

The First “Commandment”

אַנְכִי יְדַדְךָ אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים

1. Hasdai Crescas (Spain, 1340-1410)

He who includes among the list of positive precepts belief in the existence of God falls into a common error. The very character of the term Mitzvah indicated, by definition, that it can only apply to matters governed by freewill and choice. But faith in the existence of God is one of those things which are not governed by free will and choice. Consequently the term Mitzvah can not apply to it.

2. Abarbanel (Spain, 1437-1508)

The phrase “I am the Lord your God...” does not constitute a commandment neither dogmatic nor practical, but is merely a preface to the subsequent commandments and injunctions, a declaration making known to Bnei Yisrael Who was addressing them.

3. Rambam, Mishneh Torah Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 1:1,6; 2:10

The most fundamental of fundamentals and the pillar of all sciences is to know that there is a first being bringing into existence all existing things, and that all that exists on heaven and earth and between them exists only through the truth of His existence...

The knowledge of this concept constitutes a positive precept, as it is said: “I am the Lord your God” (Deut 5:6)...

And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great Name; even as David said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:3). And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil frightened, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge. And so David said, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, what is man that You are mindful of him?” (Ps 8:4-5)...Observe the Universe and then you will realize Him who spoke and the world was.