to this question.

The answer, says the great Rav Elchonon Wasserman, is that people have let their compass of truth become so cloudy and in such disrepair that they can not see the obvious truth. Belief in a Creator means that He put us here in this World for a purpose. If a person has desires for forbidden pleasures that go against that purpose, he will be blinded into changing his "beliefs" to allow him to attain all his desires. Thus, his compass of truth becomes cloudy and broken and is ultimately abandoned.

We then find great scientists and philosophers making up all sorts of theories that do not make any logical sense and have very legitimate holes in them to explain the creation of the World and man. This is not because they have proven that God does not exist, because they cannot. The evidence is too overwhelming that He does exist. But rather, because their inner desires have blinded them, in the same way that a bribe blinds a judge, they deny God's existence.

SUPERCHARGING YOUR EMUNAH



As we mentioned, Avraham Avinu's emunah has been passed down to his descendants through his spiritual DNA. That means that buried inside of us is a connection to God that can surface when needed. But that is not enough. In order to have a rock solid foundation, in order to be able to ride the waves of life's storms, each person has to develop their own emunah, their own connection with God to be their anchor. We will now discuss different ways a person can supercharge their emunah.

A relationship with God in general, and emunah in particular, is a very personal relationship and no two people will be inspired by the same things. What strikes one person as pure inspiration, might not excite another. Some people are touchy-feely and logic does not appeal to them; others are very logical and that gives them inspiration. Each person has to focus on what resonates with him and use those ideas to build a relationship with God.

There are however some common points that inspire many people to strengthen their emunah. Let us take a look at three of them.

THE WONDERS OF NATURE



Look at the wonders of nature. Can anyone look at a wonderful view and not be awe-struck? Now really take a look. When you are at Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon is there any doubt that there is a Creator? Of course not.

Take the Grand Canyon for instance, it's gorge is almost a mile deep and in some places is 18 miles wide. The peaks, spires and plateaus in the canyon are in fact mountains looked down upon from the rims. The sheer size and beauty of it is just too massive and powerful not be created by God. When you realize the grandness of it all, you get a teeny, tiny taste of the unfathomable strength of God. This small taste brings us to love Him and want to know Him more. We see that the majestic view is more than just a view, it is a catalyst for us to open our eyes and see the wonders of God.

On the other hand, when you look at nature on the molecular level, you find the systems inside each cell are more complex than the most complex factories. These complex systems each have to work in perfect order with the other systems that make up the organism. When we contemplate such ideas we are overwhelmed by God's infinite wisdom.

Think about the laws of physics. Newton discovered the law of universal gravitation and Albert Einstein updated it to the theory of general relativity. Nature has laws that govern how things interact and we can only observe them and theorize how and why they work. We can not change or affect them.

These laws are so complex and massive, that they are beyond comprehension. Indeed, some of the greatest scientists recognized this. Albert Einstein said to a group of Jewish students, if laws are discerned in nature, then Someone must be making those laws. That Someone, of course, is God.

The study of nature as a source of emunah is brought as a halacha by the Rambam: "And what is the way to attain love and awe of Him? When one observes the great and wondrous works of His creation, and sees the unfathomable and infinite majesty, he will naturally come to love and praise Hashem, and be filled with a great desire to know Him."

The wonders of nature are all around us, and everywhere we look we see God. We just have to open our eyes and our hearts to Him.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE



Personal experience—see God in your life. Every person who looks for Him will see Him. Almost everyone has had a personal experience where it is so clear that the hand of God was moving and guiding all the pieces into place. It is now our job to reflect on that experience and recognize that it came about because God loves us like a son or daughter and He controls the world. There is no greater feeling than experiencing God's love.

A remarkable story about Hashem's protection is told by Rav Shlomo Farhi, who is involved in outreach in England. A teenage boy knocked on his door and said, "Rabbi, I know that Hashem loves me, but right now I am facing a difficult situation and I was wondering if you could help me."

Rabbi Farhi asked the boy, "How do you know Hashem loves you?"

"There's no question about that at all," he said.

He proceeded to tell him that during the summer of 2005, he would travel by train to choir practice in London every Thursday morning. It was a long trip from his home, and he needed to be there at 9 a.m. One morning, as the train was just a couple of short stops away from his destination, he looked at his watch and saw it was 8:30. There was a coffee shop across the street and he figured he had plenty of time to get off, get himself a cup of coffee, and relax for a few minutes, before getting back on the train and going to practice. Shortly after he exited the train, he heard a deafening explosion. He turned and saw that the train had blown up. With tears running down his face, he watched the mayhem that ensued, with sirens blaring and fire engines and ambulances rushing to the scene. He tried calling home to inform his family that he was all right, but the cell phone network had crashed.

The boy started walking home, and two hours later, he walked through the door. He found his parents crying and sobbing. As soon as they saw him, they rejoiced.

"You're alive!" they exclaimed. "We can't believe it! You were on that train!" They told him that there was a synchronized terror attack on the London transit system, and multiple explosions took place at 8:50 a.m.

"No," the boy said, "it didn't happen at 8:50, it happened at 8:30!"

"That's wrong," his parents replied. "All the news stations reported that the attack took place at 8:50." The boy looked at his watch, and his mouth dropped. It still read 8:30. Hashem had made his watch stop so he would think he had enough time to go get a cup of coffee, and this is how his life was saved.

"Do you have a picture of that watch?" the rabbi asked.

"Rabbi," the boy said, "if you want I will give you the watch to keep." He ran home and brought back the watch. The rabbi looked at it, and saw that it had stopped at 8:30.

"If I ever experience any doubts in my emunah at any point for the rest of my life," the rabbi said, "I will look at this watch and remind myself that Hashem is controlling the world."¹

¹ This story is excerpted from Living Emunah by Rabbi David Ashear

NATIONAL EXPERIENCE



The third path to strengthen our emunah is through the study of Jewish History. No nation has been oppressed and persecuted more than the Jew. Yet in every single case, without fail, the oppressors cease to be; they disappeared from the annals of history. Yes there are Greeks, Romans, Spaniards and Germans still around, but they have lost their prominence and are no longer the world player that they once were. The Jew, tiny in number and strong in spirit, has remained in the prominent position for 2000 years. Indeed, the great Rav Yaakov Emden wrote in the introduction to his siddur, "One who thinks about the fact that we [the Jewish People] are standing in exile and cling to God between nations who persecute us and cause us trouble, recognizes the great wonder that we have survived since the destruction of the Holy Temple until today. To me, this miracle is greater than all the miracles and wonders that God performed in Egypt and when He redeemed us from servitude and split the Reed Sea and all the other miracles."

Given such small numbers, the Jewish people should, according to the normal laws of history, have disappeared by now through persecution or assimilation. For such a tiny nation not only to survive, but to thrive and have an impact so disproportionate to its numbers makes its very existence a living testimony to God's existence. Feeling a connection with God through the history of His people is a powerful force to strengthen our emunah and connection to God.

SOURCES



1. Rav Elchonon Wasserman in *Kovetz Maamarim* (page 15) explains that it is obvious that there is a God from the fact that we see order in this world. Common sense teaches that it is impossible for this to happen by itself and thus it is obvious that the world has a Creator.

People choose not to believe only because of the self-serving need for freedom and independence. It is just more comfortable to live without an all-knowing God calling the shots.

אמונה, בטחון, תשובה

הפילוסופים כפרו בהידוש העולם כי כפי גדול שכלם עוד גדלו יותר ויותר תאוותיהם להנאות עוה"ז

ו) ופתרון החידה מצינו בתוה"ק המגלה לנו כל סתום, והוא הכתוב (דברים ט"ז, י"ט) לא תקח שוחד כי השוחד יעור עיני חכמים, ושיעור שוחד עפ"י ד"ת הוא בשה פרומה כמו גול וריבית וכו', והל"ת הזאת נאמרה על כל אדם, וגם החכם מכל אדם וצדיק כמשה רבינו ע"ה, אם יצויר שיקח שוחד פרומה, יתעוררו עיני שכלו ולא יוכל לדון דין צדק, ובהשקפה ראשונה הוא דבר תימה לומר על משה ואהרן שבשביל הנאה כל דהו שהיה להם מבעל דין אחד נשתנית דעתם ודנו דין שקר, אבל הרי התורה העידה לנו שכן הוא, ועדות ה' נאמנה (תהילים י"ט, ח'), וע"כ צ"ל שהוא חוק המבע בכחות נפש האדם, כי הרצון ישפיע על השכל, ומוכן שהכל לפי ערך הרצון ולפי ערך השכל, כי רצון קטן ישפיע על שכל גדול רק מעט, ועל שכל קטן ישפיע יותר, ורצון גדול ישפיע עוד יותר, אבל פטור בלא כלום אי אפשר, וגם הרצון היותר קטן יוכל להטות איזה נמיה גם את השכל היותר גדול, ומצינו ברז"ל פ' שני דיני גזירות (כתובות קה:): שע"י הנאה כל דהו שהגיעה להם מאדם, הרגישו תיכף נמיה בשכלם לומר מצי טעין הכי וכו', ואמרו ע"ז תיפח רוחם של מקבלי שוחד, עיי"ש דברים נפלאים מאד.

והשתא נחזי אנן, אם רז"ל שהיו כמלאכים ברוחב דעתם ובמידותיהם הקדושות, פעלה עליהם קבלת הנאה כל שהוא להטות שכלם, כ"ש אנשים המשוקעים בתאות עוה"ז אשר היצה"ר משחד אותם ואומר להם הרי לפניך עולם של הפקר, ועשה מה שלבך חפץ, עד כמה יש כח בנגיעה הגסה הזאת לעור עיני שכלם, כי בדבר שהאדם משוחד לא יוכל להכיר את האמת אם היא נגד רצונותיו, והוא כמו שיכור לדבר זה, ואף החכם היותר גדול לא תעמוד לו חכמתו בשעה שהוא שיכור, ומעתה אין תימה מהפילוסופים שכפרו בחידוש העולם, כי כפי גודל שכלם עוד גדלו יותר ויותר תאוותיהם להנאות עוה"ז, ושוחד כזה יש בכחו להטות דעת אדם לומר כי שתי פעמים שנים אינן ארבע אלא חמש, ואין כח בשכל האדם להכיר את האמת בלתי אם אינו משוחד בדבר שהוא דן עליו, אבל אם הכרת האמת הוא נגד רצונותיו של אדם, אין כח להשכל גם היותר גדול להאיר את עיני האדם.

2. The Metzudas Dovid explains that Dovid told Shlomo to examine and investigate with his sechel the knowledge of God.

(ט) וְאַתָּה שְׁלֹמֹה בְּנִי דַע אֶת־אֱלֹקֵי אָבִיךָ וְעִבְדֵהוּ בְּלֵב שְׁלֵם וּבְנֶפֶשׁ חַפְצָה כִּי כָל־לְבָבוֹת דּוֹרְשׁ ה' וְכָל־יֵצֶר מַחְשְׁבוֹת מִבֵּין אִם־תִּדְרָשׁנּוּ יִמְצָא לָךְ וְאִם־תִּנְעֲזְבֵנוּ יִזְנִיחֶךָ לְעֵד:

דברי הימים כ"ח:ט

דע את אלקי אביך. כאומר חקור בשכלך לדעת אותו ואם תקצר השכל עכ"ז לא תעזבנו כי אלקי אביך הוא וסמוך על הקבלה כי בודאי האב מעמיד את בנו על האמת:

מצודת דוד שם

3. Sefer Eitz Yosef on the siddur, on the words אלקי אברהם, אלקי יצחק, ואלקי יעקב in the shemoneh esrei, says that the reason why we say אלקי in front of each of the Avos is to show that both Yitzchok and Yaakov didn't only rely on what their fathers' had taught them for their belief in God. Rather, they investigated and came to the conclusion on their own. He says this is an obligation incumbent on every Jew.

אלהי אברהם כו', מה שאומרים ג' פעמים אלהי הלא היה סגי בפעם אחת לומר אלהי אברהם יצחק ויעקב. הוא ע"ד שמצינו דאמר רוד לבנו ברה"א כ"ח פסוק מ' ואתה שלמה

בני דע את אלהי אביך ועבדו. ע"פ תורתנו הקדושה שהוא אל הבורא יתברך ויתעלה שמו. ולכך אמר דע את אלהי אביך מצד התקידה. ומצינו באברהם שהוא היה חוקר ראשון אלהותו והוא הדיע אלהותו בעולם. כי בימיו היו עובדים לכוכבים ומולות. ואם היינו אומרים אלהי אברהם יצחק ויעקב הייתי אומר שאברהם היה חוקר ראשון שחקר אלהותו יתברך ויצחק ויעקב בניו סמכו על אמונת אברהם. לכך אנו אומרים אלהי אצל כל אחד ואחד. כדי להודיע שכל אחד מצד עצמו עמר על התקידה ומצא שאין אחד אלא אלהינו. והוא חיוק אמונתנו הקדושה (שירת פנים מאירות) ואלהי יעקב. הזכיר ביעקב ואלהי וי'.

4. The Maharsha explains that there is an obligation for every Jew to examine and investigate with his sechel the knowledge of God.

גמור בכל לבבך כו'. הכוונה בזה כמ"ש הפלוסופים האלהיים דחייב כל אדם להשכיל בידיעת מציאותו ואחדותו ויכלתו וידיעת דרכיו כו' ית' ב"ה כפי יד שכלו של אדם אך ע"פ אמונתנו והתורה וכל מה שנראה לו בשכלו שהוא נגד תורתנו הקדושה לא יאמין בו ויתלה הדבר בקט שכלו וז"ש ר"מ גמור בכל לבבך כו' לדעת דרכי ה' אשר ממנו תמצא מופת למציאותו ואחדותו ויכלתו שהוא ודאי דבר גדול כי גם זה האיש משה רבינו בקש על זה הודיעני נא את דרכך אך אמר שתשקוד על דלתי תורתני שלא תזוז ממנה ודבר שיעלה על לבך והוא נגד תורת משה הוא דרך אפיקורסות ולא תשגיח בו כלל וזה הלשון שנינו הוי שקוד ללמוד תורה ודע מה שתשיב לאפיקורוס דהיינו על דבר שהוא נגד התורה ולפי שכל עסקי האדם הם במחשבה ובמעשה ובדבור אמר נצור תורתני בלבך שהיא במחשבה ונגד עיניך תהא יראתי במעשה שמור פיך כו' הוא בדבור ומסיים וטהר וקדש כו' הוא דבר נוסף כמ"ש שיקדש אדם עצמו גם במותר לו ואז ואני וכו' וק"ל:

חידושי אגדות על מסכת ברכות י"ז א

5. The study of nature as a source of emunah is brought as a halacha by the Rambam.

וְהִיאֵךְ הִיא הַדֶּרֶךְ לְאַהֲבָתוֹ וְיִרְאַתוֹ. בְּשִׁעָה שִׁתְּבוּנָן הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׂיו וּבְרוּאָיו הַנִּפְלְאִים הַגְּדוֹלִים וְיִרְאַה מִהֶן חֲכָמָתוֹ שֶׁאֵין לָהּ עֵרָךְ וְלֹא קֵץ מִיָּד הוּא אוֹהֵב וּמְשַׁבֵּחַ וּמְפָאֵר וּמְתַאֲוֶה תִּאֲוָה גְּדוֹלָה לִידַע הַשֵּׁם הַגְּדוֹל. כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד (תהילים מב ג) "צִמְאָה נַפְשִׁי לְאֱלֹקִים לְאֵל חַי".

משנה תורה, הלכות יסודי התורה ב:א

RESOURCE MATERIAL



Strengthening Our Belief in Hashem and His Beautiful Torah

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

www.koltorah.org/ravj/13-31%20Truth%20of%20Hashem%20and%20Torah.htm

Teacher Introduction

It is worthwhile to occasionally explore the foundations of our beliefs and lives. Thus, I wish to share with readers of Kol Torah why I am completely convinced of the truth of Hashem and His Holy Torah. I wish to present five approaches that I have found exceedingly convincing. I wish to follow the Rambam's example from the introduction to his commentary to Pirkei Avot (called the Shemonah Perakim) and clarify that some of the ideas I will present come from outside our Tradition. The Rambam urges us in this context "to accept the Truth whatever its source."

Introduction

It is important to clarify that I do not seek to "prove" Hashem's existence, because as modern philosophers have noted, this is not a productive exercise. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik in his classic essay *The Lonely Man of Faith* cites Soren Kierkegaard's (a major mid-nineteenth century religious philosopher) reaction when hearing that the medieval philosopher Anselm of Canterbury engaged in prayer an entire evening beseeching God to help him formulate his celebrated Ontological Proof of God's Existence. Kierkegaard, in turn, asked, does a bride in the embrace of her beloved bridegroom require proof of his existence? Kierkegaard argues that Anselm's intense prayer constituted a more authentic "proof" of God than the Ontological Proof.

Moreover, modern philosophers (such as Descartes and Kant) have demonstrated that one can "prove" very little, if anything. Descartes notes that one cannot prove that other people exist, as perhaps it is merely an evil demon that is painting a false image on one's brain to fool one into thinking that others exist. Despite the inability to prove the existence of others, I nevertheless am one hundred percent convinced of the existence of others. Similarly, I am thoroughly convinced of the Truth of Hashem and His Torah.

Rav Elchanan Wasserman – The Argument from Design

Rav Elchanan Wasserman (in his Kovetz Maamarim) argues that it is obvious that there is a God from the fact that we see order in this world. Common sense teaches that this is impossible for this to happen by itself and thus it is obvious that the world has a Creator. Philosophers have traditionally referred to this type of proof as the argument from design. Many earlier Jewish philosophers such as Rabbeinu Bachya espoused this argument for Hashem's existence.

Rav Elchanan takes this argument one step further arguing that it is also obvious that the Creator would provide a manual on how to function in the world He created. We may draw an analogy to a car manufacturer who provides a manual on how to operate the car he has created. So too, argues Rav Elchanan, common sense dictates that Hashem provided a manual, namely the Torah, for humans to know how to act.

Ramban and Kuzari – Mesorah

For the Ramban (commentary to Shemot 13:16) and the Kuzari the most persuasive argument for faith in Torah is Tradition. As the Kuzari notes, the miracles associated with great events in Jewish history, Yetziat Mitzrayim and Ma'amad Har Sinai, were witnessed by millions of people who passed this information to their descendants year after year at their seders. This is unlike the miracles claimed by other religions that are described as having occurred before a very limited number of people.

One might argue that Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah because they were a docile and gullible people who accepted anything and everything that Moshe Rabbeinu told them, because of his seductive and persuasive oratory. However, this is hardly true as Bnei Yisrael regrettably were constantly bickering and disobedient to Moshe Rabbeinu. Moreover, Moshe Rabbeinu was a very poor speaker. Virtually the only time we were unified was at Har Sinai (see Rashi Shemot 19:1). The reason we united at Sinai was that the authenticity of the Har Sinai experience was profoundly compelling and unquestionably persuasive.

Similarly, we find in every generation that observant Jews are not passive and gullible people who are accepting of everything. Every significant Talmudic and Halachic issue is carefully examined and great experts and laypeople vigorously and rigorously analyze every new and old opinion. Yet observant Jews agree upon core values and beliefs such as the divine authorship of the Torah. The Rambam (Hilchot Mamrim 1:3) indicates that if there is no dispute regarding a particular law then this law must originate as a tradition from Sinai. Examples of such laws are the Halacha that our tefillin must be colored black and that our mezuzot contain only the two

Parshiot of Shema and Vehaya Im Shamo. I have often surmised that these matters must be of heavenly origin; otherwise, we would be fighting rigorously about these laws in the manner we do about so many other Halachos.

Incidentally, it seems that this is the reason why the Sefer HaChinuch (21) rules that women are obligated in the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim (recounting the story of our Exodus from Egypt) even though it is a time-bound positive mitzvah from which women are normally excused (see the Minchas Chinuch's criticism of the Chinuch's ruling. The essence of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim is the transmittal of faith from one generation to another by recounting and authenticating the Exodus story. Women are thus certainly included in this mitzvah. This also explains why grandparents play such an important role in Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim (see Shemot 10:2 and the comments of the Oznayim LaTorah ad. loc.). Josh Strobel of TABC uses a similar argument to explain the Ramban's opinion that women are obligated to count the Omer (see my Bikkurei Sukkah section 60).

The Argument from Jewish History – The Aruch Hashulchon

The Aruch Hashulchon (Orach Chaim 1:10) wrote (in 1903):

“There is no greater sign and proof than our survival of nearly two thousand years of Exile. The only reason for our survival is because of Hashem's Hashgacha (divine providence) that is not removed from us even for a moment like a father who watches over his only child and chastises him for the latter's benefit.”

Indeed, one who ponders the wonders of Jewish history realizes that logically we should have disappeared long ago. Our survival attests to the fact that Hashem watches over His special people. Indeed, the stories of Am Yisrael's close encounters with extinction in the Tanach (such as the infertility of Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu as well as Yitzchak Avinu and Rivkah Imeinu, the Exodus from Mitzrayim and the parting of the Yam Suf, and being saved from Haman) have been repeated in our time.

The Jewish People seemed to have been lost and finished as a nation after World War II. Yet we managed to establish Medinas Yisrael in 1948 despite overwhelming odds. Rav Yehuda Amital (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Har Etzion) has often commented that some future historians will likely cast grave doubts on the authenticity of the story of a downtrodden people, who lost a third of its people within six years, who, three years later, managed to reestablish its homeland in an extremely hostile environment by throwing seltzer bottles from planes and firing fake cannons (such as the Davidka).

In America, as well as Israel, sociologists in the 1950's predicted that Orthodox Judaism would soon disappear. Look Magazine in the 1950's ran a famous cover

story entitled “The Vanishing Orthodox Jew.” Baruch Hashem, at this point, there are (Bli Ayin Hara) approximately one million Orthodox Jews in this country (including Chareidi and Modern Orthodox Jews) and the once popular Look Magazine has vanished. Moreover, Orthodox Jewry is the only group of Jews that is, with Hashem’s help, increasing in numbers.

Interestingly, Akiva Weiss of TABC has suggested (also see Rav Soloveitchik’s Kol Dodi Dofeik) that the reason that this generation is the one that Hashem has decided to create Medinas Yisrael, is that this was necessary to facilitate the continuation of our faith in Torah after the Holocaust. Indeed, Rav Soloveitchik recalled that when he traveled from Boston to New York to give Shiur at Yeshiva University during the Second World War, he constantly encountered missionaries who argued that the Holocaust was “proof” that Hashem had abandoned the Jewish People. The establishment of Medinas Yisrael undermined this argument that was used against us.

Rav Soloveitchik – The Argument from Halacha

Rav Soloveitchik writes in his classic essay, The Ish Halacha, that the Halacha is the most compelling proof for the truth of Torah. I understand this to mean that the scholar (or student guided by a competent teacher) who plumbs the depths of the Halachic system will be overwhelmed with its beauty and majesty to the point that he is left with no other option than to accept the divine origin of this system. It also might mean that one who spends a lifetime dedicated to abiding by the Halachic system will conclude that it is indeed the finest prescription for leading a fulfilling and content life. He will also comprehend why a recurring theme in Sefer Devarim that the Torah’s rules are “Litov Lach,” serve our best interest.

Another meaning of Rav Soloveitchik’s assertion appears to be the incredible enterprise of applying the ancient Halacha to the contemporary situation. The world in general and the Jewish People specifically in the last hundred years have undergone a dramatic and unprecedented degree of change in all area ranging from technology to sociology and political reality. Nonetheless, Poskim have readily applied the venerated concepts of the Gemara to modern circumstances. Amazingly, Poskim find a precedent in the Gemara for virtually every new phenomenon that emerges in society.

For example, precedents exist in the Gemara for electricity (see Sanhedrin 77), in vitro fertilization (see Chullin 70), and Jews who deviate from Halacha who are psychologically unable to grasp their error (Sanhedrin 26). A perusal of every issue of the Israeli Torah journal Techumin demonstrates the ability of Halacha to be applied to the contemporary situation in Medinas Yisrael despite the fact that we had not enjoyed political independence for nearly two thousand years.

Similarly, it is profoundly inspirational to study Tanach using the methodologies of the teachers at Yeshivas Har Etzion's Herzog College, such as Rav Yoel Bin Nun and Rav Elchanan Samet. They have used the sophisticated tools of modern literary analysis that Bible critics use to denigrate Torah, to actually provide stunningly profound insights into Tanach and Chazal. A perusal of every issue of Megadim contains breathtaking new insights into our holy Torah and Chazal. Indeed, Rav Mordechai Breuer observes (in an essay published in Herzog College's Esther Hee Haddassa p. 66) that just as the pole that Haman wished to hang Mordechai upon was used to hang Haman, the methodologies that Bible critics wish to use to disparage the Torah are used to bring glory to Torah and Chazal.

Rambam on Ahavat Hashem

The Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 2:2) writes that an appreciation of nature can draw one close to Hashem and love Him (Ahavas Hashem) and stand in awe of Him (Yiras Hashem). In our generation we are given an even greater opportunity to draw close to Hashem due to the magnificent scientific discoveries of the last hundred years. One who contemplates the magnificence even of the tiny e-Coli and certainly the intricacies of the human eye has the ability to profoundly enrich his Yiras Hashem and Ahavas Hashem.

Rav Yoel Bin Nun on Megillat Esther

One may wonder why so many intelligent people are not convinced of the truth of Hashem and Torah. Rav Elchanan Wasserman (Kovetz Ma'amarim) ascribes such lack of belief to people's wish to justify engaging in inappropriate activities. He cites as proof the pasuk in Tehillim (14:1) that states "a degenerate states in his heart that there is no God."

Another explanation for this phenomenon emerges from an understanding of the methodology of Megillas Esther as explained by Rav Yoel Bin Nun (in an essay published in Herzog College's Esther Hee Hadassah). Rav Yoel notes that Megillas Esther at first glance seems quite secular. For example, it contains no mention of God and even seems to deliberately omit mentioning Hashem's name (see, for example, Esther 4:14-16). Rav Yoel explains that one has to look behind the superficial presentation of events in Megillas Esther to discover Hashem, such as why Esther among all the beautiful women of the Persian Empire was chosen as queen, why Mordechai foiled a plot to kill Achashveirosh, and why Achashveirosh was sleepless and reading about Mordechai's actions the night that Haman came to ask permission to execute Mordechai.

Similarly, the world functions today as it is depicted in Megillas Esther. Hashem has placed a secular veneer upon the world and we must use our common sense to peel back this secular layer in order to be able to find Hashem. Those who do not believe in Hashem and his Torah have not exercised their common sense and see beyond the secular surface of our world.

Conclusion

Bertrand Russell (a British philosopher and mathematician who was a foremost proponent of atheism in the early twentieth century) once was asked what he will respond if, after he dies, he meets God and He will judge him for his lack of belief. Russell responded that he would ask God, why did You not provide sufficient evidence of Your existence. Hashem might respond, why didn't you exercise your common sense and look beyond the secular surface of the world, and see the overwhelming evidence of My existence and of My Holy Torah.