

RATIONALIST VS. MYSTICAL JUDAISM

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The Key Differences between Rationalist and Mystical Judaism

1) KNOWLEDGE

Rationalists believe that knowledge is *legitimately obtained by man* via his reasoning and senses, and should preferably be *based upon evidence/reason* rather than faith, especially for far-fetched claims.

Mystics are skeptical of the ability of the human mind to arrive at truths, and prefer to base knowledge on revelation, or – for those who are not worthy of revelation – on faith in those who do experience revelation.

Examples: Belief in God; the scientific fallibility of Chazal; R. Yochanan's student; *Kezayis*.

2) NATURE

Rationalists *value a naturalistic* rather than supernatural interpretation of events, and perceive a *consistent natural order* over history, including the creation of the universe, the Biblical period, the present, and the future Messianic era. They minimize belief in supernatural entities and forces.

Mystics prefer miracles, and believe them to be especially dominant in ancient history and the future messianic era. They maximize the number of supernatural entities and forces believed to exist.

Examples: The development of the universe and of life; Biblical miracles; *Yeridas hadoros*; Messianic wonders; demons; *ayin hara*.

3) THE SERVICE OF GOD

Rationalists understand the purpose of mitzvos and one's religious life in general as *furthering intellectual/moral goals* for the individual and society.

Mystics see mitzvos as primarily serving to engineer mechanistic manipulations of spiritual or celestial forces, with their reasons being either to accomplish this or ultimately incomprehensible.

Examples: *Mezuzah*; *Netilas yadayim*; *Segulos*; outsourcing mitzvos to benefit the deceased; Learning Torah; *Shiluach hakein*