

FAITH



Louis Jacobs

FAITH

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Seeker of Unity:

The Life and Works of Aaron of Starosselje

Principles of the Jewish Faith:
An Analytical Study

We Have Reason to Believe

Jewish Values

Jewish Prayer

A Guide to Yom Kippur

A Guide to Rosh Ha-shanah

Tract on Ecstasy

Translated from the Hebrew of Dobh Baer of Lubavitch

The Palm Tree of Deborah

Translated from the Hebrew of Moses Cordovero

Studies in Talmudic Logic and Methodology

FAITH

Louis Jacobs

VALLENTINE, MITCHELL · LONDON

For Ivor and Tirza

SBN: 85303 006 5

*First published in Great Britain 1968 by
Valentine, Mitchell & Co. Ltd.*

*18 Cursitor Street
London, E.C.4*

© *Louis Jacobs 1968*

*Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Northumberland Press Limited
Gateshead*

Contents

Preface	vii
---------	-----

PART I

Introductory

1 The Nature of Faith	3
2 The Meaning of Faith	19

PART II

Ways to Faith

3 The Way of Reason	41
4 The Leap of Faith	65
5 The Way of Experience	80
6 The Way of Tradition	98

PART III

Objections to Faith

7 The Existence of Evil	113
8 The Marxist Attack	126
9 The Freudian Attack	135

PART IV

The Life of Faith

10 Faith and Trust	149
11 Faith in Action	161
12 Faith and its Tensions	173

CONTENTS

APPENDIX I	Amen	199
APPENDIX II	Jewish Parallels to the Tertullian Paradox	201
Bibliography		213
Index		225

Preface

MANY books have been written in English on the meaning, nature and life of faith and the problems to which these give rise. It is difficult to assess the extent to which we are today committed to religious belief but there is an obvious interest in religion and in basic religious issues. This book considers belief in God from the Jewish point of view.

The vast majority of contemporary volumes on belief in God are written either from a Christian standpoint or as a direct reaction to it. Where the author's background is Christian, naturally the categories used are derived from the Christian tradition. There is rarely a hint that Jewish thinkers throughout the ages have been no less passionately concerned, as sincerely dedicated, as daringly speculative, as their Christian counterparts. On the Jewish side today there is an unfortunate suspicion of theological thinking, which is only gradually allowing serious reflection on the significance of Judaism as a religion.

No Jewish writer on faith can afford to ignore the many extremely able and valuable discussions of faith by non-Jews, or apologise for considering them. The God in whom Jews believe is King of the Universe. The great themes of faith are universal, the concern of all Theists. Nevertheless, the Christian concept of God, insofar as one can speak of a concept of God, is at variance with the Jewish. The insights provided by distinguished Jewish thinkers are vital for the Jew and may frequently also be of help to non-Jewish Theists. Maimonides, as Aquinas, is God-intoxicated and it is unforgivable to imply that Israel, which brought God to mankind, has nothing more to offer on the fundamental principle of Theistic faith.

PART I

Introductory

*Chapter I**The Nature of Faith*

IN the *Jewish Chronicle* of Dec. 11th, 1964, it is reported that an American Rabbi declared himself to be an atheist but of the 'sophisticated' theoretical kind. 'Personal Comment' of the same issue, remarked that by continuing to serve as a Rabbi the American evidently believed in organised religion even though he did not believe in God. This is a good illustration of the way in which the term 'belief' can be used in two different ways. When it is said of the Rabbi that he did not believe in God, the meaning is that he did not believe *that* God exists. But when it is said that he believed in organised religion, the meaning can hardly be that he believed organised religion exists, since this is self-evident. The meaning is that he had confidence in organised religion, that he saw value in it, even without God. He believed *in* it.

Or consider these two affirmations: 'I believe in ghosts'; 'I believe in the policy of the Labour Party'. The first is an affirmation that there are ghosts, that these are real beings who can appear to the living, not mere subjects of chilling tales or part of folklore and superstition. There is no suggestion of the trustworthiness or reliability of ghosts. The second affirmation is one of trust and confidence. Even the most rabid opponent of Socialism would not deny that the Labour Party has a policy, even though he will think it a pretty poor one. Belief in the policy of the Labour Party expresses faith that the policy is beneficial to the country, that it will prove itself in practice, that it will work. The first proposition is a 'belief *that* . . .', the second a 'belief *in* . . .'.

A 'belief *in* . . .' proposition always presupposes a 'belief

that . . . proposition. I cannot believe in the trustworthiness of my friend, for instance, unless I first believe that he and his trustworthiness are real and have been united in the past. My belief in him implies that he will be equally reliable in the future. 'Belief *that . . .*' on the other hand, need not involve any kind of 'belief *in*'. Hamlet's belief that he had seen his father's ghost was not in itself sufficient ground for trusting the ghost's tragic tale and advice.

'Belief *that . . .*' is chiefly a matter of the intellect. The man who believes in ghosts does so because the arguments for their existence convince him. Even if his belief is not based on a careful weighing of the evidence, even if it is the result of a 'hunch', his mind is satisfied that the 'hunch' is correct. Emotional factors are not, of course, absent. He may wish to believe in ghosts. The conviction that there are ghosts may, for some reason, be emotionally more satisfying than the conviction that they do not exist. But the affirmation is more mental than emotional or moral.

On the other hand, 'belief *in . . .*' is primarily a matter of the moral will. The man who believes in his friend (or in himself) does so not so much because he has weighed dispassionately all the evidence for trustworthiness but because it seems right to him to place his trust in that which is worthy of his trust as he sees it. Moreover, the very attitude of trust in one's friend may itself summon forth a response on the part of the friend and so be responsible for the vindication of trust. 'Belief *that . . .*' involves the appropriation of a truth. 'Belief *in . . .*' involves the determination to act on the truth one has seen. It follows that there can be no command to 'believe *that . . .*' But 'belief *in . . .*' can be commanded. We can meaningfully be ordered to be loyal to the truth we have seen just as we can be commanded to obey any other moral imperative.

When the famous Jewish mediaeval philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), understood the first of the Ten Commandments as a command to believe that there is a God he was severely criticised on the ground that such a command is logically absurd. If belief is present no command is necessary. If it is absent there is no one to do the commanding. But, apart from this, there cannot be a command to believe that

there is a God because 'belief *that* . . .' cannot be commanded.¹

The truth of the matter is that not only is there no command in the Bible to believe in God but the Hebrew word for 'faith' (*emunah*) always refers, in the Bible, to 'belief *in* . . .', never to 'belief *that* . . .'. When the word is used to denote belief in God it is always in the sense of belief in God's power to help, of confidence and trust in Him, of reliance on His word. In order to appreciate this it is necessary to grasp the reality that, however we understand the phenomenon, the Biblical writers had no doubts of God's existence. His was an all-pervading Presence. He was part of their lives. He had guided their ancestors, and He was guiding them now. He was as real to them as their families and friends. His voice could be heard in the storm and wind, His footprints seen in human history. But trusting in Him, relying on His guidance, obeying the moral demands He made on man, this was a very different thing. The Biblical authors recognised that there is an element of perversity in human nature which all too frequently prevents man from acting on the truth he has seen. There was no tension for the Biblical writers around the belief *that* there is a God. Neither they nor those to whom their words were addressed ever conceived of denying His existence. In those far-off days theoretical atheism was unknown. But there was a good deal of tension around belief and trust *in* God. Indeed, all the spiritual drama of the Bible, all its moral pain and anguish as well as its grandeur and challenge, stem from the creative tensions inseparable from man's inner struggle to live by that which he knows to be true but finds hard to follow.

The Hebrew word *emunah*, denoting trust, confidence in, reliance on someone or something, is connected etymologically with the word *amen* (Amen) and the word for 'truth', *emeth*. The meaning behind all three words is one of affirmation, steadfastness and perseverance. A good illustration of the Biblical usage is Exodus 14: 31: 'And Israel saw the great

¹ See Maimonides' 'Sepher Ha-Mitzwoth', *Mitzwoth Aseh*, I, Part II, pp. 3-4 and commentaries. Some of the commentators defend Maimonides by suggesting that he means that the command is not to believe but to keep the belief alive in Israel. On the whole question of the two kinds of belief see the stimulating discussion by H. H. Price: 'Belief "In" and Belief "That"', in 'Religious Studies', Vol. 1, No. 1.

¹ See R. Zadok ha-Kohen: 7eidkat ha-Tradita No. 232
(Jer. 1968, p. 184) זקוק לראי אמת אנכי באמת
אם אפסל לראי אמת כי יבטיח וטעם בו ראוי

FAITH

work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord, and in His servant Moses.' Belief here (*wa-yaaminu*) cannot possibly mean 'belief that . . .'. According to the narrative, even before their deliverance at the shores of the Red Sea the Israelites did not doubt the *existence* of Moses. They knew Moses was leading them but they lacked confidence in his leadership, and were uncertain that he was the deliverer God had promised. When Israel walked safely through the waters which drowned their foes their doubts were silenced. They now believed *in* Moses. And by the same token the verse on their belief in God refers to the Israelites' reliance on God as their Redeemer from bondage. They had come to trust in Him.

Similarly, Scripture says of Abraham, when he trusts in God's promise to give him a son and multiply his seed, '*And he believed (we-heemin) in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness*' (Gen 15: 6). Abraham's attitude of trust had a moral quality. It was an act of righteousness. This attitude of trust in what is worthy of it is implied by the Psalmist when he proclaims of God's commandments: '*Teach me good discernment and knowledge; for I have believed (heemanti) in Thy commandments*' (Ps. 119: 66).

It is worth noting that the idea of trust implied in the word *emunah* refers in the Bible to the relationship between two human beings as well as to that between God and man, as in the verse: '*And Achish believed (wa-yaamen) David*' (1 Sam. 2: 12). It follows from the Biblical usage that the author of the book of Proverbs is thinking more of an over-enthusiastic misapplication of trust than of credulity, in the verse: '*The simpleton believeth (yaamin) every word*' (Prov. 14: 15). The simpleton of Proverbs is not so much the prey of superstition as the natural victim of the confidence trickster.

Furthermore, the word *emunah* is used of God in the Bible. It is obviously grotesque to speak of God as 'believing'; but to speak of Him as trustworthy is valid. Man is justified in placing his confidence in God because He can be relied upon. Thus the Psalmist says: '*To declare Thy lovingkindness in the morning, And Thy faithfulness (we-emunathka) in the night seasons*' (Ps. 92: 3). In life's morning, when all is bright, man's attention is focused on God's mercy. In the darkness of

THE NATURE OF FAITH

night, when mercy is obscured, man yet relies on God's faithfulness. In the same spirit the Psalmist says of God: '*All his work is done in faithfulness*' (*be-emunah*) (Ps. 33:4). And the Deuteronomist speaks of Him as '*A God of faithfulness* (*emunah*) *and without iniquity*' (Deut. 32:4).²

It would never have occurred to the Biblical writers to attempt to prove God's existence. They were aware of Him as experienced reality. This, no doubt, seems strange to moderns. How could the ancients have had so powerful a conviction that God *is* that it was never questioned as it is today. But this fact is clear beyond doubt to anyone who takes the trouble to read the Bible carefully. The unbeliever will explain this away in naturalistic terms; that in a pre-scientific age the world is inevitably thought of as peopled with spirits or (at a more advanced stage) with a Great Spirit. The believer will not necessarily reject such explanations entirely but will view this very phenomenon as part of God's self-revelation. Thus, for him, the awareness of God's constant Presence by the Biblical authors is not a mere subjective feeling but a reflection of ultimate reality.

The post-Biblical Jews, during the period of the return and down through the Rabbinic period, were the heirs to Biblical thinking in this matter. In the vast Rabbinic literature, too, God is so real and His presence so vividly experienced (Max Kadushin has coined the expression 'normal mysticism' for this phenomenon) that the Rabbis never seem to have been moved to try to prove God's existence. As for the Biblical authors so for the Rabbis *emunah* is 'belief in . . .', never 'belief that . . .'. George Foot Moore, after surveying the references to faith in early Rabbinic literature, rightly says: 'In conclusion it may not be superfluous to remark that the words for faith in the literature and thought of this age are not used in the concrete sense of creed, beliefs entertained—or to be entertained—about God.'³

Many illustrations can be given of the Rabbinic use of the

² Cf. the following Biblical passages: Ex. 4:1, 5, 8-9; 19:9; Num. 20:12; Deut. 9:23; 28:66; II Sam. 20:19; II Kings 12:16; 17:14; 22:7; Is. 11:5; 43:10; Hos. 2:22; Hab. 2:4; Ps. 33:4; 78:22, 23; 106:24; 119:30; II Chron. 20:20 and the article 'Faith' in Kittel's 'Dictionary of the New Testament' by Rudolf Bultmann and A. Weiser.

³ 'Judaism', Vol. II, p. 238.

FAITH

word *emunah* for belief and confidence in God or in some person, idea or object. To mention just a few of these, on judgment day, said a Rabbi (*Sabb* 31a), among the questions that will be put to man is: 'Did you conduct your business affairs faithfully?' (*be-emunah*) i.e. reliably, honestly, in a trustworthy fashion. Another Rabbi remarked that God enjoins Israel to spend lavishly on food, wine and good things for the festivals: '*Have faith in Me (heeminu li) and I will pay your debts*' (*Betz.* 15b). In a somewhat cryptic passage (*Taan.* 8a) it is said: 'If this is the case with one who trusts (*maamin*) in the weasel and the well how much more so if one trusts (*maamin*) in the Holy One, blessed be He!' The tradition recorded by the standard commentators is that the reference here is to an ancient love story in which a young man plighted his troth to a maiden, calling upon a weasel and a well to be his witnesses. These avenged her when he failed to honour his promise (the weasel bit him and he fell into the well).

The Talmud (*Hull.* 57b) refers to a certain teacher who is described as an 'experimenter' because he preferred to test things by experience instead of taking them on trust. When he came to the verse: '*Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise: which having no chief, overseer or ruler, provideth her bread in the summer*' (Prov. 6: 6-8), this ancient scientist resolved to try to discover empirically whether it is true that the ants have no king. He spread his coat over an anthill so as to cause a shadow. When one of the ants emerged he marked it for the purpose of subsequent identification. The ant returned, evidently to inform the other ants that the sun had gone down. The ants came out to see what had happened but by this time the Rabbi had removed his cloak, whereupon the other ants set upon the marked ant and killed it for misleading them. This provided the Rabbi with the proof he needed that Solomon was right to say that the ants have no ruler. For if the ants have a king surely he would have been consulted before the execution was carried out. Another Rabbi, however, objected to the conclusiveness of the test. The king may have been with the ants, he argued, and may have been consulted, or they may have received the king's permission previously to act in this way when the need arose,

THE NATURE OF FAITH

or the action may have taken place during an interregnum. Consequently, the empirical test fails to prove the case and one must rely on the 'trustworthiness (*hemanutha*) of Solomon', the traditional author of the book of Proverbs. It might seem at first glance that the reference in this quaint passage is to a 'belief *that* . . .', and this would contradict our argument that this type of belief is never referred to by the term *emunah* in Rabbinic literature. But a careful examination of the passage shows that the concern here is not whether ants have a king but whether Solomon is to be trusted when he declares that ants have a king. The 'experimenter' (Heb. *askan bi-debharim*, lit., 'one who busies himself with facts' instead of resting content with the theories provided by the tradition) wanted to discover the truth for himself. The implied criticism by the other Rabbi is that such a procedure casts reflections on Solomon's reliability. Since in any event no empirical test is conclusive, he says, the only thing to do is to rely on Solomon's trustworthiness. Such reliance, well-founded from the point of view of the Rabbis, is obviously a 'belief *in* . . .'. It is as if the Rabbi is saying (it is irrelevant that this is not our point of view): Solomon's wisdom as recorded in Scripture has never let us down, why not rely on it here?

As in the Bible, the term *emunah* is used in the Rabbinic literature of God. One interpretation of the verse (Deut. 32: 4) 'A God of faithfulness' (*emunah*) is a 'trusting God', a God who has faith in His creation: 'He believed in the world (*she-heemin ha-olam*) and so He created it' (*Siphre ad loc.*).

For us, 'weak in faith' generally has a cognitive connotation. The man 'weak in faith' cannot quite make up his mind that there is a God, and he alternates between belief and unbelief. But the expression, occurring frequently in the Rabbinic literature, 'lacking in faith' (*mehusar emunah*) or 'those little in faith' (*mi-ketane amanah*) (corresponding to 'ye of little faith' in Matthew 6: 30) denotes weakness in the attitude of trust. For instance, R. Eliezer the Great said: 'Whoever has bread in his basket and yet says: "What shall I eat tomorrow," belongs to the ranks of those small in faith' (*Sot.* 48b). His trust in God is weak. Since God has today provided him with food he should not lack confidence in God's power to provide

FAITH

for the future. Noah was 'weak in faith' because until the last moment he doubted God's word that the deluge would come. (Gen. R. 32.)⁴

In all this we are far from suggesting that the Rabbis were unconscious of beliefs of the 'belief *that . . .*' kind. But for these they did not use the word *emunah*, 'faith', but words suggesting knowledge or truth, e.g. God's *Torah* is true. As we shall see, the mediaeval contrast between *emunah* ('faith') and *kephirah* ('denial') in a cognitive sense arose as a result of a completely new meaning given to faith. In the Middle Ages faith came to mean 'belief *that . . .*' rather than 'belief *in . . .*'. During the Rabbinic period terms from the root *kaphar* were, indeed, used as the opposite of 'faith' but of faith in the 'belief *in . . .*' sense. The *kopher* was the opposite of the *maamin*. The latter placed his trust in God, the former was lacking entirely in such trust. On the whole (without it being stated in the sources in quite this systematic way) the Rabbinic analysis of 'faith' recognised three stages in the matter of trust in God: one who had perfect trust in God was a *maamin*, a man of faith. The man whose trust was weak and casual was 'small in faith'. The man who had no trust in God was a *kopher*, a 'denier', not so much in the sense of theoretical rejection as of practical failure to live as if this were the truth. The *kopher* may have entertained an abstract belief that there is a God but his belief had no effect on his life, he lived as if he had no God. The following examples will help to make this clearer.

A homily on God's nearness to the poor says that God is quite different from a human being who acknowledges his rich relations but denies (*kopher*) his poor ones (*Jes. Ber. IX, 1*); denial clearly does not refer to a disbelief in the existence of the poor relations but to a refusal to help or even to accept them. In another passage (*Sabb. 116a*) the saying of R. Tarphon is quoted that if he were fleeing for his life he would prefer to seek sanctuary and protection in a heathen temple than in the home of Jewish sectarians, since the heathen do not recognise God and deny (*kopherim*) Him whereas the

⁴ Cf. the following passages: *Mekhilla*, *Beshallah*, to Ex. 14:15; *Ber. 24b*; *29a*; *Pes. 118b*; *Meg. 6a*; *Hag. 8a*; *14a*; *Sot. 46b*; *B.M. 49a*; *B.B. 8a*; *75a*; *Makk. 24a*; *Tam. 28a*; *Ex. R. 22*; *Yalkut, Hosea 519*; *Psalms 674*.

THE NATURE OF FAITH

sectarians deny (*kopherim*) while recognising Him, which is worse. Clearly in this passage 'belief that . . .' is referred to, by speaking of the *recognition* of God. It is possible, such is the implication, to recognise God (to acknowledge that there is a God) and yet to deny Him, (be disloyal to His will).

However, when using the term *kephirah* ('denial') for a rejection of certain basic principles of Judaism other than belief in God the Rabbis sometimes refer rather to the cognitive aspects of disbelief than to the moral and volitional.⁵ There is nothing surprising about this. For the Rabbis belief that God existed was so real as to be utterly beyond doubt. For then the drama of faith was acted out in the sphere of 'belief in . . .' Moreover theoretical atheism was virtually unknown among Jews in Rabbinic times. But one who lacked faith in some basic principle of Judaism (other than belief in God) may have failed either because he refused to act on a truth he acknowledged or because he acknowledged no such truth. With regard to belief in God, however, theoretical atheism, even by unbelievers in other principles of Judaism, appears to have been as unknown to the Rabbis as to the Biblical authors. For example, the references in the Rabbinic literature to one who 'denies the root principle'⁶ (*kopher ba-ikkar*) seem to be not to one who denies that God exists but to one who denies that God is concerned with the deeds of men, or to one who wishes to dissociate himself entirely from the Jewish Community.

A great change came about in the Middle Ages. Faced with the challenge of Greek and Arabic philosophy (including philosophical denials of God's existence), Zoroastrianism and its offshoots, Christianity and Islam, and, from within, the rejection by the Karaites of the Rabbinic tradition, the traditional Jewish teachers were obliged to cultivate a more systematic approach to the whole question of Jewish beliefs. Not that all the challenges were new. Zoroastrianism for instance produces echoes in the later parts of the Bible and

⁵ E.g. 'The sectarians deny the resurrection of the dead' (*R.H.* 17a); 'Whoever denies idolatry is called a Jew' (*Meg.* 13a); 'Job denied the resurrection of the dead' (*B.B.* 16a); 'The nations of the world do not deny that God created the world' (*Midrash Psalms*, 19). The term *kopher* is also used of a man who denies that he owes money (*B.M.* 3a).

⁶ *Siphra*, *Behukothai*, 26; *Sanh.* 38b; *B.B.* 16a; *Ecl.* R.7.

FAITH

polemics against it and the Christian faith occur periodically in the Rabbinic literature. In an indirect way the Rabbis faced, too, the implications of Greek thought. Two things were, however, new. First, the combination of vigorous and deeply disturbing challenges demanded a more detailed and a more comprehensive defence. Secondly, the systematic nature of the rival philosophies demanded a systematic refutation. A systematic Jewish philosophy or theology which owed much to Islamic patterns was consequently developed. A systematic discussion of the belief in God's existence as a rational philosophical viewpoint became the urgent demand.

In this period 'belief *in . . .*' yields increasingly to 'belief *that . . .*' as the chief concern of Jewish thinkers. The process receives its culmination in the *Ani Maamin* ('I Believe') formulation of the articles of the Jewish faith. This, modelled almost certainly on Islamic catechisms, first appeared in 1517 and became incorporated into many liturgies.

'I believe with perfect faith *that*
the Creator, blessed be His name, is
the Author and Guide of everything that
has been created, and *that* He alone has
made, does make, and will make all things.'

It would be wrong to maintain that the 'belief *in . . .*' was entirely overlooked during the mediaeval period although it did tend to become relegated to moralistic rather than philosophical literature.⁷ New problems, such as the relationship between faith and reason, become more urgent. For 'faith' (*emunah*) has now become identified with the belief *that* there is a God. The tensions of faith were shifted from the moral and the volitional to the cognitive. The new tendency is perfectly obvious in all the great works of Jewish apologetics produced in this period. These were written chiefly to further 'belief *that . . .*' and to provide a rational demonstration of the truth of Judaism. Their authors appear

⁷ In Bahya Ibn Pakudah's 'Duties of the Heart', for instance, the first 'Gate' deals with the philosophical understanding of the existence of God and His unity while trust in God is considered in the moralistic part of the book ('*Shaar Ha-Bittahon*').

THE NATURE OF FAITH

to have held that if this great work is carried to a successful conclusion the 'belief in . . .' could safely be left to take care of itself. When the citadel itself is attacked its defenders cannot be too concerned with the polite conduct appropriate to a more peaceful state. Volitional response gave way more and more to intellectual attempts at proving the truth though, needless to say, this had a moral fervour of its own.

Faith is no longer chiefly a matter of trust and confidence, and disbelief a matter of lack of confidence. For faith now becomes assent to certain propositions; disbelief a rejection of certain propositions. The relationship between faith and reason had been no problem for the Biblical authors and their Rabbinic heirs. For them faith meant trust in God and had little to do with cognition. Reason could neither support nor reject except insofar as it is reasonable to act on the truth one has seen. It was otherwise during the Middle Ages. Faith having become chiefly a matter of accepting certain propositions as true, had to come to grips with reason. For reason has a good deal to say about truth and falsehood and there were some whose reason compelled them to accept a different set of propositions. Even after valiant attempts had been made to demonstrate that faith was supported by reason there arose the new problem of why, in that case, was it necessary for the truth to be revealed by God in a special revelation.

More and more in this period *bittahon* ('trust'), used in both Bible and Talmud as a synonym for *emunah* ('faith'), came to be used on its own to denote the trusting aspect of faith,⁸ with *emunah* reserved for the new meaning of 'belief that . . .'. By a new meaning we do not suggest that a completely fresh interpretation was given consciously to the older term. 'Belief that . . .' had, of course, been implied in the older use of the term. It is impossible to have an attitude of trust towards a non-existent being. But what had formerly been only implicit now became explicit. Faith was now the intellectual perception of truth in propositional form.

⁸ Bahya, *op. cit.*, Bahya Ibn Asher: '*Kad Ha-Kemah*', s.v. *emunah* and *bittahon*; pseudo-Nahmanides: '*Sepher Ha-Emunah We-Ha-Bittahon*' in 'Collected Writings of Nahmanides' ed. B. Chavel, Vol. II, pp. 341f. Max Kadushin: 'The Rabbinic Mind', pp. 42-43, has argued convincingly that in the Rabbinic literature *emunah* means general trust in God, not necessarily implying trust for personal security, whereas *bittahon* is more personal.

The mediaeval thinkers were not aware that there had been a change in attitude. The whole concept of historical development, of ideas changing from age to age in response to environmental factors, was foreign to them. They saw nothing anachronistic in using Biblical and Rabbinic references to *emunah* to convey those ideas they themselves read into the term and, so far as we can judge, they believed their meaning was the original one.

Maimonides' statement of the fundamental principle of the Jewish faith is indicative of the new approach. 'The first precept. This is the command which He commanded us to believe in Deity (*be-haamanuth ha-elohuth*). This means that we must believe (*shenaamin*) that there is a Supreme Cause who is the Maker of all things.'⁹ Elsewhere Maimonides writes:¹⁰ 'The foundation of foundations and the pillar of the sciences is to know that there is a Primal Being and it is He who brings all things into existence.' Whereas in the Bible and for the Rabbis belief in God is different from knowledge of God,¹¹ for Maimonides belief and knowledge refer to the same thing and are both a matter of cognition. To believe in God is to know that there is a God. It also follows both from Maimonides' observations here and in other works that man should try to arrive at the truth that God exists by means of his reasoning powers. In the 'Guide for the Perplexed' Maimonides states that for the masses the only way to faith is through tradition whereas the more advanced thinker has a duty to attain the truth by the use of his unaided reason.¹² Bahya Ibn Pakudah, in 'Duties of the Heart', similarly holds that it is man's duty to reason for himself that God exists.¹³ Other mediaeval thinkers, notably Judah Ha-Levi,¹⁴ consider belief based on tradition to be superior to belief attained through reason. Belief based on tradition can never be refuted whereas belief based on reason can be contradicted by reason and is

⁹ 'Sepher Ha-Mitzwoth', *Mitzwoth Aseh*, I.

¹⁰ *Yad*, 'Yesode Ha-Torah', I, 1.

¹¹ The Biblical 'knowledge of God' includes the adequate relationship with Him through moral conduct, through 'walking in His ways'. See Jer. 2:8; 9:23; Prov. 3:6; I Chron. 28:9.

¹² 'Guide', I, 33.

¹³ 'Duties of the Heart', 'Shaar Ha-Yihud', Chapter 3.

¹⁴ 'Kuzari', I, 25; v. 21.

THE NATURE OF FAITH

consequently never secure against refutation. R. Aaron Ha-Levi of Barcelona, the author of '*Sepher Ha-Hinnukh*', adopts a midway position. Belief through tradition is wholly admirable and should not be treated with contempt but the highest order of belief is that reinforced by reason.¹⁵ There is an interesting description of faith in this work: 'The meaning of faith is that man should fix it firmly in his heart that the truth is so and that it is quite impossible for it to be otherwise. If he is questioned on the subject he will reply always that this is his heart's belief, and that he is prepared to be killed rather than acknowledge the opposite. By saying this he actualises the potential and in this way the heart of faith is reinforced and becomes firmly fixed. I mean by this that the words of his mouth fulfil the resolve of his heart. Once he has the merit of ascending in the degrees of science so that his heart understands and his eyes see by incontrovertible proof that his belief is true and that it is impossible for it to be otherwise, he has fulfilled the precept of faith in the highest possible way.'

We shall later examine in greater detail these views of the mediaeval thinkers on faith versus tradition. It is sufficient here to note that even those thinkers who prefer to base faith on tradition are thinking of faith in its new, mediaeval connotation of 'belief *that . . .*'. The mediaeval debate is not concerned with the nature of faith but with the way to its attainment. For the Biblical authors' and the Rabbis' belief that God existed was taken for granted. It was a conviction apparently based on intuitive awareness or direct apprehension. It was part of their very lives and there was no need for them to 'attain' it. Tradition was as irrelevant to it as reason (at any rate on the conscious level, though subconsciously tradition played its part). They did not hold their belief because their fathers held it and did not normally seek to substantiate belief by an appeal to tradition. From this point of view the frequent mediaeval appeals to tradition are themselves untraditional!

Partly as a result of the weakening of the traditional proofs of God's existence by the critiques of Hume and Kant, and partly as a result of the new emphasis by religious existentialists on the need for involvement (all of which we shall consider later), many modern religious thinkers have been moved

¹⁵ No. 25, pp. 76-77.

FAITH

to work out an approach to faith which, in a sense, recaptures the Biblical view of faith as 'belief *in* . . .'. Without anticipating our later fuller discussion of religious existentialism, it suffices here to call attention to the fresh insight that, on any dynamic view of faith, it is impossible to separate 'belief *that* . . .' from 'belief *in* . ..'. It is now seen that far more is involved in the act of faith and trust than a mere formal assent to the proposition that there is a God, followed by a resolve to trust in Him. The two attitudes of assent and trust cannot be set out in neat chronological sequence but are bound up one with the other. The God arrived at simply as the conclusion of an argument is not the God of vital religion. The mediaeval thinkers were themselves deeply religious men and even though they give the impression of arguing objectively for God's existence, as they would for any other proposition, they were already, in actual fact, committed to the religious life. Logically an attitude of trust in God follows on the belief that He exists but, in practice, belief that there is a God and trust in Him are both part of that complex situation called encountering God. At least, this is how many religious existentialists see the man of faith's situation and there is some validity in their attitude. The man who reaches out in faith and trust because he is aware of his insufficiency and finiteness is helped by awareness to validate the argument for God's existence. Freud would say that this is no more than wishful thinking: because I feel that I need a God I invent one. (A later chapter is devoted to the consideration of Freud's views.) But Freud prejudices the issue on non-psychoanalytical grounds. He assumes that there is no God. The believer sees his very attitude of trust, his very hunger for the divine, so often felt only faintly and sporadically, as part of the validation of the argument. His hunger implies for him that it is capable of satisfaction because reality is so constituted that it can afford him that satisfaction.

Religious existentialism and the whole present-day emphasis on 'belief *in* . . .' is, in a sense, a return to Biblical categories of thinking. Yet it is not a complete return. The past cannot so simply be effaced. The significant difference between the Biblical and modern approach in this matter (both different from the mediaeval) is that for the Biblical authors the

THE NATURE OF FAITH

question whether God really existed was never really posed as a live question. It was perfectly evident to them that He existed. As we have repeatedly tried to show, they would never have thought of doubting that the Being with whom they had such an intimate personal relationship existed. He was more real to them than the material world they experienced with their senses. The modern attitude seeks to return to the Biblical insight but it is a conscious return, a return in which it is acknowledged that for some men at least there is a query against God's existence.

The matter can be summed up as follows. There have been three stages in the history of faith: (1) The Biblical (and the Rabbinic) period in which 'belief *in* . . .' formed the centre of faith's tensions, with 'belief *that* . . .' taken for granted. (2) The mediaeval period which witnessed a shift in emphasis from 'belief *in* . . .' to 'belief *that* . ..'. At this time it is 'belief *in* . . .' which is allowed to take care of itself. Faith has become much more cognitive than volitional. (3) The modern period which witnesses a partial return to the first period's standpoint. 'Belief *in* . . .' and 'belief *that* . . .' are now seen as two sides of the same coin. 'Belief *in* . . .', or the attitude behind it, is seen as an essential ingredient in the life of faith. All that has so far been said is not, of course, an argument for faith or a defence of it. Our concern in this chapter has been only to describe the nature of faith as understood in different periods of Jewish thinking.

We might try to express these propositions in diagrammatic form.¹⁶ Let belief that God exists be represented by a circle, and trust in God by a straight line. In the Biblical-Rabbinic period and in the mediaeval period the circle and the straight line were drawn distinct from one another. They represented two different areas of life. In the Biblical-Rabbinic period the circle was left alone, as it were. It was taken for granted and questioned by none. All the attention was focused on the straight line. In the Middle Ages the emphasis is shifted to the circle. In this period it is felt that if only the circle be firmly drawn the straight line will take care of itself. In the modern period the straight line is *inside* the circle. Neither straight line nor circle can be approached one without the other.

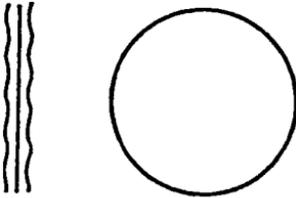
¹⁶ See diagram on page 18.

FAITH

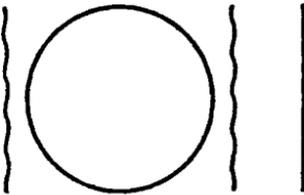
But the diagram is still misleading in that it represents both circle and straight line as in the same dimension. In reality 'belief in . . .' is qualitatively different from 'belief that . . .', in a different dimension as it were. 'Belief that . . .' is cognitive, intellectual, propositional. 'Belief in . . .' moral, volitional, a response of the whole personality. The statement: 'I love X' is of a different order from the statement: 'There is a table in the room.' If it were possible on paper, a far better illustration would be to represent 'belief in . . .' not as a straight line flat on the page beside the circle but as a dagger cutting through the page.

*(the wavy lines denote
the tensions of faith, the
particular emphasis)*

(A) **Biblical-Rabbinic view**



(B) **Mediaeval view**



(C) **Modern view**

