



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 20 | Noach | Sichah 1

Matured Faith

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining readability. As in all translations, however, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

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1.

IN HIS GENERATIONS,

The verse at the beginning of our *parshah* says,¹ “These are the offspring of Noah — Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations.” In his Torah commentary, Rashi cites two interpretations² of the word “בְּדֹרֹתָיו, in his generations”: “There are those among our Rabbis who expounded {this word} as praise {of Noah}... and there are those who expounded it {as deprecation of Noah}....”³ According to the view that “in his generations” isn’t meant as praise, our Sages teach, as explained by Rashi: “According to {the standards of} his generation, he was righteous. But had he been in Avraham’s generation, he would not have been considered anything {noteworthy}.”

The wording, “had he been in Avraham’s generation,” is problematic: Avraham was born fifty-eight years before Noah’s passing,⁴ as conveyed by the mnemonic taught by *Ibn Ezra*:⁵ “Our patriarch Avraham was נ"ח {numerically equivalent to fifty-eight} when נֹחַ passed away,”⁶ meaning that Noah lived for a certain period of time “in Avraham’s generation”!

True, Avraham did not likely achieve the lofty stature of “צַדִּיק, righteous” at the beginning of his life. In fact, the Midrash says,⁷ “Avraham was fearful, and said, ‘Perhaps it may be said that I am guilty of sin, for I have worshiped idols all those years,’”⁸ and only after that did he become aware of his Creator.

¹ {*Bereishis* 6:9.}

² *Sanhedrin* 108a; *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 30, sec. 9; *Tanchuma*, “Noach,” sec. 5; *Zohar*, vol. 1, 60a (*Tosefta*); *Tanchuma*, “Noach,” sec. 6 (Buber ed.).

³ Rashi on *Bereishis* 6:9; similarly in *Tanchuma*, sec. 6 (Buber ed.); but this wording doesn’t appear in the other sources cited in fn. 1.

⁴ We can posit that for this reason, Avraham’s generation is not mentioned in *Bereishis Rabbah* cited in fn. 1.

⁵ *Ibn Ezra* on *Bereishis* 6:9.

⁶ *Ibn Ezra* explains that “in his generations” also includes Avraham’s generation, “and ‘in his generations’ means *in his generation* — at the time of the flood — and *in the subsequent generations*.”

⁷ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 39, sec. 8.

⁸ This corresponds to what Rambam says in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 3 (cited below in the *sichah*).

Nonetheless, according to all opinions, Avraham was aware of his Creator before he was fifty-eight.⁹ Additionally, Avraham came to this recognition by dint of his **own efforts** — Rambam describes at length, at the beginning of *Hilchos Avodah Zarah*, how, on his own, Avraham became aware of and knew Hashem: “He had no teacher **nor** was there anyone to inform him.” —

[In contrast, Noach’s knowledge and recognition of the Creator (as implied {by Rambam})¹⁰ was not something Noach arrived at on his own. Additionally, we find that it is stated **explicitly** that Noach learned the secret of intercalation¹¹ from Chanoch¹² and from Mesushelach,¹³ Noach’s grandfather. {We see further support for this idea} particularly according to Rambam,¹⁴ who says that Mesushelach had a house of study¹⁵ and a *beis din*¹⁶ — certainly his favorite grandson Noach¹⁷ attended these institutions and studied there. Noach received instruction from those who came before him. (Also, it says regarding their difference in disposition:¹⁸ “Noach needed support to sustain him, whereas Avraham strengthened himself and practiced righteousness on his own.”)]¹⁹

How can it be said that “**if he had been** in Avraham’s generation...” when Noach, in fact, lived during a specific period in Avraham’s generation, even after Avraham “became aware of his Creator”?

⁹ See Section 2, below.

¹⁰ This is implied in Rambam’s words in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 2 and 3 — Avraham recognizing Hashem on his own was something unique.

¹¹ {Adding days or months to the Jewish calendar to align the lunar and solar cycles, to keep the festivals in their proper seasons, and for other technical reasons.}

¹² *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*, beg. of ch. 8.

¹³ See Rav David Luria on *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*, beg. of ch. 8 that there is a lacuna in the text, and this should also be the corrected text in *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*; and see also *Seder HaDoros*, “Year 1056.”

¹⁴ *Moreh Nevuchim*, vol. 2, ch. 39.

¹⁵ The *Achronim* {later authorities} write that there is no earlier source for this; perhaps the source is in *Midrash Avkir*, cited in *Yalkut Shimoni*, “*Bereishis*,” *remez* 42, which says that “he studied 900 Orders of Mishnah.”

¹⁶ Perhaps, the source for this is *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*, *ibid.*, because intercalation was practiced in the *beis din*, and only great sages know the secret of intercalation, and they only teach it to ordained and perceptive sages (*Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh*,” ch. 11, par. 4).

¹⁷ Note *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 4, par. 8, which says that Mesushelach gave Noach the garments of Adam HaRishon (the garments of the *Kohen Gadol*).

¹⁸ Rashi on *Bereishis* 6:9, s.v., “*es haElokim*,” cited from *Tanchuma*, *loc. cit.*; the position of Rav Nachman in *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 30, sec. 9.

¹⁹ See at length *Akeidah* (“*Lech Lecha*,” *shaar* 16; and in *chazus kasheh*, *shaar* 2); et al.

Even if we explain that the phrase “Avraham’s **generation**” doesn’t refer to the period when Avraham focused on his own development, but rather, to the period when he began to influence others — “and the souls that they made in Haran,”²⁰ as it says in the Gemara,²¹ the Two Thousand Years of Torah²² began specifically in this {later} period — Noach was still alive at that time. As the Gemara says,²³ “It was taught {as a tradition} that at that time, Avraham was fifty-two years old.”

2.

WHEN DID AVRAHAM BECOME AWARE OF HIS CREATOR?

There are several opinions as to Avraham’s age when he became aware of his Creator: at the age of three,²⁴ forty, forty-eight,²⁵ or fifty.²⁶

In *Hilchos Avodah Zarah*, Rambam says,²⁷ “Avraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator.”²⁸ Commenting on this, *Raavad* says: “An *aggadah* states that Avraham was three years old, as it says,²⁹ ‘עֲקָב, because Avraham obeyed my voice’ — for {172 years,} the numerical value of עֲקָב.”³⁰

The *Kessef Mishneh* explains:³¹

Both opinions can be correct. Avraham was three years old when “he began to think...” to become aware of his Creator. And when he was forty years old, he was fully aware of Him. Our Rabbi {Rambam} wrote about Avraham’s pivotal stage of awareness, which happened when Avraham achieved complete awareness at forty years old. We must say

²⁰ *Bereishis* 12:5.

²¹ *Avodah Zarah* 9a.

²² See *Maharsha*, “*Chiddushei Aggados*” on *Nedarim* 32a {the Talmud divides world history into three two-thousand-year eras; the second of these eras is the Two Thousand Years of Torah}.

²³ *Avodah Zarah* 9a.

²⁴ *Nedarim* 32a; *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 30, sec. 8., **and references listed there.**

²⁵ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 30, sec. 8., and references listed there.

²⁶ The first opinion that appears in *Pesikta Rabbasi*, ch. 21.

²⁷ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 3.

²⁸ This is also how it appears in *Radak* on *Bereishis* 26:5.

²⁹ *Bereishis* 26:5.

³⁰ {Avraham lived to the age of 175 (*Bereishis* 25:7); if he became aware of his Creator at the age of 3, he would have *obeyed His voice* from the time he was 3 until his death — for a total 172 years.}

³¹ {*Kessef Mishneh* on *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 3.}

that the Rambam's version is... forty years old... and not forty-eight years old, as it is in some books.

However, we need to clarify: Since the **widespread** version in the extant Midrashim³² says, "Avraham was forty-eight years old when he became aware of his Creator," why did Rambam adopt the version that says, "Avraham was forty years old³³ when he became aware of his Creator"?³⁴

We also need to clarify: Since "both opinions may be valid" (the opinion that Avraham became aware of his Creator at three years of age, and the opinion that he did so at forty years of age), and Rambam himself, at the beginning of his explanation, describes Avraham as a child — "After this **mighty** child was **weaned**, he began to explore and think. **Though he was a child, he began to think...**" — why doesn't Rambam explicitly state that "he began to think" when he was three?

³² This is the version in many midrashim — see the references in *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 30, sec. 8, and ch. 64, sec. 5.

³³ Especially considering that the version that Avraham was forty-eight years old finds its source in other places: "For in the Generation of the Dispersion, Avraham was forty-eight years old, and we do not find that he participated in their subversion" (Rashi on *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 64, par. 4). Similarly, it is stated in *Magen Avos* there: "They concluded that this was his age (forty-eight years old when he became aware of his Creator) since in the year of Peleg's death, the land was divided, and then Avraham was forty-eight years old... Upon witnessing the separation of their language and the ensuing confusion, contrary to their intentions, his belief in Divine providence was solidified, and then he attained full awareness of his Creator." *Magen Avos* further asserts, "The version that says that Avraham was forty years old is a corrupted version," with the accurate age being forty-eight.

³⁴ *Tzafnas Paneach*, on Rambam here, states: Refer to *Bava Basra* 91, where it is stated that Avraham was imprisoned for ten years, and afterward, in Charan, he was fifty-two years old, as explained in *Avodah Zarah* 9. See there. This is the source of Rambam's approach, asserting that Avraham became aware of his Creator at forty, not at forty-eight. However, it should be noted that Rambam here did not mention his imprisonment, although he did write about it in *Guide for the Perplexed*, vol. 3, ch. 39.

3.

RAMBAM'S NARRATIVE

These issues will be clarified by prefacing with a general explanation of Rambam's *Hilchos Avodah Zarah*. Rambam begins the first chapter by saying: "During the times of Enosh, humanity committed a grave error." He then goes on to explain their error at length and concludes by saying: "This was the essence of idolatry."

Subsequently, in paragraph 2, Rambam continues: "After many years passed, there arose people — false prophets — who claimed that G-d had commanded them to declare: 'Serve this star....'" Rambam details how they began worshiping a particular star and describes at length how later they degenerated to the extent that they engaged in the basest forms of idolatry. "As the years passed, {Hashem's} glorious and awesome Name was forgotten by the entire populace, and no one was aware of Him... except a few, for example, Chanoch, Mesushelach, Noach, Shem, and Ever. The world continued in this fashion until the pillar of the world was born — our Patriarch Avraham."

In paragraph 3, Rambam explains at length how Avraham reached an awareness of his Creator and describes Avraham's noble acts afterward to promulgate the "great fundamental principle" (consciousness of the Creator and His service) in the hearts of "thousand and myriads." This {continued} until "he taught it to Yitzchak, his son..., and Yitzchak taught Yaakov... and Yaakov taught his children..." Rambam describes the circumstances of Yaakov's sons until Hashem dispatched Moshe Rabbeinu and gave the mitzvos to the Jewish people. All this is described at length and in great detail.

This is perplexing: *Mishneh Torah* is a book {of halachos} "law by law" (as Rambam writes in the Introduction to his work). It is not a book of world history. It is not even a record of the annals of the Jewish people.

Of what **halachic** significance is the lengthy description in this entire chapter, discussing the degeneration of the idolaters from the times of Enosh

and on until the time when “Hashem chose {the Children of} Israel as His inheritance, He crowned them with mitzvos and informed them of the path to serve Him, and {taught them} the judgment prescribed for idolatry and all those who stray after it”?

If Rambam would have prefaced by saying that Adam HaRishon³⁵ was commanded about (the prohibition against) idolatry, one could answer, albeit with difficulty, that this lengthy passage relates to what Rambam writes later in Chapter 2:³⁶ “Anyone who professes belief in a false deity denies... everything that has been commanded to the prophets **from Adam** until eternity....” Additionally, since Noahides³⁷ are also commanded not to engage in idolatry,³⁸ this lengthy passage clarifies that despite Noahides having engaged in idolatry over the course of many generations from the days of Enosh and on — to the extent that “these practices spread throughout the world”³⁹ — nonetheless, we shouldn’t think that idolatry was not prohibited to them. Rambam emphasizes that by worshiping idols, they violated Hashem’s command.

However, in this entire chapter, Rambam makes no mention that Adam HaRishon was commanded to desist from idolatry. Also, Rambam does not emphasize the severity of idolatry that applies to the periods when people violated this prohibition.

It turns out that the lengthy narrative comprising this entire chapter is, seemingly, merely a recounting of historical events. It does not correlate with Rambam’s *Sefer HaYad*,⁴⁰ the content of which is Jewish law.

³⁵ As Rambam writes in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” beg. of ch. 9.

³⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 2, par. 4.

³⁷ {Lit., “the children of Noach,” this term refers to Gentiles.}

³⁸ See *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 9, par. 2.

³⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 2.

⁴⁰ {*Yad HaChazakah* is an alternate name for Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*.}

4.

IDOLATRY – A PROHIBITION MAINLY OF THOUGHT

We can posit that the **first** chapter of *Hilchos Avodah Zarah*, and the details presented in this chapter, constitute a general **introduction** to all of *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* in this work of the Rambam.

The explanation:

The sin of idolatry also comprises prohibitions involving action and specific acts (*avodah zarah*, {lit.} strange **service**). But the substance and essence of idolatry relate to a person's thoughts and musings. When he contemplates, thinking that any creation, an angel or a sphere, is a deity or even serves as an intermediary, existing independently – such a thought is also prohibited explicitly.

As Rambam explains in these paragraphs, right at the beginning of Chapter 2:

The essence of the commandment forbidding idolatry is not to serve any of the creations, not an angel... even if a person worshiping knows that Hashem is the {true} G-d and serves the creation in the manner in which Enosh worshiped.... The Torah warns us about this.... This implies that you might inquire with “the eye of the heart,” and it might appear to you that these entities control the world, having been apportioned by Hashem.... Therefore, you might say it is proper to bow down to them and worship them. For this reason, {the Torah} commands and says.... This implies that the musings of your heart should not lead you astray to worship these and make them an intermediary between you and the Creator.

In subsequent paragraphs, Rambam continues and says:

The Holy One has commanded us not to read those books (concerning idolatry), nor to reflect about them or any matters involved with them.⁴¹ ... all these prohibitions share one common aim:⁴² to pay no attention to idol worship....⁴³ Idolatry is not the only

⁴¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 2, par. 2.

⁴² *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 2, par. 3.

⁴³ One receives lashes as punishment, specifically when he “performs a deed that reflects his concern with idol worship” (*Mishneh Torah*, *ibid*). However, one transgresses the prohibition simply by paying attention to it. See the commentaries on *Mishneh Torah* *ibid*. Also, consult Rambam's *Sefer Hamitzvos*, negative mitzvah 10, 47; et al.

subject we are forbidden to pay attention to. In addition, we are warned not to ponder any thought that will cause us to uproot one of the fundamentals of the Torah....⁴⁴

5.

RAMBAM'S INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE AS FOUNDATIONAL

In light of this, it is clear that to properly fulfill the positive and negative mitzvos included in the prohibition of idolatry, it is not enough to know the halachos dealing with **action** — what a person should do and what he should not do. Rather, **first and foremost**, a person must verify that his thoughts are **entirely** appropriate. For this reason, Rambam offers his lengthy introduction.

A person must firmly establish in his **mind** and heart that all creations in the world have no independent existence. Therefore, there is no room for a person to honor, ascribe importance to, or serve any created entity⁴⁵ — “not an angel, and not a sphere, and not a star, and not any of the four fundamental elements, nor any entity created from them.”⁴⁶

Moreover, Rambam's introduction to *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* is relevant to fulfilling all of the mitzvos because fulfilling the prohibition against idolatry is “fundamental to all of the mitzvos.”⁴⁷

For this reason, Rambam places the entire first chapter before the laws of idolatry, beginning with, “During the times of Enosh, humanity committed a grave error... the **wise men** of **that** generation.” Rambam **explains** that their error was a result of them thinking that “since Hashem created the stars... and accorded honor to them...,” it would be appropriate {for people} to honor and praise these entities and even build temples for them and serve them, Heaven forbid.

⁴⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 2, par. 6: “Whoever accepts a false god as true, even though he does not actually worship it, disgraces and blasphemes {God's glorious and awesome Name}.”

⁴⁵ See Tzemach Tzedek's *Sefer HaMitzvos {Derech Mitzvosecha}*, “*Mitzvas Milah*,” chs. 2 and 3.

⁴⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” beg. of ch. 2.

⁴⁷ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 2, end of par. 4.

By offering this explanation, Rambam clarifies that the basis and rationale behind people turning to idolatry (including those who lived in the generation of Enosh, whose intent was “to fulfill **Hashem’s will**, according to their false conception”) is not only untenable because of Hashem’s command and decree; it was also contrary to the truth and to reality, and contrary to logic, being based on humanity having “**committed** a grave **error**.” They knew that “You are {Hashem} alone.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, they succumbed to idolatry because of “their foolish error, that they perceived this emptiness {idolatry} as Your will.”⁴⁹

In paragraph 2, Rambam speaks of the lowest, coarsest forms of idolatry when he says that “G-d had commanded...: ‘Serve this star,’” and “their priests would tell them: ‘This service will enable you to be successful,’” or that “the star itself... commanded them: ‘Serve me,’” until they told the people that “this image is the source of benefit or harm.” Rambam explains that they reached these depths because “false prophets arose among the people.” Meaning, this error in mind and heart led to such an awful degeneration, which was even worse than an error based on logic and rationale. Their error was diametrically opposed to logic and sprung from “**false** prophets...” and “other **deceivers**.”

In the end, this {series of mistakes} would lead a person to forget Hashem completely, as in fact occurred at that time: “As the years passed, {Hashem’s} glorious and awesome Name was forgotten by the entire populace....” As a result of this grave misconception, they degenerated further over time, becoming more and more distant {from Hashem} until eventually, any memory of the Creator of the world and its Controller was forgotten.

After this entire narrative, Rambam describes (in paragraph 3) how Avraham became aware of Hashem. What decidedly emerges from this description is that (logically as well) a person should utterly reject all forms of idolatry. Although Avraham lived among the basest idolaters,⁵⁰ “and he served with them,” nonetheless, “he appreciated the way of **truth** and understood the

⁴⁸ {Mishneh Torah, “Hilchos Avodah Zarah,” ch. 1, par. 5, paraphrased from *Nechemiah* 9:6.}

⁴⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “Hilchos Avodah Zarah,” ch. 1, end of par. 5.

⁵⁰ For by then, “{Hashem’s} glorious and awesome Name was forgotten by the entire populace.”

path of **righteousness** through his accurate comprehension... and he knew that the entire world was committing an error.”

Moreover, Rambam details how Avraham reached this conclusion: “He wondered: ‘How is it possible for this sphere to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it and causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve...,’ and his heart was searching and {gaining} understanding.”

Meaning, creation itself compels {acknowledgment of} and reveals the “way of truth.” Namely, “there is one G-d who controls the sphere and He created everything...”

As mentioned above, all of these concepts are foundational. It is presented as an introduction to (and forms a part of) the **laws** of idolatry. Not only is this passage effective in influencing a Jew to refrain from *actively* engaging in idolatry, but its primary influence is upon the Jew’s **mind** and heart by firmly implanting within them the truth. In this way, the possibility of succumbing to this sin is completely averted — for it will be clear that all creations have no independent existence or significance, as discussed above.

6.

THREE, FORTY, OR FORTY-EIGHT?

On this basis, we can explain why Rambam chose the version that says, “Avraham was **forty** years old when he became aware of his Creator,” and not the version “forty-eight years old” or other versions. (We can also understand why Rambam mentioned Avraham’s age at all.)

It is because this detail explains and emphasizes the nature of rejecting idolatry: Concerning the age of forty, our Sages say:⁵¹ “At forty years of age {a person attains} understanding.” Meaning, when a person reaches the age of forty, he **naturally** attains maturity in understanding and comprehension. (In

⁵¹ *Avos*, end of ch. 5.

the same way, in the previous case {in this mishnah}, it says, “at thirty years of age {a person attains} strength,” which is also something that a person attains **naturally**. Similarly, it says earlier {in this mishnah} “at five years of age, the study of Scripture {should be commenced}”;⁵² and it says subsequently, “at fifty {a person can give} counsel; at sixty — old age,” etc.)⁵³

On this basis, it is clear that awareness of the Creator’s existence and understanding that anything other than Him has no independent existence or significance is a function of the **nature** of a **person’s** intellect. It is not something that transcends intellect. Thus, Rambam maintains the version, “Avraham was forty years old when he **became aware** of his Creator,” because, at this age, a person’s mental consciousness and intellectual understanding become mature.

This correlates with the general subject matter of this paragraph and chapter {in *Mishneh Torah*}. (Although, also according to Rambam, “abundant years teach wisdom,”⁵⁴ as mentioned above, “at fifty...” Afterward, also, Avraham’s awareness of the Creator grew — when he was forty-eight, when he was fifty, and so on.)

In light of this explanation, it is also clear why Rambam doesn’t mention at the beginning of this paragraph that Avraham was “three years old” when “he began to think and ponder in his mind,”⁵⁵ thereby beginning the process of becoming “aware of his Creator.” For then, we might mistakenly think that this cognizance was not based on Avraham’s natural intellect. Instead, it must have been miraculous beyond intellect — if, at the age of three, he already was conscious of G-dliness! ⁵⁶

⁵² {At that particular age, he becomes capable of studying Scripture.}

⁵³ See *Avodah Zarah* 5b; Rashi on *Devarim* 29:6; *Meiri* on *Avos*, loc. cit.

⁵⁴ *Iyov* 32:7.

⁵⁵ {*Kessef Mishneh* on *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 3.}

⁵⁶ Although Rambam writes, “After this mighty man was weaned” (especially in light of fn. 39 in the original {that Avraham was weaned at the beginning of his third year, at 24 months old}), Rambam adds, “though he was a child.” Meaning, {Avraham became aware of Hashem} sometime after he was weaned; it was then that he **began** {to become aware of Hashem}...; this accords with *Hagahos Maimoniyos*, sub-sec.1.

7.

LOGICAL PROOF

On this basis and with this orientation, Rambam explains in detail in this paragraph how Avraham “began to formulate replies... and **debate** with them.... When he overcame them through {the strength of} his **arguments**, the king desired to kill him....” Rambam explains that “he would go out and call to the people, gathering them in city after city,” until he brought the people “to the way of **truth**. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are the men of the House of Avraham. He planted in their **hearts** this great fundamental principle.”

By means of **logical** proofs, Avraham steered “thousands and myriads” (away from idolatry) to “the way of truth,” and “he planted in their hearts” {belief in the Creator}. All of this adds to what was discussed above and underscores the ability of the truth-seeking human intellect to renounce idolatry.

8.

AVRAHAM'S GENERATION

In light of everything discussed, we now understand what Rashi said about Noach: “Had he been in Avraham’s generation, he would not have been considered anything {of significance}”:

Rashi doesn’t say that when compared with Avraham, Noach “would not have been considered anything.” Rather, Noach was compared with “Avraham’s **generation**.”

The phrase “Avraham’s generation” doesn’t refer to the period in which Avraham achieved renown in his generation by means of “the souls that they made in Haran” [which already began in Noach’s lifetime, as discussed above]. Rather, it refers to the period when Avraham’s generation became **his**

generation. They aligned themselves with Avraham’s way of life; they followed his outlook. This period did not yet begin when Avraham lived in Ur Kasdim. When he had lived there, he merely “**overcame** them through {the strength of} his arguments” — and it did not begin when Avraham lived in Charan. It began much later, when “he came to the land of Canaan, proclaiming {the existence of the Creator} as it says,⁵⁷ ‘He called there in the Name of Hashem, the eternal G-d,’” until “ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are the men of the House of Avraham. He **planted** in their hearts this great fundamental principle.”

The uniqueness of this period was that they came to an awareness of the Creator not (merely) because Avraham “**overcame** them through {the strength of} his arguments,” and not (merely) by them **accepting intellectually** Avraham’s explanations and proofs. This sort of awareness would be an acquired belief (based on what Avraham conveyed). Instead, it was because Avraham “**planted**⁵⁸ in their hearts” an awareness and knowledge of G-dliness that was their own, resembling Avraham’s awareness and knowledge. They possessed a consciousness of G-dliness that was (also) based on **their** own intellect.

Thus, it is fitting to refer to this generation as “**Avraham’s** generation” — a generation imbued with an awareness of G-dliness similar to that of Avraham.

We can now understand the wording, “**Had** he been in Avraham’s generation,” because the generation only achieved **this** distinction after Noach’s death when Avraham was seventy years old.

⁵⁷ *Bereishis* 21:33.

⁵⁸ Akin to something planted, which the ground itself yields thereafter.

9.

INTELLECTUAL AWARENESS IN INSUFFICIENT

However, in light of the above discussion, we need to clarify what Rambam says in paragraph 3: After the sons of Yaakov became “a nation that knew Hashem, the Jews extended their stay in Egypt (and subsequently, there was a change {in them}).” “They regressed and learned from the {Egyptians’} deeds and began to engage in idolatrous worship, as they {the Egyptians} did.... Within a short time, the fundamental principle that Avraham had planted would have been uprooted.” Based on the above discussion, this description contradicts the content of this entire chapter — that a person, through his own intellect, will conclude that idolatry is untenable and will come to an awareness of Hashem. In contrast, it says in this passage that even “a nation that knew Hashem” had changed; they “regressed and learned from the {Egyptians’} deeds and began to engage in idolatrous worship, as they {the Egyptians} did.”

This issue is clarified based on what Rambam says at the conclusion of this chapter: “Because of Hashem’s love for us... He brought forth Moshe, the master of all prophets, and sent him {to redeem the Jews}. After Moshe prophesied, and Hashem chose {the children of} Israel as His inheritance, He crowned them with mitzvos and informed them of the path to serve Him and the judgment prescribed for idolatry and all those who stray after it.”

Rambam emphasizes the following idea here: The existence of idolatry and its accompanying worship — whatever manner of service is performed (even the manner of service of the generation of Enosh) — has no basis in reality. It is possible to conceive and understand this by means of human intellect, and Creation compels us to acknowledge this, as discussed above. Thus, as an introduction to the laws of idolatry, it is important to be aware of this because it implants the recognition of G-dliness and the rejection of idolatry in human intellect, as discussed.

However, along with this principle, we must realize that it is impossible to **rely** on and **build** upon the **foundation** of human intellect alone as the basis

for the rejection of idolatry, for the awareness of the existence of the Creator, and for {our obligation with respect to} His service. For as we see concerning {the Children of} Israel during this period, after they were “a nation that knew Hashem,” they “extended their stay in Egypt, they regressed and learned from the {Egyptians’} deeds and began to engage in idolatrous worship, as they did... and the descendants of Yaakov would have returned to the errors of the world and their crookedness.”

To circumvent the sin of idolatry, they needed the foundation described by Rambam: “Because of Hashem’s love for us... He brought forth Moshe, the master of all prophets, and sent him {to redeem the Jews}. After Moshe prophesied, and Hashem chose {the Children of} Israel as His inheritance, **He crowned them with mitzvos and informed them of the path to serve Him...**” Meaning, it was on the strength of Hashem’s command that they fulfilled this commandment {concerning idolatry}.

This doesn’t apply only to the awareness of the Creator’s existence. It also applies to His worship, which was also established (in Avraham’s times) based on their own understanding — “that it is fitting to serve only the G-d of the world. To Him {alone} is it fitting to bow down, sacrifice, and offer libations....”⁵⁹ We must **know** that this is also dependent on Hashem’s word — the prophecy of Moshe; Hashem “informed them of the path to serve Him.”

We can posit that this has halachic ramifications: Even a person who intellectually renounces idolatry as pure fiction and is fully aware of Hashem must fulfill the mitzvah and command concerning idolatry. This mitzvah includes the prohibition against idolatrous worship — because Hashem “**informed** them of the path to serve Him.”

⁵⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 3.

10.

UNDERSTANDING AND FAITHFULNESS

Based on all the above, Rambam presents two halachos in the first chapter of *Hilchos Avodah Zarah*: (a) Even when viewed through the lens of the human intellect, idolatry is untenable; a person must firmly establish within his intellect the falsehood of idolatry and the detailed commands and prohibitions relating to idolatry; and (b) on the other hand, the **fulfillment** of the mitzvah {to reject idolatry} **in practice** should not (only) be based on awareness and understanding; a person must fulfill this mitzvah because Hashem “informed them of the path to serve Him” through Moshe, “the master of all prophets.” This means the fulfillment of this mitzvah in practice must be based on faith in Hashem and fear of violating His command.

The commands and prohibitions relating to idolatry consist of restrictions — “don’t do” — whereas the positive obligations include the mitzvos of knowing Hashem and the unity of Hashem. [As Rambam says regarding the first part of *Sefer HaYad*:⁶⁰ “I will include within it all the mitzvos that are the foundations of the faith {taught by} Moshe, our teacher, of blessed memory... such as the unity of Hashem, blessed is He, and the prohibition against idolatry. I have called this book *The Book of Knowledge*.”] When Rambam discusses these positive mitzvos, he also mentions these two principles:

At the beginning of *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, Rambam says:⁶¹ “...**to know** that there is a Primary Being (to know that there is a G-d).”⁶² This mitzvah is based on a person’s intellectual **knowledge** and **understanding** that there is a Primary Being, the Creator of the world. And at the beginning of *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Rambam writes:⁶³ “We are commanded to believe in Hashem, to believe that there is a source and cause” — the command is to believe with faithfulness (that transcends intellect) in the existence of Hashem.

⁶⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, beg. of “*Listing of Mitzvos*” according to the division of halachos in *Mishneh Torah*.

⁶¹ {*Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*,” ch. 1, par. 1.}

⁶² Rambam’s wording in the heading {listing the mitzvos} of *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*; similarly, in the listing of the mitzvos at the beg. of *Mishneh Torah*, “positive mitzvah 1.”

⁶³ *Sefer HaMitzvos*, “positive mitzvah 1.”

11.

THE LIMITATIONS OF HUMAN INTELLECT

On this basis, we can explain some of the more profound ideas on this subject:

To fulfill the positive mitzvah, it is not enough to know the Creator.⁶⁴ After all, a person's understanding is limited to his own intellectual ability. Human intellect can apprehend G-dliness only at the level on which Hashem is described as “a Primary Being who brought into being all existence.”⁶⁵ This is the level at which Hashem contracts Himself, so to speak, to relate to the world. However, a person can only arrive at “the truth of the existence” of G-dliness — the G-dly light that transcends any relationship to the world — by means of a faith that surpasses intellect.

The same applies to the negative aspects — the commands and prohibitions relating to idolatry: Their practical fulfillment must not be based solely on intellect. Moreover, **this** intellectual rejection of idolatry, by itself, is also insufficient to implant within a person's mind the truth that nothing (and surely not the lowest form of idolatry) has independent existence or significance other than Hashem. [Firstly, if his only basis for this outlook is human intellect, it is likely that after a person is immersed in worldly matters over an extended period of time, his experience of the world (and all it entails) will overwhelm his intellect and lead him in the opposite direction, to the lowliest of places. This is what happened to the Jewish people in Egypt — when “the days there lengthened,”⁶⁶ “they regressed and learned from the {Egyptians}' deeds and began to engage in idolatrous worship, as they did.” Additionally —]

Human intellect is a “something” — a created and limited entity. Consequently, human intellect cannot deny the actual existence of creations.

⁶⁴ See Tzemach Tzedek's *Sefer HaMitzvos {Derech Mitzvosecha}*, the beginning of “*Mitzvas Haamanas Elokus*.”

⁶⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*,” ch. 1, par. 1; see at length the “*Hadran*” on Rambam's *Sefer Mishneh Torah* (Kehot, publ., 5745), which explains the first halachos of *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*.

⁶⁶ {Wording from *Bereishis* 26:8.}

Only when this idea emanates from **Hashem's** commands, fulfilled by a person predicated on his faith, can the person feel the truth deeply — that any existence, aside from Him, absolutely does not exist.

— From the talk delivered on Motzaei Shabbos *parshas Noach*, 5740 (1979)