

י"ג עיקרים של הרמב"ם

Rambam

THE 13 PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

THE SLAGER EDITION

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Rambam

THE 13 PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

PRINCIPLES VIII & IX

*With an anthology of commentaries
from the Talmud, Midrash,
Rishonim and Acharonim,
and elucidation from the works
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.*

*Compiled and Adapted by
Rabbi Chaim Miller*

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RAMBAM - THE 13 PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

PRINCIPLES 8 & 9: THE TORAH

with commentary from classic Rabbinic texts,
and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

ISBN 1-934152-11-0

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Published and Distributed by:

Kol Menachem

827 Montgomery Street,

Brooklyn N.Y. 11213

1-888-580-1900

718-951-6328

718-953-3346 (Fax)

www.kolmenachem.com

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First Edition — May 2007

Second Edition — January 2008

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PREFACE



Following the remarkable success of the *Gutnick Edition* of the Torah, published over the last five years, *Kol Menachem* has recently expanded the size of its operation considerably and is in the process of preparing a number of works for the benefit of the public. One of our new enterprises is a series on the works of Rambam, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1138-1204—known in Western culture since the Renaissance as Maimonides), whose writings have exerted a colossal influence on Jewish thought and practice, both in his own day and in subsequent generations.

Our first task has been to address Rambam's *Thirteen Principles of Faith*, which was the first and, to this day, the most recognized statement of principles which attempt to define Judaism.

☞ THE NEED FOR THIS WORK

This is, of course, not the first book to discuss Rambam's *Principles*. But, at a time when Jewish publishing, especially in the English language, has blossomed exponentially in the space of just a few decades, it is remarkable how little attention the *Principles* have attracted.

Partially at least, this may be attributed to the fact that, even in Rambam's original text, the *Principles* themselves are an extremely brief summary of some very deep ideas. This means that to study the *Principles* in outline is a relatively short exercise, whereas to meditate upon them and come to a thorough appreciation of their true meaning is a huge undertaking. So most works on the *Thirteen Principles*, both in Hebrew and in English, tend to be either overly brief, or intensely philosophical, which means that the majority of people are lacking a commentary that is informative and at the same time accessible.

In our day, the need to study the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* is as pertinent as ever, when modern life forces most of us to engage

with cultures and thought-systems which are not based on the *Principles* and, in many cases, are antithetical to them.

Educating the next generation to act as observant, G-d fearing Jews is proving to be more difficult than ever, as the outside world appears to be increasingly colorful and enticing, while Jewish texts remain in “black-and-white.” And why *should* our youth be attracted to Judaism if they are not imparted a profound appreciation of its basic beliefs and ideas?

Furthermore, each year there are countless Jewish men and women who are in the process of adopting a life of Torah and *mitzvos* and are thirsty to know its true, spiritual meaning. With the constant expansion of outreach efforts in every part of the global Jewish community, there are countless Jews whose interest has been sparked, and want to discover more about the Torah. How many times have we heard the question: I want to study, but where do I begin?

And even for those of us who are happy, observant Jews, not suffering a crisis of faith, and not in the process of major soul-searching, it is so important that our *mitzvah*-acts do not become dry and performed by rote. Studying the *Principles* refreshes our worship of G-d, invigorating every deed with an enhanced awareness of Who we are serving and why we are serving Him. While each *mitzvah* has its own specific *kavanah* (intention and purpose), the *Thirteen Principles* enrich us with the general *kavanah* which underlies all of the *mitzvos*.

🔗 NOTES ON METHOD

For these reasons, among others, I have long felt it necessary that a text be prepared from which thoughtful people can study the *Thirteen Principles of Faith*, so as to come to a deeper appreciation of the basic foundations of Judaism.

Faith is, of course, something we all grapple with and it cannot be “delivered” in book-form. Genuine faith demands much thought and reflection, a process of nurturing that “sixth-sense” that we are all born with by speaking with our souls and encouraging our spiritual sensitivities to become honed and refined.

Since time immemorial, Jews have done this, not by meditating on mountain tops, but by studying the Torah. Besides providing us

with fascinating and important information, the Torah's inner light guides its student on the right path and nourishes his or her spirituality.* While this is true for all Torah texts, whatever the subject may be, studying the *Principles of Faith* is more directly rewarding in this respect than, for example, examining minutiae of law.

In this volume, we have gathered a series of classic texts which address the *Principles* from over 150 sources—beginning with the Biblical canon, Mishnah, Midrash and Talmud, spanning across the gaonic and medieval period, to the era of Jewish philosophers, the kabalists, the chasidic masters, giants of the Lithuanian school, and modern thinkers up to the twentieth century.

We begin each *Principle* with *Rambam's* original formulation, excerpted from his *Commentary to the Mishnah*. Originally, it was our intention to place this text on the top of the page and have a running commentary underneath, but *Rambam* is so brief in his formulation of the *Principles* and so much commentary is required that such a layout proved unworkable. Instead, we have isolated a number of key topics and questions that arise from *Rambam's* text and address them in a series of “lessons.”

While the lessons do follow a logical sequence, in most cases they can be studied independently, without knowledge of the material that preceded it, and many crucial ideas are cross-referenced.

A weakness common to some treatments of the *Thirteen Principles* is a tendency to drift off the subject. So in the lessons, we have endeavored to address only the subject-matter of *Rambam's* text, or questions that arise from it.

While the texts have been prepared primarily for the English reader, we are aware that nowadays works of English Judaica are used by a vast cross-spectrum of readers, ranging from total beginners to those well-versed in Torah study. Therefore, all the classic texts appear here alongside their Hebrew (or Aramaic) source, so that those who are capable of studying in the original may do so. Nevertheless, our translations of the texts are specifically geared to the reader who is studying *only* in English, so we have aimed to make them as readable and digestible as possible, often choosing

*See *Eichah Rabah*, Intro. 2 and *Yefey Anaf* ibid.; Jerusalem Talmud, *Chagigah* 1:7 and *Korban ha-Eidah* ibid.; *Mesilas Yesharim*, author's introduction; *Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch*, *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 4:3.

to paraphrase or summarize more intricate Hebrew passages. The English rendition will therefore be of limited value, in many instances, for those who seek a precise, linear translation, so as to familiarize themselves with Hebrew etc.

🌀 STRUCTURE OF THE LESSONS

Since the *Kol Menachem Chumash* was published, countless readers have noted how much they enjoyed the way in which information was presented. “In most Chumashim,” wrote one reader, “questions are answered but not explicitly asked. Uneducated readers are lost. In the *Kol Menachem Chumash*, questions always precede answers. This means that the reader understands what he or she is about to read. Suddenly, the text makes sense. Not only has the reader studied Torah—he or she has actually understood it.”

The English commentaries in the *Chumash* were basically built around three structural elements: a.) *Classic Questions*—addressed by a series of citations from the classic commentaries. b.) *Toras Menachem*—A discussion of these texts, based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s works, encouraging the reader to explore various possible interpretations. c.) A further layer of commentary offering a Chasidic angle, entitled *Sparks of Chasidus* (insights) and *The Last Word* (practical directives).

Presenting the material in this fashion proved to be effective for a number of reasons:

- i.) By engaging in a Rabbinic debate before exploring possible solutions, the reader becomes an “active” participant in a multifaceted discussion, rather than being spoon-fed from a “flat text” (as the above citation illustrates).
- ii.) Those familiar with the Rebbe’s teachings found it refreshing to see how his thoughts interplayed with a host of different views.
- iii.) For those unfamiliar with the Rebbe’s approach, this structure brought to light the Rebbe’s desire to be a genuine *teacher* of Torah and not a preacher of his own ideas.*

*Rabbi Pinchas Hirshprung (1912-1998), Chief Rabbi of Montreal and world renowned Talmudic scholar, once exclaimed to the Rebbe, “I particularly enjoy the footnotes in *Likutei Sichos*. They are remarkable!”

iv.) A pleasant balance was achieved between *information* (becoming familiar with different sources), *analysis*, *inspiration* (through Chasidic insights) and *direction* (through the “Last Word” commentaries).

In this volume, we have followed a virtually identical structure. The only significant change is the addition of a further element to the commentary, entitled “A Living Example,” where authentic stories culled from classical texts are used to add further illustration to various points in the discussion.

The reader should also be reminded that the *Toras Menachem* commentaries are: a.) Adaptations and not translations.** The editor has taken extreme care not to add arguments of his own. Where it was deemed necessary to add background information, additional explanation or further illustrations, this was indicated in a footnote or by the use of square brackets. b.) The material here only represents a fraction of the Rebbe’s teachings which fill some two hundred volumes. c.) Many essays have been constructed from a number of sources written or spoken on different occasions. d.) We have drawn primarily from sources which were edited for publication by the Rebbe himself, though in many instances we were forced to rely on unedited transcripts which are the only existing records of many of his teachings.

Since the format of the *Toras Menachem* commentary differs considerably from its original presentation by the Rebbe himself, if the reader finds the logical sequence of ideas uneasy or if any points are lacking clarity, the shortcoming is to be attributed to the editor and not to the original author.

The Rebbe replied, “There is another purpose here, which is why I endeavor to make all the references in *Likutei Sichos*: that if somebody does not agree with the explanation I offer in the *sicha*, he will be able to study the sources for himself in Mishnah, Gemara, Midrash, Zohar and Chasidic texts, beginning with the Tanya” (*Hisvaduyos* 5748, vol. 2, p. 558).

**In reference to publishing his own teachings in English translation, the Rebbe wrote: “As I have mentioned many a time, what matters is the content and not the word-for-word translation. Therefore, you should ensure that the language is clear and the style appropriate, for the main objective is that the readers should appreciate what is written” (*Igros Kodesh* vol. 28, p. 267).

[For further details on our methodology, the source texts which were available to us, and our system of transliteration, see Foreword to the *Kol Menachem Chumash*].

🌀 OTHER APPROACHES TO THIS SUBJECT

One of the reasons why the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* have not yet become an extremely popular topic for Torah study, despite their centrality and the fascinating nature of the subject material, is because existing works tend towards one of two extremes: they are either too *philosophical* or too *polemical*.

Much of the source material which relates directly to the *Principles* is to be found in works of medieval Jewish Philosophy. These texts tend to be long and complex, and demand background knowledge in the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought which was in vogue at the time they were composed. Perhaps the best book on our subject, *With Perfect Faith* by Rabbi J. David Bleich (Ktav, 1983), clearly possesses this drawback. While the author offers thought-provoking introductions to each Principle and remains loyal to the subject, his selections from the classic philosophical texts are far too long and intricate for anything less than an intense academic study. He also limits himself strictly to philosophical works, and does not draw upon Talmudic and Midrashic passages which serve to illustrate the *Principles*, nor does he touch upon the vast corpus of mystical texts (kabbalah and chasidus), or quote from any Acharonim (post-medieval texts) or contemporary sources.

Other works make the mistake of being too polemical: they are on the offensive to prove their point aggressively with various arguments etc. In my opinion, such an approach is of very limited effectiveness, and can even prove counterproductive, for a number of reasons.

a.) Human nature is such that when we are “attacked” with proofs for ideas which we are uncomfortable with, and may well have a vested interest in rejecting, our defenses are raised. In one letter, the Rebbe wrote,

“In most polemics, debates, dialogues and the like, the usual outcome is not a rapprochement of minds and hearts; rather do they evoke an impulse of rivalry and the desire to score a point, or gain a victory over the opponent by any means. This is usu-

ally the case even in non-religious polemics, and certainly very much so in religious debates, inasmuch as the subject matter touches one's inner soul; and even more so where religious zealots are concerned" (Letters from the Rebbe, vol. 1, p. 7).

Obviously, this stands true for a written polemic as it does for a verbal one.

b.) Logical arguments tend to come and go as they are formulated and later refuted. If a person's Judaism is based on logical proofs, then his commitment will be shaky and liable to be refuted at any time. Just as he was once convinced by an argument, he might later find it unconvincing.

Of course, this does not mean to say that we should only have blind faith and never explore our beliefs intellectually. This book was conceived on the foundation that it is important for thoughtful people to try to appreciate their beliefs intellectually as much as possible, and that faith is strengthened when intellectually supported. But when the Jews were given the Torah they declared, "We will observe *and then* we will understand" (*Shemos* 24:7), indicating that intellectual inquiry is a necessary accessory to our faith, but it should not be the basis of it.

c.) Proofs tend to send a dogmatic message that if we harbor doubts we are not cut-out for religious life, leading a person to suffer feelings of rejection.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We all possess a *yezter hara* (evil inclination), which in all but the most exceptional of cases is never eliminated. And, consequently,

"one should not feel depressed or very troubled at heart even if he be engaged all his days in this conflict, for perhaps this is what he was created for, and this is the service demanded of him—to subdue the forces of evil constantly" (Tanya, ch. 27).

Furthermore, the fact that our doubts *trouble* us is really an expression of faith:

"With reference to the other topic of our correspondence, namely, my suggestion that one's protestations against G-d are in themselves proof of belief in the existence of G-d—perhaps I did not make myself clear, in that it is not the negation which I consider to be proof, so much as the manner in which it is expressed. For, when one declares his atheism once and for all,

affirming that henceforth he has no place for G-d in his thoughts, lexicon and daily life, then the matter is settled and closed. However, when one asserts that G-d does not exist yet at the same time, on seeing an injustice in the world, experiences pain and promptly demands, "Where is G-d?"—his harping on the same theme again and again is proof that deep in his heart he believes in G-d—which is precisely why he feels so hurt and outraged (Letter written by the Rebbe in 5727).

This inner kernel of faith needs to be nurtured by a gradual process of reflection and study. It cannot be built overnight by a series of proofs.

A further important point concerning the process of faith-building is that observance of the commandments plays an important role:

"The physical body requires a daily intake of certain elements in certain quantities obtainable through breathing and food consumption. No amount of thinking, speaking and studying all about these elements can substitute for the actual intake of air and food. All this knowledge will not add one iota of health to the body unless it is given its required physical sustenance; on the contrary, the denial of the actual intake of the required elements will weaken the mental forces of thought, concentration, etc. Thus it is obvious that the proper approach to ensure the health of the body is not by way of study first and practice afterward, but the reverse, to eat and drink and breathe, which in turn strengthen also the mental powers of study and concentration, etc.

Similarly in the case of the soul and the elements which it requires daily for its sustenance, known best to its Creator, and which He revealed to all at Mount Sinai, in the presence of millions of witnesses, of different outlooks, walks of life, character, etc., who in turn transmitted it from generation to generation, uninterruptedly, to our day, the truth of which is thus constantly corroborated by millions of witnesses, etc. (undated letter by the Rebbe).

Consequently,

"the absence of the religious practice itself handicaps the powers of the intellect to grasp the truth. Furthermore, since the human intellect is by its very nature limited, while the subject it desires to grapple with is related to the Unlimited, it is only with

the aid of the Infinite G-d that one hopes to be lifted across the unbridgeable chasm separating the created and the Creator, and such Divine aid can come only through Divine service (Letter written by the Rebbe on 18th of Sivan, 5715).

To avoid these pitfalls, we have stayed clear, for the most part, of lengthy philosophical texts. Obviously one cannot ignore the contribution of the medieval philosophers, but we have attempted to present the essence of their arguments in a few short paragraphs. The other texts cited were chosen because they make their point briefly and clearly.

Likewise, we have steered away from polemics.* The lessons aim to enlighten and inform the reader and guide him or her through the various pathways of understanding the Principles of our faith. Very often, a person's difficulty with a Principle will arise because his understanding of it is too rudimentary and simplistic. By informing the reader of the various subtleties and nuances of the last two thousand years of Rabbinic discussion, it is hoped that many foundations of our faith will be freshly illuminated.

☞ THE REBBE ON FAITH

While a full-length study of the Rebbe's analytical approach to the *Thirteen Principles* (and to Torah texts in general) is most definitely a project that needs to be undertaken in the future, it would be remiss of me not to mention at least a few words here on the subject.**

*With the exception of Lesson One. Here it was deemed necessary to give at least some logical underpinning for the core of Rambam's *Eighth Principle*. Our fears of dealing with polemics were allayed in this case since the content of the lesson is excerpted *verbatim* from letters penned by the Rebbe himself which, clearly, were written with sufficient sensitivity to avoid the problems mentioned above.

**As a Chasidic Rebbe, and leader of the Jewish community at large, the Rebbe dedicated much of his life to inspiring others with faith, and was a living example of one who took faith very seriously. However, we will touch here only on his approach to the study of faith-related texts, which is the subject of this work.

First, the scope of the Rebbe's treatment is staggering. While he spoke on many topics (often revolving around the weekly Torah portion or an upcoming festival) the themes of faith recur consistently—G-d, Prophecy, the Divine authorship and eternity of the Torah, Reward and Punishment, Mashiach, and Resurrection. If one were to collect all this material, it would no doubt fill many thousands of pages.

This persistent interest in faith is, in fact, quite unusual for a Torah scholar who had mastered both Talmuds and a vast array of other important texts. Most Rabbinic writing does not repeatedly stress the need for faith or discuss its parameters, except those works which are exclusively dedicated to the subject, such as the philosophical and *mussar* literature, etc. It is therefore quite remarkable that even amid complex legal discussions of Talmud, *Mishneh Torah* and Halachah, the Rebbe would, almost inevitably, find an opportunity to address faith issues.

A second point worthy of note is that the Rebbe approached faith-related texts with a level of analytical sophistication normally reserved for advanced Talmudic dialectics. Studying the *Principles of Faith* thus becomes an intellectually challenging enterprise, as this volume clearly demonstrates.

A third outstanding feature is the Rebbe's willingness to deal with difficult questions. When preparing the *Classic Questions* commentaries, it often surprised me how hard it was to find solutions for some glaringly obvious questions. This is all the more perplexing when one considers that modern research techniques, especially through the use of computers, and the general availability of information nowadays, means that we have at our fingertips many more texts than were accessible in the past. It is therefore notable that the Rebbe had a significant scholarly contribution to make on all of the twenty-eight issues addressed by the lessons of this book—and this is despite the fact that he never addressed the *Thirteen Principles* formally or systematically.

A final point—and this strikes me as being the most outstanding of all—is the *way* in which the Rebbe dealt with faith questions. As the reader will discover over the next few hundred pages, there are numerous statements of the Talmud, Midrash and later authorities which appear, at first glance, to be inconsistent with, or worse still, a contradiction to Rambam's *Principles*. For example, *Principle Nine* states categorically that the Torah will never be annulled, and yet

at least one view in the Talmud maintains that the commandments will be annulled in the future (*Nidah* 61b).

This leaves us in a conundrum. Apparently, something is going to have to “give-way”: either our strict adherence to the simple meaning of the Talmud’s words, our unquestioning faith in the *Ninth Principle*. In fact, the commentators tend to follow one of these two paths, either arguing that Talmud’s “annulment” does not mean what it may at first seem; or by partially delimiting the scope of the *Ninth Principle*, proposing that it is only applicable before the Resurrection, but not afterwards.

While both interpretations are clearly within the pale of Orthodoxy, the Rebbe was dissatisfied with both of them. Our instinctive soul-reaction to both texts (the Talmud and the *Ninth Principle*) was to take them literally, and, in the Rebbe’s view, we must seek to uphold that pure faith with an intellectually rigorous solution (see *Principle 9, Lesson 8* for how the Rebbe deals with this problem).

Thus, repeatedly in this volume, the reader will find instances where the absolute integrity of one of the Principles appears to be challenged by a genuine Torah source, and the Rebbe demands a solution which confirms both our faith in the Principles and in the precision of Torah texts.

Furthermore, in many instances, the Rebbe succeeds in “turning the tables,” and transforming something which was a *question* on the Principles into an argument which *supports* them. For example, the reader who is initially disturbed by the fact that the Oral Law contains so many differences of opinion, may be uplifted to hear that this actually represents something very beautiful: G–d’s desire that the Torah be meaningful to us and sensitive to *our* condition, which is why He gave man the right to express his own opinion (see *Principle 8, Lesson 5*, and also *Lessons 8-10*).

In this, and so many other cases, the Rebbe’s insights uplift, not merely by solving problems, but by uncovering an inner sanctity in the question itself. Darkness has not merely been dispelled, it has been transformed to light.

🌀 NOTES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publication of the current volume, which contains commentary on Rambam's *Eighth* and *Ninth Principles* (Divine authorship and eternity of the Torah), has been arranged to coincide with the Festival of Shavuot 5767 (2007), when the Giving of the Torah will be celebrated for the 3319th time. We have also added an appendix discussing the Rebbe's view on conflicts between science and Torah, an issue which poses a significant challenge to fully embracing the *Eighth Principle* for many in our generation.

Further volumes, which are currently in preparation, will, G-d willing, address the remaining Principles.

Kol Menachem gratefully acknowledges the generous support and tireless dedication of our founding patron **Rabbi Meyer Gutnick**. For the past five years Rabbi Gutnick has not only kept our organization financially afloat, he has also devoted thousands of hours of his personal time to assisting our work and ensuring that our publications receive the widest publicity possible. His vision is to bring words of Torah, especially as they are illuminated by the teachings of Chasidus, to the English speaking world, with unprecedented clarity and quality of presentation—and it is a task which he carries out with the loyal dedication of a chasid.

In 2006 we had the privilege of welcoming a new partner to our enterprise, **Mr. David Slager**, who generously dedicated the Synagogue Edition of the *Kol Menachem Chumash*. His warm encouragement and continuing support have enabled us to expand the scope of our activities significantly and bring many more works to the public. This volume proudly bears his name, the *Slager Edition*, and is dedicated to the entire Slager family, **David, Lara** and their precious children **Hannah** and **Sara Malka**. May the merit of spreading words of Torah, illuminated by the teachings of Chasidus to thousands across the globe be a source of blessing for them for generations to come.


I would like to gratefully acknowledge the following people who have assisted in producing this volume: Rabbi Itzick Yarmush, my dear colleague and friend who spent hundreds of hours discussing and clarifying the source material with me, and painstakingly checked the *Toras Menachem* commentaries against their source texts. I also received invaluable editorial assistance from Rabbi Mendy Lent, Rabbi Asher Lowenstein, Rabbi Zvi Homnick, Rabbi

Shmuel Rabin and Rabbi Dovid Orenstein, and I am grateful to Mrs. Yehudis Homnick and Chaya Sara Cantor for proofreading.

Finally, I would like to thank all those readers who took the time to send in positive feedback to our previous works, making what is sometimes a lonely profession into an extremely rewarding one.

May we soon merit the true and complete redemption, when all the Jewish people will be totally free to observe G-d's commands and study his Torah.

Rabbi Chaim Miller
General Editor
Kol Menachem
Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5767



*One must educate a child in all areas of
Torah and mitzvos, especially in the Thirteen
Principles of Faith.*


(Sichas Shabbos Parshas Terumah 5741)

*In response to the questions in your letter...
What are the correct beliefs that a person
should have? Those expressed by the classic
statements of "Ani Ma'amin."*

(Igras Kodesh vol. 15, p. 277)

*Lectures should be arranged on the Principles
of our faith, its foundations and details.*

(Igras Kodesh vol. 26, p. 88)



THE 8th PRINCIPLE

ה' סוד השמיני

R A M B A M ' S T E X T

THE 8TH PRINCIPLE: DIVINE AUTHORSHIP OF THE TORAH

Rambam
Commentary to
the Mishnah

The *Eighth Principle* is the Divine authorship of the Torah. Namely, that we are to believe that the whole Torah which is found in our hands today, is that which was given by Moshe our teacher, peace unto him, and is all from the mouth of the Almighty. In other words, it all was conveyed to him by G-d in a manner which is referred to metaphorically as “speech,” though the only person who knew the true nature of that communication was Moshe, peace unto him, because he was the one who actually received it. He was like a scribe writing from dictation who chronicled the events of those days, both the episodes and the laws, and it is for this reason that he is referred to in scripture as an “engraver” (*Bamidbar* 21:18).

[Apparently unimportant] verses such as “*And the children of Cham were Kush and Mitzrayim*” (*Bereishis* 10:6), “*His wife’s name was Mehaytavail bas Matrayd*” (*ibid.* 36:39), and “*Timnah was a*

וְהִסּוּד הַשְּׁמִינִי — הַיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. וְהוּא: שְׁנֵאֲמִין, כִּי כָּל הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת הַמְצוּיָה בְּיַדֵּינוּ עֲתָה, הִיא הַנְּתוּנָה עַל יְדֵי מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם, שֶׁהִיא כְּלָה מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה, כְּלוּמַר: שֶׁהִגִּיעָה אֵלָיו כְּלָה מֵאֵת ה' יִתְבָּרֵךְ, בְּעֵנֵן שְׁנִקְרָא עַל דְּרָךְ הַשְּׂאֵלָה “דְּבוּר”. וְאִין יָדוּעַ הֵיאָךְ הִגִּיעָה, אֶלָּא הוּא מֹשֶׁה עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם, שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לוֹ, וְכִי הוּא הִיָּה כְּמוֹ סוֹפֵר שְׁקוֹרְאִין לוֹ וְהוּא כּוֹתֵב כָּל מֵאֲדָעוֹת הַיָּמִים, הַסְּפוּרִים וְהַמְצוּוֹת. וְלִפְיָךְ נִקְרָא “מְחַוֵּק”.

וְאִין הַפֶּרֶשׁ בֵּין “וּבְנֵי חָם בּוֹשׁ וּמִצְרַיִם וּפּוּט וּכְנַעַן”, “וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ מְהַיֻּטְבָּאֵל בַּת מִטְרַד”, “וְתַמְנַע הָיְתָה פִּלְגֶשֶׁת”, וּבֵין

concubine” (ibid. 36:12), are no different from [overtly significant] verses such as “*I am G-d your G-d*” (*Shemos* 20:2), and “*Hear O Israel*” (*Devarim* 6:4), since they are all from the Almighty’s mouth. It is all “*the perfect Torah of G-d*” (*Psalms* 19:8), which is pure, holy, and true.

A person who says “these few verses and episodes were written independently by Moshe” is considered by our Sages and Prophets to be a heretic, one who corrupts the Torah more than all other heretics. For he believes that the Torah has a “core” and a “shell” and that these historical events and episodes serve no useful purpose and are consequently the independent product of Moshe! This is the meaning of one who “denies the Divine authorship of the Torah” (*Sanhedrin* 10:1).

Our Sages of blessed memory taught: “*Any person who believes that the whole Torah is from the Almighty with the exception of one verse which he claims that G-d did not utter, but was said independently by Moshe, is guilty of having ‘disdained G-d’s word’*” (*Bamidbar* 15:31; *Sanhedrin* 99b)—May G-d be exalted far and beyond such heretical slander!

In truth, every word of the Torah contains immense wisdom and phenomenal insights for those who are capable of discerning them, though their full profundity can never be grasped—“*Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea*” (*Job* 11:9). A person need only but follow in the footsteps of David,

“אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ” ו”שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד,” כִּי הַכֹּל מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה, וְהַכֹּל תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה טְהוֹרָה וְקַדוּשָׁה אֱמֶת.

וְזֶה שְׂאוֹמֵר, שְׂכַמוֹ אֵלֶּה הַפְּסוּקִים וְהַסְּפֹרִים מִשֵּׁה סִפְרָם מִדַּעְתּוֹ, הִנֵּה הוּא אֵצֶל חֻכְמֵינוּ וְנִבְיָאֵינוּ כּוֹפֵר וּמְגַלֵּה פָּנִים יוֹתֵר מִכָּל הַכּוֹפְרִים, לְפִי שְׂחָשֵׁב שֵׁשׁ בַּתּוֹרָה לֵב וְקַלְפָּה, וְשִׂאֵלָה דְבָרֵי הַיָּמִים וְהַסְּפֹרִים אֵין תּוֹעֵלַת בְּהֵם, וְשֵׁהם מֵאֵת מִשֵּׁה. וְזֶהוּ עֲנִין “אֵין תּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם.”

אָמְרוּ חֻכְמֵינוּ זְכוֹרֵנָם לְבָרְכָה: “הוּא הַמֵּאֲמִין שְׂכַל הַתּוֹרָה מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה חוּץ מִפְּסוּק זֶה, שֶׁלֹּא אָמְרוּ הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֵלֹה מִשֵּׁה מִפִּי עֲצָמוֹ.” וְזֶה “כִּי דָבַר ה' בְּזֶה.” הַשֵּׁם יִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְבָּרַךְ מִמֵּאֵר הַכּוֹפְרִים.

אֵלֶּה: כָּל דְּבוּר וְדְבוּר מִן הַתּוֹרָה יֵשׁ בָּהֶן חֻכְמוֹת וּפְלָאִים לְמִי שְׂמַבִּין אוֹתָם, וְלֹא תִשַּׁג תְּכַלִּית חֻכְמָתָה. “אֲרַכָּה מֵאֲרֶץ מִדְּבָר, וּרְחִיבָה מִנֵּי יָם.” וְאֵין לְאִישׁ אֵלֶּה לְהֵלֵךְ בְּעֻקְבוֹת דָּוִד,

anointed one of the G-d of Ya'akov, who prayed, “Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things in your Torah” (Psalms 119:18).

The above also stands true for the orally transmitted interpretation of the Torah, which was likewise received from the Almighty's mouth.

Thus, the way in which we observe today the precepts of *Succah*, *Lulav*, *Shofar*, *Tzitzis*, and *Tefilin* etc., is precisely the same way that G-d, blessed be He, told Moshe, who then informed us. And the one whom G-d appointed as His agent is surely to be relied upon.

The verse which teaches this principle is: “Moshe said, ‘Through this you will know that G-d authorized me to carry out all these acts, for it was not from my own heart’” (*Bamidbar* 16:28).

מְשִׁיחַ אֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב, שֶׁהִתְפַּלֵּל: גַּל עֵינַי וְאֲבִיטָה נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרַתְךָ.

וּכְמוֹ כֵן פְּרוּשׁ הַתּוֹרָה הַמְקַבֵּל, גַּם כֵּן מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה.

וְזֶה שֶׁאֲנִי עוֹשִׂים הַיּוֹם מִתְּבִנַּת הַסֵּכָה וְלוּלָב וְשׁוֹפָר וְצִיצִית וְתַפְלִין וְזוֹלָתָם, הוּא בְּעֶצְמוֹ הַתְּבִנַּת אֲשֶׁר אָמַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ לְמֹשֶׁה, וְהוּא אָמַר לָנוּ, וְהוּא הַמְגִיעַ שְׁלִיחוֹת — נֶאֱמַן בְּשְׁלִיחוֹתוֹ.

וְהַמְּאֵר הַמּוֹרָה עַל הַיְסוּד הַזֶּה, הוּא מֵה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, בְּזֹאת תִּדְעוּן כִּי ה' שְׁלַחְנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים הָאֵלֶּה, כִּי לֹא מִלְּבָבִי.

Points to Remember...

- ✔ G-d dictated the Torah to Moshe.
- ✔ Every part of the Torah, even something that seems unimportant, is crucial.
- ✔ Every word of the Torah contains immense wisdom and phenomenal insights.
- ✔ The Oral Torah, which explains the Written Law, was also given from the Almighty's mouth to Moshe.

LESSON 1

A LOGICAL APPROACH TO SINAI

IN THIS LESSON

- ▶ Logical, scientific proof that the Torah was given at Sinai.
- ▶ The difference between Judaism and other religions.
- ▶ Why every detail of the Torah is crucial.

CLASSIC QUESTION

How can we be assured of the Torah's authenticity?

*Sáadia
Ga'on*

A report, unlike something perceived by the senses, could be distorted in two ways: Either, a.) through a mistaken understanding; or, b.) through willful falsification....

Mistaken ideas and deliberate falsification can only occur and remain unnoticed if they are the product of individuals. A large group, however, will not all make the same mistake, and if they decide to fabricate a report, they will not all be able to keep it secret....

Thus, when a report is safe against these two said types of falsification, there is no third way in which it could possibly be distorted.

הַסְפּוֹר אֶפְשֶׁר שְׂיִפְּל בּוֹ הַפְּסֹד
מֵה שְׁלֵא יִתְּכֵן בְּמוֹחַשׁ מִשְׁתִּי
סְבוֹת: הָאֶחָת מִדֶּרֶךְ הַמַּחְשָׁבָה,
וְהַשְּׁנִית מִדֶּרֶךְ הַזְּדוּן ...

כִּי הַמַּחְשָׁבָה וְהַזְּדוּן לֹא
יִפְּלוּ וַיַּעֲלֵמוּ אֱלֹא לְבוֹדְדִים,
אַבְּל הַקְּבוּץ הַמְּרֻבֶּה הָרִי
מִחֻשְׁבוֹתֵיהֶם לֹא יִשְׁתּוּוּ, וְאִם
יִזְדוּ וַיִּסְבְּימוּ לִיצוֹר סְפוֹר לֹא
יַעֲלֵם הַדְּבָר בְּפְנֵי רַבִּים מֵהֶם ...

וּכְאֲשֶׁר הַסְפּוֹר נִקְי מִשְׁנֵי אֱלֹה,
אֵין שׁוּם דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלִישִׁית הַגּוֹרְמֵת
הַפְּסוֹד.

If the reports of our ancestors will be examined according to these principles, it will be evident that they are safe from these criticisms and that they are true and firmly established (*Beliefs and Opinions* 3:6).

Kuzari | [The Prince of Khazar] invited a Rabbi and asked him about his beliefs.

The Rabbi replied: I believe in the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, who took the Israelites out of Egypt with miracles and wondrous acts; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land of Cana'an, after bringing them across the sea and the Jordan in an extremely miraculous way; who sent Moshe with His law, and then thousands of prophets, who confirmed His law by promising reward to the observant, and punishment to the disobedient. We believe in everything that is written in this Torah, and the matter is an extremely broad one.

Prince of Kuzari: ...Shouldn't you have said to me, O Jew, that you believe in the Creator of the world, its Governor and Guide, Who created you and sustains you? Or some similar Divine attributes in which every religious person believes? Aren't these the things which have led you to pursue the G-d of truth and justice, since you wish to mirror the G-dly attributes of wisdom and justice?

Rabbi: What you are saying is true for a doctrine which is based on

ובאשר אנו מעמידים ספורי אבותינו על פי היסודות הללו, ימצאם הבודק שלמים מטענות אלה, אמתיים וקיימים. (אמונות ודעות מאמר שלישי אות ו')

... אז שלח לקרא לאחד החכמים היהודיים ושאלהו לאמונתו.

אמר לו החבר: אני מאמין באלקי אברהם יצחק ויעקב אשר הוציא את בני ישראל באותות ובמופתים ממצרים, וכלכלם במדבר והנחילם את ארץ פנען אחרי אשר העבירם את הים ואת הירדן במופתים רבים, ואשר שלח אליהם את משה בתורתו ואחריו אלפי נביאים שכלם קראו אל תורתו ביעדם שכן טוב לכל שומרה וענש לכל עובר עליה. אנחנו מאמינים בכל הפתוב בתורה הזאת והדברים ארבים.

אמר הפוזרי: ... וכי לא היה לך לאמר אתה היהודי, כי מאמין אתה בבורא העולם ומסדרו ומנהיגו, הוא אשר בראך והוא המטריףך לחם חקוד, וכדומה מן התארים האלוקיים בהם יאמין כל בעל דת, ובגללם שואף הוא א-ל האמת וא-ל הצדק ברצונו להדמות לבורא בהקמתו ובצדקו?

אמר החבר: מה שאתה אומר נכון הוא בנוגע לדת המיסדת

rational speculation...but from logic alone many doubts can arise. If you'll inquire from the philosophers you'll find that they can't agree on one approach or one principle. Because such rational systems can be established only by logical arguments, of which only some can the philosophers prove to be conclusive, and others can be substantiated only with tenuous proofs....

Kuzari: What you are telling me now, O Jew, makes more sense than your introductory comments. I would now like to hear more of what you have to say.

Rabbi: Actually, my initial statement was, in fact, a powerful proof of this point. In fact, it is an argument so strong that no further proof or evidence is required.

Kuzari: How is that?

Rabbi: Allow me to make a few preliminary remarks, because I see that you are not appreciating what I am saying.

Kuzari: Let me hear what you have to say.

Rabbi: If you were told that the King of India was a kind man, and that you should therefore pronounce him as being great and praise his kind acts, and that you should do this only on the basis of a report you have heard about the righteousness of his people,

על ההגיון ... אָמַנְם מִן הָעֵינִי אֶךְ
נוֹפְלִים בְּהַ סְפִיקוֹת רַבִּים. וְאִם
עָלֶיךָ תִּשְׁאַל אֶת הַפִּילוֹסוֹפִים,
לֹא תִמְצָאֵם מְסַבְּמִים עַל
מַעֲשֵׂה אֶחָד וְלֹא לְדַעַה אַחַת, כִּי
דָת בְּזֹאת בְּנוּיָה עַל טַעֲנוֹת אֲשֶׁר
רַק חֵלֶק מֵהֶן יְכוּלִים
הַפִּילוֹסוֹפִים לְהוֹכִיחַ בְּמוֹפֵת,
וְאֵלוֹ עַל אַחֲרוֹת נִתֵּן לְהַבִּיא
רְאִיוֹת מְסַפִּיקוֹת בְּלִבָּר ...

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: רוּאָה אֲנִי דְבַרְךָ
זֶה יְהוּדִי מִתְקַבֵּל עַל הַדַּעַת
יֹתֵר מִדְּבַרֵי הַפְּתִיחָה. וְהִנְנִי
רוּצֵה בְּעַת לְהוֹסִיף וּלְהַקְשִׁיב
לְדְבַרְיָךְ.

אָמַר הַחֶבֶר: אוֹלָם פִּתַח דְּבַרֵי
הוּא הוּא הַמוֹפֵת, גְּדוּלָה מְזֹאת,
הוּא הַהוֹכְחָה שְׂאֲחַרְיָהּ אֵין צֶרֶךְ
לֹא בְּרֵאָיָה וְלֹא בְּמוֹפֵת.

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: וְאִיךָ זֶה?

אָמַר הַחֶבֶר: תֵּן לִי רְשׁוֹת
לְהַקְדִּים הַקְּדָמוֹת אַחֲדוֹת, כִּי
רוּאָה אֲנִי דְבַרֵי קָשִׁים עָלֶיךָ
וְנִקְלִים בְּעֵינַי.

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: הַקְּדָם הַקְּדָמוֹתֶיךָ
וְאֲשַׁמְעֶנּוּ.

אָמַר הַחֶבֶר: אֵלוֹ אָמְרוּ לְךָ כִּי
מֶלֶךְ הַדָּוִד אִישׁ חֶסֶד הוּא וְעָלֶיךָ
לְהַעֲרִיצוֹ וּלְהַגְדִּיל שְׁמוֹ וּלְסַפֵּר
מַעֲשֵׂי חֶסֶד, וְכָל זֶה רַק לְפִי
שְׂמוּעָה שְׂהִגִּיעָה אֵלֶיךָ עַל דְּבַר
צְדָקַת אֲנָשֵׁי אֶרְצוֹ וּמַדּוּתֵיהֶם

Kuzari | their fine character and honest
(cont.) | business dealings, would this be
sufficiently convincing for you?

Kuzari: Why should this be convincing for me when the matter is uncertain, for perhaps the Indian people themselves are in any case righteous? In fact, how do we know that they have a king at all? On the other hand, it is conceivable that the righteousness is because of the King, or perhaps, due to both the King and the nation?

Rabbi: Now supposing the King's messengers came to you bringing various presents which you know for a fact are only to be found in an Indian royal palace, accompanied by a letter which is clearly written by the King of India.

Enclosed with the letter are drugs which heal all your illnesses and protect your health, poisons for all your enemies or anyone who dares to fight with you, and other means to fight and kill them without armies or weapons, would this not be convincing for you?

Kuzari: Yes it would. For this would remove my initial doubt whether the Indians have a king and I would believe that evidence of his power and dominion had reached me.

Rabbi: So if you were asked about the King, how would you describe him?

Kuzari: Firstly, I would state what had been clearly proven to me with

הטובות ומשאם ומתננם באמונה,
האם היית רואה צדק לנפשך
לעשות בן?

אמר הכוזרי: מדוע אראה צדק
בזה לנפשי, הייתי מטיל ספק
בדבר אולי צדקת אנשי הדו
מצד עצמם היא? אף יתכן כי
אין להם מלך כלל, ואולי באמת
מצד מלכם היא, ואולי משני
הצדדים גם יחד?

אמר החבר: אולם אלו באו
אלך מלאכי המלך ההוא
בתשורות אשר אין להטיל ספק
בדבר כי נמצאות הן אף ורק
בארמנות מלכי הדו, ובמכתב
אשר ברור לך כי רק ממלך הדו
הוא, ולמכתב מצרפים סמי
תרופות המרפאים אותך מקל
מדויך ושומרים על בריאותך,
וסמי מות לאויבך ולכל
הלוחמים בך אשר תפילים
בצאתך לקראתם בלא חילות
ובלא כלי מלחמה, האם לא
היית חייב אז לסור אל משמעתו?

אמר הכוזרי: אמנם בן. כי אז
היה הספק הראשון אם אמנם
יש לאנשי הדו מלך מסתלק
מפני, ואז הייתי מאמין כי שלטון
מלך הדו ופקדתו נוגעים גם לי.

אמר החבר: ואם ישאלך אז
השואל למלך זה, במה תתארהו?

אמר הכוזרי: ראשונה באותם
התארים אשר נתבררו אצלי

my own eyes. After that, I would describe the things that I had initially been skeptical about, but were later clarified to me by these proofs.

Rabbi: This, precisely, was the way I responded to your initial inquiry.

Similarly, Moshe made his opening words to Pharaoh, “*The G-d of the Hebrews sent me to you*” (*Shemos* 7:16), namely, the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov. For the phenomenon of the Patriarchs was well known at the time to the nations, and they knew that a Divine being communicated with them, that He looked after them, and performed miracles for them. Thus Moshe did not say to Pharaoh, “The G-d of heaven and earth,” or “Our Creator sent me.”

Likewise, G-d’s opening words to the assembled people of Israel were, “*I am the G-d your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt*” (*ibid.* 20:2), but He did not say, “I am the Creator of the world and your Creator.”

My initial response to you, Prince of Kuzari, when you asked me about my faith was in the same vein. I stated to you what obligates me and the whole Jewish people. I explained to you something which was initially clarified to the Jewish people with their own eyes, and subsequently transmitted through an uninterrupted tradition which is equivalent to seeing with one’s own eyes (Part I, par. 10-25).

מתוך מה שראו עיני, ואחריהם
בתארים שהטלתי בהם ספק
לפני זה אף אחרי כן נתבררו לי
על ידי אלה.

אמר החבר: ומעין זה השבתיך
כאשר שאלתני אתה, ובדומה
לזה אמר משה בפתח דבריו
בדברו אל פרעה “אלקי העברים
שלחני אליך” רצונו לומר אלקי
אברהם יצחק ויעקב, כי היה
דבר האבות מפרסם אז
באמות, ונודע כי הענין האלקי
נתחבר עמם והשגיח עליהם
ועשה להם נפלאות, ולכן לא
אמר לו משה לפרעה “אלקי
השמים והארץ שלחני אליך”
ולא “בוראי ובוראך שלחני
אליך”, וכן פתח האלוה בדברו
אל כל עדת בני ישראל “אנכי יי
אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ
מצרים” ולא אמר “אני בורא
העולם ובוראכם”.

וכן פתחתי אני בהשיבי לך שר
הכוזרים כאשר שאלתני
לאמונת, בהודיעי אותך מה
הוא הדבר המחייב אותי והמחייב
את כל עם ישראל, דבר
שנתברר לבני ישראל בראשונה
על פי ראות עינים, ואחרי כן
נמסר לאיש מפי איש בקבלה
הדומה למראה עינים. (מאמר

ראשון אות י – כ”ה)

CLASSIC
QUESTION

How can it be demonstrated that the Oral Tradition is genuine?

Ikarim

Perfection means that no enhancement or flaw is imaginable. Since King David described the Torah as being “perfect” (Psalms 19:8), it must contain no flaw that would prevent it from being absolutely perfect.

Now, any written document is liable to various, opposing interpretations, to the extent that one person will espouse a certain argument and another will contradict it....Therefore, in order for G-d’s Torah to be perfect and understood correctly it is a logical imperative that when G-d gave Moshe the Written Law He must have explained to him the correct meaning. Moshe must have likewise done so to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets, and so on through the generations, so that no uncertainty should arise as to the correct meaning of the written text.

This explanation of the Written Law, which was transmitted from Moshe to Yehoshua, and by Yehoshua to those that followed him, is called the “Oral Law,” because it is impossible to write down this explanation. For any written text would render itself open to variant interpretations, as explained above in reference to the original text, and consequently a further explanation will be required of this “interpretation,” and so on *ad infinitum*.

הַדָּבָר הַשְּׁלֵם הוּא אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְמָה עָלָיו תּוֹסֵפֶת וְלֹא חֲסָרוֹן, וְאַחַר שֶׁנִּמְצָא דָּוִד יִתְאָר תּוֹרַת הַשֵּׁם בְּשֵׁהִיא “תְּמִימָה”, הִנֵּה אֵי אֲפֹשֶׁר שִׁיְהִיָּה בְּהָ שׁוֹם חֲסָרוֹן לְהַגְעֵת שְׁלֵמוֹתָהּ וְתִכְלִיתָהּ.

וּמֵאֲשֶׁר כָּל דָּבָר הַנִּכְתָּב מֵאִיזָה מִיֵּן שִׁיְהִיָּה כְּכָר אֲפֹשֶׁר שִׁיּוּבֵן בְּשֵׁתֵי הַבְּנוֹת מִתַּחֲלָפוֹת, עַד שֶׁאֲפֹשֶׁר שֶׁתִּהְיֶה הַבְּנָה הָאֶחָת מִסְכָּמֶת לְכּוֹנֶנֶת הָאוֹמֵר וְהַשְּׂנִית מִתַּחֲלָפֶת לָהּ מִכֵּל וְכֵל ... בְּעֵבֹר זֶה הִיָּה מִחֵיב כְּדֵי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ תְּמִימָה וְתוּבֵן עַל הַכּוֹנֵנָה הָרְאוּיָה, שֶׁבִּתּוֹת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ אוֹתָהּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּכֹתֵב יִפְרֹשׁ אוֹתָהּ לוֹ עַל הַכּוֹנֵנָה הָרְאוּיָה. וְכֵן מֹשֶׁה לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכֵן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים וְזִקְנִים לְנְבִיאִים וְכֵן דֹּר אַחֲרֵי דֹר, כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִפֹּל שׁוֹם סִפֵּק בְּהַבְנַת הַכְּתָב כְּפִי מַה שֶׁרְאוּיָה.

וְהַפְּרוּשׁ הִנֵּה מִהַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכֹתֵב שֶׁמִּסֵּר מֹשֶׁה לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ וְיְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְבָאִים אַחֲרָיו הוּא שֶׁקָּרְאוּ תּוֹרָה שְׁבַעֲלִפָּה, לְפִי שֶׁאֵי אֲפֹשֶׁר שִׁיּוּבֵא הַפְּרוּשׁ הִנֵּה בְּכֹתֵב, כִּי בְּכֹתֵב הַהוּא יִפֹּל גַּם כֵּן הַסִּפֵּק שֶׁאֲמַרְנוּ שִׁיּוּבֵא בְּמִכְתָּב הָרְאוּשׁוֹן וְיִצְטָרֵךְ פְּרוּשׁ לְפְרוּשׁ, וְכֵן לְבִלְתִּי תִכְלִית.

This is precisely what occurred to the text of the Mishnah, which is an explanation of the Written Law. Its meaning became unclear, such that a super-commentary was required, which is the Talmud, authored by Rav Ashi to clarify the Mishnah. Likewise, the Talmud, which was meant to clarify the Mishnah, itself required a further explanation, and many commentaries were authored offering variant interpretations. These commentaries then engendered further commentary, and so on.

Thus we have explained that it would be impossible for the Written Law to be perfect unless it were accompanied by an oral interpretation, which is what we refer to as the “Oral Law” (Part 3, chapter 23).

Kuzari | Rabbi: In what manner do you think Moshe gave the Torah Scroll to the Jewish people?

Prince of Kuzari: Undoubtedly, it was a simple scroll, without vowels and cantillation marks, just like the Torah scrolls which are in our possession today...

Rabbi: Obviously, then, the vowels and cantillation marks were preserved by memory...Thus any person who accepts that we read the Torah in this way is effectively accepting the Oral tradition of Moshe.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁקָּרָה לְחִבּוּר הַמִּשְׁנָיוֹת
שֶׁהוּא פְּרוּשׁ תּוֹרָה שְׁבֻכְתָּב,
שֶׁנֶּפֶל בּוֹ מִן הַסֵּפֶק וְהַמְּבוּכָה עַד
שֶׁהֶצְרֵךְ לְפָרוֹשׁ אַחֵר וְהוּא
חִבּוּר הַגְּמָרָא שֶׁעָשָׂה רַב אֲשִׁי
לְפָרֵשׁ הַמִּשְׁנָיוֹת. וְכֵן הַגְּמָרָא
שֶׁהוּא פְּרוּשׁ הַמִּשְׁנָיוֹת הֶצְרֵךְ
לְפָרוֹשׁ גַּם כֵּן, וְרַבּוּ עָלָיו
הַפְּרוּשִׁים וְחִלּוּקֵי הַסְּבָרוֹת, וְכֵן
עַל הַפְּרוּשִׁים גַּם כֵּן.

וְלִזֶּה הוּא מְבֹאָר שֶׁאֵי אֶפְשָׁר
שֶׁתְּהִיָּה הַתּוֹרָה שְׁבֻכְתָּב שְׁלֵמָה
אִם לֹא בְּהַמְצָא עִמָּה הַפְּרוּשׁ
הַזֶּה עַל פֶּה, וְזֶהוּ הַנִּקְרָא תּוֹרָה
שְׁבַעַל פֶּה. (מֵאמֵר שְׁלִישִׁי פָּרָק כ"ג)

אָמַר הַחֶבֶר: וּבֵאֵיזוֹ צוּרָה סָבוּר
אֲתָה מְסַר מִשָּׁה אֶת סִפְרוֹ לְבְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל?

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: אֵין סֵפֶק כִּי זֶה
הָיָה סִפֵּר חֶלֶק אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָיוּ בוֹ
לֹא נִקּוּד וְלֹא טַעֲמִים, מֵעַיִן
הַסִּפְרִים אֲשֶׁר בְּיַדְנוּ הַיּוֹם ...

אָמַר הַחֶבֶר: אִם כֵּן הַקְּבֵלָה
חֻבָּה עָלֵינוּ ... כָּל הַמּוֹדָה כִּי זֹאת
הַתּוֹרָה הַמְּצוּיָה עֵתָה בְּיַדְנוּ
וּבְדֶרֶךְ הַקְּרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר אָנוּ
קוֹרְאִים בָּהּ הִיא תּוֹרַת מִשָּׁה
עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם.

Kuzari
(cont.)

Kuzari: The Karaites* agree on this point. But since they find the Torah to be perfect as it is, they consider the Oral tradition superfluous.

Rabbi: May G-d spare us from this ideology! If the rudimentary text of the Book of Moshe requires, just in order to be read, so many orally transmitted phonetic signs, such as vowels, accents, division of paragraphs and other masoretic information, then all the more so is an oral tradition required for the *comprehension* of the text, for the meaning of the words is certainly more ambiguous than their pronunciation.

Take the following example. When G-d said to them, *"This month shall be the head of the months for you"* (*Shemos* 12:2), it was evidently not at all unclear to them whether he was referring to the Coptic, i.e. Egyptian calendar (which was the local custom), or the Chaldean calendar (the people who lived with Avraham in Ur Kasdim), or the solar calendar, or the lunar calendar, or the intercalated lunar calendar (Part 3, par. 29-35. See *ibid.* where a series of such examples of obtuse scriptural statements is cited, which prove the necessity of an accompanying oral tradition).

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: כִּי אִין צָרִיךְ בִּקְבֻלָּהּ. אֲמַר הַחֲבֵרִי: אִין צָרִיךְ בִּקְבֻלָּהּ. אֲמַר הַחֲבֵרִי: אִין צָרִיךְ בִּקְבֻלָּהּ. אֲמַר הַחֲבֵרִי: אִין צָרִיךְ בִּקְבֻלָּהּ.

אָמַר הַחֲבֵרִי: יִשְׁמְרֵנוּ הָאֱלֹהִים מִדְּעָה זוֹ, שֶׁהָרִי אִם לְשֵׁם הַקְּרִיאָה הַנִּכּוֹנָה שֶׁל תְּבוּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו שֶׁל סֵפֶר חֶלֶק זֶה סֵפֶר מֹשֶׁה עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם הַצְּרִכְנוּ לְקַבֵּל מֵאֵת סִיעוֹת רַבּוֹת שֶׁל בְּעָלֵי נְקוּד בְּעָלֵי טַעְמִים מִסְמְנֵי פְרָשִׁיּוֹת וּבְעָלֵי מְסוּרָה, עַל אַחַת כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה צְרִיכִים אָנוּ לְקַבֵּל לְשֵׁם הַבְּנֵת תְּכֵנוּ, כִּי הַקֶּפֶה שֶׁל הוֹרָאתָ הַמְלִים גְּדוֹל מִהַקֶּף קְרִיאָתוֹ, הֲלֹא תִרְאֶה לְמִשְׁלַל כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר לָהֶם הָאֱלֹהִים-הַ לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֹאשׁ חֹדְשִׁים" לֹא נִתְעוֹרֵר סִפְק בְּלִבָּם עַל אֵלּוֹ חֹדְשִׁים הוּא מְדַבֵּר, עַל שֶׁל הַקּוֹפְטִים הֵם הַמְצָרִים שְׂבִינֵיהֶם גְּרוּ אֹז, אִין עַל שֶׁל הַסּוּרִים הֵם בְּשָׂדִים תּוֹשְׁבֵי אֹר בְּשָׂדִים בִּימֵי אֲבֹרָהּ, עַל חֹדְשֵׁי הַחֲמָה אִין עַל חֹדְשֵׁי הַלְבָּנָה, אִין עַל חֹדְשֵׁי שְׁנַת הַחֲמָה הַמִּתְאַמֶּת לְחֹדְשֵׁי שְׁנַת הַלְבָּנָה (מֵאִמֵר שְׁלִישִׁי אֹת כ"ט - ל"ה).

*A sect of Jews that arose in the 9th century C.E., who accepted only the strict interpretation of the literal text of the scripture, but denied the authenticity of the Oral Law.

🌀 TORAS MENACHEM

A LOGICAL APPROACH TO SINAI*

In view of the various religions and creeds in the world, each claiming to be the truth and superior to all others, how is a Jew to be certain that his religion is the true one?

This and related questions have already been dealt with at length in the famous 12th century classic, the Book of *Kuzari* by the great Jewish philosopher Rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi. It is well documented and based on proofs that would stand up to the scrutiny of scientific method and common sense.

One basic scientific principle is that the first thing is to ascertain the facts, regardless whether they seem logical or not, and then to try to find the right explanation. Science does not come with foregone conclusions and beliefs with the idea of reconciling and adjusting facts to these beliefs. Rather the opposite, it deals with facts then formulates opinions and conclusions. This has been expressed in the dictum that knowledge is derived from reality, not vice versa. If according to one's reasoning the reality should be different, the fault is with one's reasoning, not with the reality.

A further basic principle of scientific method is that the veracity of testimony is compelling when it is based on the widest possible range of witnesses and observations, substantiated, moreover, by experience under the widest possible conditions, etc. Where there is such evidence it is accepted as a fact which is undeniable, even if it does not agree with a scientific theory. This is the accepted practice in science even where there are several

*NOTE: This lesson differs considerably from the others in this volume in two significant respects. First, it is *polemical*: it is trying to prove a point, in contrast to the other lessons which aim to explain rather than to argue or to prove. Second, the entire lesson (with the exception of one paragraph), is excerpted from letters penned by the Rebbe himself (in English), in contrast to the other lessons which have been adapted from his talks and writings by the editor.

reliable witnesses, and certainly scores of them, hundreds and thousands.

By way of illustration: If you are asked, how do you know there existed such a person as Maimonides, author of *Yad ha-Chazakah* [*Mishneh Torah*], *Sefer ha-Mitzvos*, etc., you will surely reply that you are certain about his existence from the books he has written, and although *Rambam* (Maimonides) lived some 800 years ago, his works now in print have been reprinted from earlier editions, and those from earlier ones, still uninterruptedly, going back to the very manuscript which the *Rambam* wrote in his own hand. This is considered sufficient proof even in the face of discrepancies or contradictions from one book of *Rambam* to

🌀 Sparks of Chasidus 🌀

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM TO DENY JUST ONE VERSE?

Why should it be the case that if a person accepts the validity of every part of the Torah except for one apparently inconsequential verse (such as “*And the children of Cham were Kush and Mitzrayim*”—*Bereishis* 10:6), he is considered to have denied the validity of the *entire* Torah?

Chasidic thought elaborates upon the idea that a person's will is composed of many superficial layers but has a single, unified core. Every act that a person carries out is motivated by some sort of will—otherwise it simply would not take place—but many things that we do are merely a “means to an end” and do not represent our true, inner will.

[For example, every businessperson wishes to please his clients, but his will to do so is a relatively superficial one, motivated by a more powerful, immediate drive to bring in revenue. But even money is not the ultimate desire of a healthy human being, for money is but a tool that enables a person to fulfill his purpose and mission in life, etc.]

In a similar manner, G-d is also described as having many superficial “wants and desires” which are motivated by a single inner drive. We are taught that G-d created the entire universe, “*for the sake of the Torah and for the sake of the Jewish people*” (*Rashi* to *Bereishis* 1:1), and this is the driving force behind all His multitudinous acts of creation and Divine providence. So while the millions of species of animals and plants and the billions of people who inhabit the world only do so because G-d wills their specific existence, there is a single underlying will which motivates, so to speak, all of this: G-d's desire for the Torah and the Jewish people. And being the core of His innermost will, it is a single, *indivisible* drive.

Therefore, a denial of just one tiny part of the Torah is tantamount to denying it all, because when dealing with an essential will it cannot be divided into parts.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 30, p. 151)

another. Such contradictions do not demolish the above proof, but efforts are made to reconcile them, in the certainty that both have been written by the same author.

The same kind of proof substantiates any kind of historic past, which we ourselves have not witnessed, and all normal people accept them without question, except those who for some reason are interested in falsification.

Accordingly, as pointed out in the *Kuzari*, and in other sources through the ages, we Jews are certain that “*Moshe is true and his Torah is true*” (*Tanchuma, Korach 11*), on the basis of the historic events of the Exodus and the Revelation at Sinai, which were witnessed and experienced by 600,000 male adult Jews (apart from women and children). Among these original witnesses there were many who were initiated in the sciences of those days (i.e. Egypt), many achievements of which are still baffling nowadays; among them were philosophers and thinkers, as well as ignorant and uneducated persons, women and children of all ages. Yet all of them reported the event and phenomenon connected with it without contradiction to each other.

What our ancestors witnessed and experienced they transmitted to their children and children’s children, from generation to generation to this day, for there has never been a break or any interruption in our history and tradition from the time of our first Patriarch Abraham. Even during the times of the greatest persecutions, and even after the destruction of the *Beis ha-Mikdash* [Holy Temple], there always survived large numbers of Jews who preserved the text of the Torah and the traditions, so that the chain has *never* been broken. At no time, even during the worst pogroms and massacres of Jews, were there less than millions of Jews faithfully maintaining this tradition.

Thus, the *identical* tradition has been transmitted to us by millions of Jews from all walks of life, and verified by the actual way of life and commitment to the same *mitzvos* of the same Torah (the same *Shabbos*, the same *Tefilin*, *Mezuzah*, etc.) from generation to generation, in different lands and under different conditions. While other factors which are usually associated with the preservation of other nations and their ethnic cultures—such as territory, political independence, language, dress, etc.—have changed in Jewish life from time to time and from place to place, the Torah and *mitzvos* did not change in the life of *all* Jews. This

fact that runs like a golden thread throughout our Jewish history not only confirms without the slightest doubt the authenticity of our Torah and *mitzvos*, but also clearly demonstrates which is the truly vital *constant* factor that has preserved us Jews under all possible circumstances and crises, namely, the Torah and *mitzvos*, “*our life and the length of our days*” [liturgy, evening prayers].

No other religion, without exception, even those whose followers by far outnumber our Jewish people, can claim such proof of authenticity. In all other religions, especially those which are more prevalent in the U.S.A., namely, Christianity and Islam, the religion itself bases its tradition and origin on a single individual, (Mohammed), or several individuals, (the Christian Apostles, and here, too, eventually on one person, Paul, the founder). The same is true of Buddhism, which was founded by an ancient Hindu sage, the Buddha, (“Enlightened One”), whose followers adopted his teachings and doctrines and called themselves Buddhists, after him. These religions themselves, and their followers, openly declare that they were so founded.

Consequently, despite the multitude of followers, the skeptic may question the veracity of the revelation claimed by the original founder, whether it was a genuine prophetic revelation as

🌀 The Last Word 🌀

THE TORAH: A FORM OF INSTRUCTION

Even though the Torah contains vast repositories of wisdom, as the verse states, “*It is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations*” (*Devarim* 4:6), the word “Torah” does not mean “wisdom,” but rather, “instruction” (*Zohar* III 53b). Consequently, every part of the Torah, even passages which appear to mention no specific directives or *mitzvos*, convey practical instruction for a person’s day-to-day life.

Therefore Rambam writes, “*Verses such as...‘Timnah was a concubine’ (Bereishis 36:12), are no different from [overtly significant] verses such*

as...‘Hear O Israel’ (Devarim 6:4), since they are all from the Almighty’s mouth.” For even though “Hear O Israel” conveys one of the most significant commands to contemplate G–d’s oneness, and the other verse is one detail of a narrative, both share the quality of being a Divine revelation that conveys practical instruction.

Our task is to take every verse of the Torah to heart and to meditate upon its personal relevance to our lives. Sometimes the message is obvious; other times it requires some contemplation, but instruction is always to be found.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 2, pp. 331-2)

claimed or perhaps a hallucination, and, in the case of a small group of founders, whether there was a genuine shared experience, or perhaps a collusion, and the like.

On the other hand, the Jewish religion goes back to the Revelation at Mount Sinai, (in which, incidentally, the Christians and Moslems also believe), which took place in the presence of 600,000 adult men, not including women, children and the elderly, all of whom, taken together, would total several million souls. This distinction is a very fundamental one, for where it is claimed that the religion originates with a single individual or group of individuals, one can argue that there may have been human error involved, or even conspiracy. No such argument can be made in regard to the Divine Revelation at Mount Sinai, which took place in the presence of the entire Jewish people—living witnesses—and was transmitted from parents to children, in an unbroken chain of tradition, to the present day.

By way of illustration: Suppose that 600,000 parents would today say to their children, “This morning you and we were all gathered at a certain place, and we all heard a Heavenly voice proclaim the Decalogue.” The children would not accept this for they would say: “If we were there with you, why did we not hear or see anything?” Now, making the single assumption that human reactions have not essentially changed in the course of centuries, one can assume that such would have been the reaction also in the previous century, and two centuries ago and so on, until we reach the generation whose parents witnessed the event of the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

And let it be emphasized again that during this long chain of tradition, there has been no break, nor has the number of transmitters at any time been reduced to less than many hundreds of thousands, for at no time was there less than one million Jews in the world, Jews from all walks of life, who had no personal ax to grind, etc., yet in each generation of the uninterrupted and unbroken history of our people, this event was accepted as authentic history and the text of the Decalogue remained exactly the same. This is certainly undeniable evidence according to all the rules of scientific proof accepted today.

To deny such a fact is anything but scientific; it is the very opposite of science.

🔖 BIBLE CRITICISM

What, then, is the response to "Bible criticism"?

It is not a case where these people have a different tradition from ours, going back to all those ancient generations, but it is rather a case where this one or that one has come out with theories or hypotheses which are not only speculative, but have been shown to be unscientific as well as illogical. For, according to them, it would be a case where thousands upon thousands of Jews have at one point or another suddenly changed their views and attitudes toward the Torah in radical ways. With all the arguments about superstitions or mass hypnoses, etc., such radical changes by hundreds of thousands of people of different backgrounds in different parts of the world, etc. are very farfetched and most illogical.

🔖 DEAD SEA SCROLLS

How are we to understand the fact that ancient scrolls were found buried near the Jordan whose texts vary from our version of the Bible?

No conclusive evidence can be brought from these findings since it is possible, and indeed quite likely, that these scrolls were buried because they were *incorrectly written*. For Jewish law requires that incorrectly written scrolls must be buried and not destroyed.

🔖 VALIDITY OF THE ORAL TRADITION

Granted that the Torah is being accepted as of Divine origin, how is it possible to be certain of the validity of the Oral Law, and of the traditional interpretation of the Torah?

Modern science has made all sorts of discoveries and opened new fields, such as electronics, etc., which are based on the

science of mathematics, the basic principles of which were known thousands of years ago, as is well known and admitted. Needless to say, the mathematics of old had no idea or conception of electronics, but there is no contradiction here, only the application of old principles and methods of deduction to new fields or branches of science. Therefore, the traditional interpretation of the Torah is already contained in the Torah itself, and is nothing but a continuation of the written Torah, so that only both together do they constitute one living organism.

In this case, too, we can apply the argument from common sense, as mentioned above. For it is unthinkable to assume that at any particular time there arose a new school of thought which claimed to give a new interpretation to the Torah which was in conflict with the accepted traditions of the past. No one would accept such a radical change, and certainly it would not be accepted by the whole Jewish people. For, it is not a case where a particular professor is studying with a group of students, but the study and interpretation of the Torah has been going on in numerous yeshivos and academies, all of which presented a remarkable degree of unanimity.

🔗 DISPUTES IN THE ORAL TRADITION

Why then do we find so many differences of opinion in the Oral tradition?

To be sure, we will find differences of opinion in *Mishna* and *Gemara*, but the important thing is the resulting decisions, which became unanimous in the halachah. Thus, we also find in the Torah itself a difference of opinion, on occasion, between Moshe Rabbenu and others, but it is the final outcome of such differences that is important. We also find a difference of opinion between the first Jew, Abraham, and his wife Sarah, in which case there was a Divine directive that Abraham was to follow Sarah's opinion. Therefore, the integrity of the whole tradition and Oral Law is in no way challenged by differences of opinion which are mentioned in the Talmud, which are in themselves methods of deduction to arrive at the final decision, or *p'sak din*. [See below, Lessons 5-11].

🌀 CAN IT BE SO OBVIOUS?

If all the above is so plain and logical, how is one to explain the comparatively small number of those who conform to the Torah and mitzvos, while transgressors are so numerous?

When one reflects upon his conduct and deeds, particularly in his everyday life (not during periods of special spiritual elation, such as during the days of *Yom Tov* [festivals], etc.)—it is not hard to see that a very great number of one's actions are motivated by one's desires and inclinations, not by one's intellect. This is particularly true where the conflict does not raise the immediate threat of "reprisals." The farther removed is the threat of sanctions, the weaker becomes the intellectual motive, and the more strongly is the conduct influenced by desire and emotion; even more so when the sanctions are of an "abstract" nature. For the fear of physical sanctions (imprisonment or fine, etc.) is more effective than admonition, or argumentation, in the name of morality, justice, humanity, etc.

There enters also an additional factor of human nature. When man succumbs to temptation and commits a "sin," he may experience one of two kinds of reaction: If he is honest and courageous, he will recognize his act for what it is, a failure, as well as a breach of his own true will and conscience. Recognizing his failure as a sign of weakness, he will seek to overcome it and to do better next time, and "*G-d has compassion with, and forgives, he who concedes his mistake and resolves to correct it.*"

One, however, who is afraid to face the truth and its consequences in the case of a failure, begins to find excuses for himself and to justify his negative action. Moreover, as "*one transgression brings another in its train*" (*Avos* 4:2), the guilt complex and need for self justification will become ever more persistent and pressing, both in order to pacify his own troubling conscience, as well as to square himself in the eyes of others. "*Love covers up all offenses*" (*Prov.* 10:12), particularly self love, and "*bribery blinds the eyes of (even) the wise*" (*Devarim* 16:19), especially the self bribery that goes with vanity. He will thus become biased in his own favor, and in his befuddled thinking

will “devise” a personal philosophy or even a “*Weltanschauung*,” to fit his conduct, which will not only “justify” it, but even turn vice into virtue.

🌀 A Living Example 🌀

THE SANCTITY OF EVERY SINGLE VERSE

The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shne’ur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), was the regular Torah-reader in his Synagogue in Liozna. Once he was away on the *Shabbos of Parshas Ki Savo*, and his son R’ Dov Ber—later to become the Mittlerer Rebbe—heard the Torah being read by another person. At the time, R’ Dov Ber was not yet *Bar Mitzvah*.

When he heard the part of the Torah reading which recounts numerous ominous curses (which G-d threatens to bring upon the Jewish people if they fail to observe the Torah), he became emotionally and physically distraught, to the extent that the Alter Rebbe doubted whether his son would be able to fast on Yom Kippur, a few weeks later.

“But don’t you hear this very same reading every year?” the Mittlerer Rebbe was asked.

“When father reads it,” he replied, “you don’t hear any curses.”

The existence of the Torah predates that of the world (*Shabbos* 88b). So even when Torah appears to touch upon very “worldly” phenomena such as acts of fraud and corruption, it nevertheless does so from a pristine, pre-creation perspective where no evil exists. From this sublime viewpoint even the most base of acts is seen in light of their ultimate rectification, and the harshest of punishments are understood to be for a person’s benefit.

When the Alter Rebbe read from the Torah, he managed to bring to the surface—for those who were able to discern it—the Torah’s primordial message, at which level only good exists. Thus, on the one occasion when the Mittlerer Rebbe heard from another reader, the literal, worldly implications of the Torah’s “curses,” he was quite disturbed.

This sheds light on *Rambam’s* statement that “verses such as ‘*And the children of Cham were Kush and Mitzrayim*’ (*Bereishis* 10:6), ‘*His wife’s name was Mehaytavail*’ (*ibid.* 36:39), and ‘*Timnah was a concubine*’ (*ibid.* 36:12), are no different from [overtly significant] verses such as, “*I am G-d your G-d*” (*Shemos* 20:2), and “*Hear O Israel*” (*Devarim* 6:4), since they are all from the Almighty’s mouth.” At first glance this assertion is difficult to understand. How can the sanctity of a verse such as “*I am G-d your G-d*,” the opening of the Ten Commandments, be equated to the sanctity of “*Timnah was a concubine*,” which speaks of a woman who was born through an adulterous union (see *Rashi* *ibid.*)?

However, the key point here is that they are both verses in the Torah which preceded the world. And from this inner perspective, even parts of Torah that express themselves negatively in this world are essentially good and holy.

(Based on *Sichas Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan* 5746)

🌀 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EVERY DETAIL

Why does Rambam state that even the denial of one tiny, apparently insignificant detail of the Torah violates a principle of Judaism?

Our Torah is called “*Toras Emes*” [“Torah of Truth”] because it is eternal and immutable. When the Truth is modified or altered by compromise, whether to the extent of 99% or less, it ceases to be the Truth. And the Truth remains the same for all people, and at all times. If one accepts the eternity of the Torah, and this can be only on the basis of *Torah min ha-Shamayim* [Divine authorship of Torah], then it would be absurd to say that while it is true that Torah was given by G-d, times have changed—as if the Creator and Governor of the Universe could not have foreseen that there would be a 20th century with certain groups of people, such as scientists or “modernists,” who would be inclined to accept only a compromised Torah, not the Torah of Truth.

Even without the ruling of Maimonides, this would be self-evident and logical. For one has to be consistent: Either one accepts that the Torah is Divine, in which case a human being with his limited intellect, inasmuch as all creation is limited, cannot possibly fathom the Divine Wisdom that is in the Torah, and cannot, therefore, select passages from it which appeal to his intellect and discard others which do not.

On the other hand, if a human being is so presumptuous as to use his own discretion with regard to the Torah, and accept or reject accordingly, this means that he regards the Torah as some-

🌀 *Sparks of Chasidus* 🌀

THE TORAH: G-D'S NAME

Our Sages taught that “*the entire Torah is the name of G-d*” (Ramban, introduction to commentary on *Bereishis*). This sheds light on Rambam’s ruling that even apparently insignificant

verses such as “*Timnah was a concubine*” (*Bereishis* 36:12), are equally important to the rest of the Torah, for every word is, quite literally, the name of G-d.

(Based on *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Re'eh* 5748, par 18)

thing which does not go deeper or beyond his human understanding. Consequently also, the Torah in his opinion has no greater binding force than that dictated by human reason, which in effect means no binding force at all, since no human being can impose his views on any other human being.

Where truth is concerned, there can be no compromise or accommodation, for even 99% of truth is not the whole truth, and therefore not truth at all.

Needless to say, 99% is better than 98%, but one must not delude oneself in believing that it is the whole truth. Indeed, the Rambam rules that if a Jew *accepts* the whole Torah except for one letter, he is deemed as if he denied the whole Torah. And one of the explanations of it is, as mentioned above, that truth and compromise are contradictory.

The above does not mean that unless a Jew observes all the 613 *mitzvos*, he is not an observant Jew. Indeed, the Torah declares, “A Jew, though he has sinned, remains a Jew” (*Sanhedrin* 44a). It states further than no sinner is rejected, and eventually everyone who had strayed will return to the fold (II Sam.14:14). What is emphasized above is that any thought that the Torah is in any way “outdated” and needs to be “modernized” is heresy and a denial of the Divine origin and eternal nature of the Torah and *mitzvos*.

☞ NON-TRADITIONAL MOVEMENTS

How then are we to perceive movements that do not accept the entire Written and Oral tradition?

It is necessary to have a clear understanding where certain movements stand in relation to authentic Judaism. As to which movements and ideologies are opposed to the Torah, this is easy to determine in light of the *psak* [ruling] of the *Rambam* to the effect that to deny even one letter of the Torah is tantamount to denying the whole Divine authorship of the Torah (*Laws of Teshuvah* 3:9).

Once one begins making concessions, holding no more to the principle of the inviolability of the pure faith and Divine Law, there is no telling how far one will go. Human nature is such that

once he accepts the principle of compromise in matters of faith, there is bound to be a steady erosion, every time with a lighter mind and less qualms. Secondly, it is bound to undermine one's respect for one's religion, knowing that anyone can "do business" with it; trim it a bit here, a bit there; and whatever is left—what real value can be attached to it, and what binding force can it have? Moreover, one, at the same time, loses also one's self respect, recognizing one's lack of courage and personal weakness to hold on to one's own belief, or the beliefs of his people, and taking instead the line of least resistance.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to make a distinction between individuals and movements. While movements and ideologies which are against the Torah must be opposed and exposed, an individual Jew, even if he sins, is a Jew, and it is necessary to do everything *be'ahavah* [with love] to help him back on the right path (see *Tanya*, Chapter 32, "Lev"*).

Thus, at the personal level, the classification of Jews into so-called orthodox, reform and conservative denominations is a

*In Hebrew, the number 32 spells the word "lev" meaning "heart," alluding to the topic of Chapter 32 of *Tanya*, which explains the importance of brotherly love for one's fellow Jew.

🌀 Sparks of Chasidus 🌀

UNITED BY OUR ESSENCE

The word ישראל, Israel, is an acronym for יש ששים ריבוא אותיות לתורה, "there are 600,000 letters in the Torah" (*Megaleh Amukos* par. 186), alluding to the fact that each individual Jew is connected specifically with a letter in the Torah.

With the Torah, every verse and every letter is crucial to the integrity of the whole. Thus *Rambam* writes that a person who denies just one verse denies the whole Torah, and according to Jewish Law, if one letter of a

Torah scroll is defective the entire scroll is invalid.

Likewise, in the case of the Jewish people, each individual is crucial to the nation as a whole. Superficially some people may appear to be more important than others, especially those that enjoy a leadership role. But as far as the *essence* of a Jew is concerned, at the core of our Jewish identity, all are equal and all constitute an indispensable part of the Jewish nation.

(Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayigash 5747, par. 18)

purely superficial one which has no basis in the *essence* of a Jew which is bound up with his Divine soul. For, all Jewish souls were present at Sinai, including those to be born on this earth, and to each one of them G-d addressed himself in the second person singular, "I am the L-rd *thy* G-d" (*Shemos* 20:2), when He gave the Torah and *mitzvos* to our people. To be sure, there are fully observant Jews and less observant Jews, but all this has to do only with external manifestations and influences, whereas essentially all Jews are *fully* committed to Torah and *mitzvos*. It is, therefore, necessary only to shed the external "garments" or "layers" to reveal the inner Jewish essence, and this is something which every Jew has the capacity to do, where there is a firm will and determination.

(Excerpted from letters written by the Rebbe on 23rd of Adar I 5717, *Rosh Chodesh* Adar II, 5738; 4th of Adar II, 5738, 12th of Shevat 5744 and on various other occasions; *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Matos-Masei* 5742, par. 43)

Points to Remember...

- ✔ Unlike other religions which are based on the testimony of a *single* individual or a small group, the Revelation at Sinai was an event witnessed by the *entire Jewish nation* and could therefore not be fabricated.
- ✔ The Written Law must have been given with an oral interpretation, otherwise it would have no objective meaning.
- ✔ The Oral Tradition we have today must be what was revealed to Moshe at Sinai because people would naturally have rejected a new interpretation to the Torah which was in conflict with the accepted traditions of the past.

- ✔ To deny just one part of the Torah, even one verse, or one detail of the Oral Law is tantamount to denying it all, because where truth is concerned there can be no compromise or accommodation.
- ✔ The word “Torah” means “instruction,” indicating that every part of the Torah conveys practical instruction for a person’s day-to-day life.
- ✔ While *movements* which are against the Torah should be rejected, an *individual Jew*, even if he sins, is a Jew, and we must to do everything to help him back on the right path with love.

THE 13 PRINCIPLES: A HISTORICAL NOTE*

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In 1168, Rambam completed his first major work, the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, in which he reproduced the entire text of the Mishnah and appended a commentary in Judeo-Arabic. Besides being the first extensive commentary to the Mishnah,¹ this work also became known for its three lengthy introductions which discuss a number of fundamental topics systematically.² Their substantial contribution to Jewish thought has rendered these introductions as works in their own right.³ They are: a.) A general introduction to the Oral Law which traces its history and sources. b.) The “Eight Chapters,” an introduction to the *Ethics of the Fathers* discussing the philosophy of the soul, dealing with topics such as virtue, vice, ethics and free will. c.) An introduction to the tenth chapter of Tractate *Sanhedrin* in which Rambam makes known his views on immortality⁴ and formulates *Thirteen Principles of Faith*, which, he argues, are crucial prerequisites for the soul to be immortalized.⁵

Rambam devotes, on average, a few paragraphs to a brief overview of each principle,⁶ and they could be summarized as follows: 1.) G-d exists; 2.) G-d is one; 3.) G-d is incorporeal; 4.) G-d precedes everything; 5.) only G-d may be worshiped; 6.) prophecy occurs; 7.) the superiority of Mosaic prophecy; 8.) the Torah was Divinely authored; 9.) the Torah will never

* A full introduction to the *Thirteen Principles* will appear in the first volume of this series.

1. Rashi's commentary to the Mishnah, which preceded that of Rambam, is relatively brief, since it was written for a readership who intended to study the Talmud's commentary.
2. A quality uncharacteristic of rabbinic texts in general, but a hallmark of Rambam's treatment of any subject, as his later works were to demonstrate.
3. Thus we find that the introductions have been published as separate texts. For example, *Rambam le-Am, Hakdamos* (Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1994, 14th printing), with commentary by Rabbi Mordechai Dov Rabinowitz; *Hakdamos ha-Rambam le-Mishneh* Rabbi Yitzchak Shilat, (Jerusalem 1996); *Hakdamos ha-Rambam le-Perush ha-Mishneh*, Rabbi Nechemia Shmuel Roth (Machon Yerushalayim, 2005).
4. For a lengthy discourse on immortality, written by the Rebbe, drawing from rabbinic, kabalistic and chasidic teachings, see *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 1, p. 141.
5. For the status of one who inadvertently fails to meet these criteria, see: *Igros Kodesh* vol. 22, p. 33-4; *Likutei Sichos* vol. 15, p. 79; *ibid.* vol. 35, p. 29; *Sichas Yud-Tes Kislev* 5712. See also *Shogaig be'Ikrei ha-Das* by Rabbi Shimon Vizthandler in *Kovetz ha-Yovel (Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim ha-Merkazis, 2000)*, vol. 1, p. 189ff.
6. The full text of each *Principle* as it appears in the *Commentary to the Mishnah* is cited in this series, at the beginning of each section.

change or be annulled; 10.) G-d knows what man does; 11.) the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished; 12.) Mashiach (the Messiah) will come; 13.) the dead will be resurrected.⁷

For those who have some knowledge of Judaism, none of these *Principles* appear to be alarming or radical in their own right. In fact, any person familiar with Jewish liturgy will note that these themes form the focus of many prayers and psalms. Nevertheless, as the first⁸ self-contained statement of the fundamentals of Judaism since the Torah was given in 1312 BCE, Rambam's Principles inevitably generated controversy.

The fact that no formulation of the beliefs of Judaism had been made until this point is not difficult to understand when one bears in mind that there was a general prohibition to write down even the legal parts of the Torah, and that the Mishnah and Talmud were only recorded out of dire emergency, to save them from being lost altogether.⁹

In the case of esoteric wisdom, Jewish law is even more conservative. The Mishnah rules explicitly that mystical rites known as "the Account of Creation," and "the Account of the Chariot," may be taught only to those capable of appreciating such wisdom, and even then it must be done only in private.¹⁰ Today we understand that these "Accounts" refer to kabalistic¹¹

7. All of the Principles were restated in *Rambam's Code*, the *Mishneh Torah* (in *Laws of Foundations of the Torah* and *Laws of Teshuvah*), though not as a thirteen-point list, and as part of a strictly halachic text they become a more authoritative statement (see *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Acharai* 5730). In the *Guide*, *Rambam* also elaborates on many of the Principles at length.

For an explanation as to why *Rambam* did not include all Thirteen Principles in his *Laws of Foundations of the Torah*, see *Hadran al ha-Rambam* 5735, par 4.

8. Sa'adia Ga'on, in the tenth century, was the first to discuss the principles of Judaism philosophically, and an extremely brief formulation of "four elements" of belief in G-d necessary for salvation was made by Rabbenu Chananel (c.975-1057), in his commentary to *Shemos* 14:31. *Rambam*, however, was the first to compose a complete, systematic list of Principles.

9. See *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:71

10. *Mishnah*, *Chagigah* 2:1.

11. As its name suggests—kalah means "tradition"—Jewish mysticism is part of the corpus which was revealed to Moshe on Mount Sinai, and handed down faithfully through an unbroken chain of tradition.

The kabalah, is an extremely valuable and extensive discussion of G-d, creation, revelation and redemption, and contains substantial commentary on all of the ideas mentioned in *Rambam's* list of Principles. Its ideas, however, did not enter general circulation until as late as the seventeenth century, through the efforts of the famed kabalist of Tzefas, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (1534-1572).

Until the late twelfth century, the kabalah was virtually a total secret. Even the Zohar itself, the core text of the Kabalah authored by the tannaic Sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (2nd century), was only made known at the end of the thirteenth century.

teachings¹² about creation and G-d, which explains why, as the generations diminished in their intellectual capacities,¹³ even the private dissemination of esoteric wisdom became less prevalent. It is no surprise, therefore, that no texts delving into the principles of faith were produced for public consumption.¹⁴

To understand what prompted Rambam to define Judaism philosophically, one needs to appreciate the historical circumstances prevailing at the time. The Moslem invasion of Spain in 711 brought significant change to a large segment of the global Jewish community who resided in these lands or subsequently immigrated to them. During this “golden era,” which lasted until the 12th century, Jews enjoyed much more freedom and opportunity than under the previous Christian rule, and the Arabic culture made a lasting impact on Sefardic cultural development. The Arabs ruled much of the area around the Mediterranean where Greek philosophy was popular, which resulted in philosophy spreading throughout all the Arabic lands. The Moslem philosophers Alfarabi (870-950), and later Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198), adapted the works of Aristotle and Plato into the Arabic language, which resulted in Greek philosophy becoming very much in vogue. Inevitably, the Jews who had integrated into the culture became strongly influenced by it.

This presented two seemingly insurmountable problems for which the Rabbinic leadership of the time were forced to find a solution:

a.) While Aristotle did affirm the existence of One G-d, many of his conclusions were inconsistent with Jewish beliefs.¹⁵ For example, he main-

Earlier still, Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, “Nachmanides,” 1194-1270) had authored a popular commentary to the Torah which openly incorporates kabalistic ideas. But, Rambam, who was active primarily in the second half of the twelfth century, wrote at a time when the kabalalah was still a totally secret rite. See note 18.

12. *Likutei Sichos* vol 1, p. 150. See also *Talmud Bavli*, Schottenstein edition, *ibid.* note 33.

13. “*The minds of the earlier scholars were like the entrance to the Temple Hall, but ours are like the eye of a needle*” (Erwin 53a).

14. As for why the Torah itself (i.e. the Pentateuch) does not address theological issues formally and systematically, see *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Devarim* 5746, par. 38:

Why did the Torah only allude to the coming of Mashiach, in the prophecies of Bilam, or through a proof from the command to “add three further cities” (Devarim 19:9; see Laws of Kings 11:1-2)? One would imagine that the Torah would have stated this belief clearly and explicitly, as indeed we find it is articulated in the books of the Prophets.

However, the Torah is, by definition, a text of practical halachah. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to discuss such a matter directly, and it is only mentioned in connection with a practical law, the addition of three additional cities in the future.

15. Abarbanel notes that this is reflected in the sequential organization of the Thirteen Principles: Principles 1-3 are fully consistent with Aristotelian philosophy; Principles 4-6 are partially consistent; Principles 7-9 are outside the scope of Aristotelian

tained that the world always existed and he denied the phenomenon of Divine providence.¹⁶ Consequently, study of the Islamic Aristotelian works resulted in a crisis of faith¹⁷ among a large segment of the Jewish community. Many Jews remained outwardly observant, but their minds and hearts were loyal to philosophy and its conclusions.

b.) Being a purely rational system, Aristotle's metaphysics was extremely convincing, and, armed with no system of formal Jewish theology whatsoever (since kabbalah remained a hidden science), Jews were offered no alternative way of thinking. Furthermore, the intellectual stimulation of philosophy and the profundity of its subject matter gave Jews the feeling that this was true spirituality. As time passed, the laws of the Torah and its narratives became increasingly belittled in their eyes, to the extent that they were wont to say, "Moshe gave us the exoteric law, but Aristotle gave us the esoteric law!"

In the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries, the prospect of openly revealing the kabbalah,¹⁸ Judaism's own esoteric wisdom, was out of the question, for a

philosophy and would be neither accepted nor rejected by it; and Principles 10-13 would be completely denied by Aristotle. See *Rosh Amanah*, chapter 10.

16. "Worse still are the heretics who do not believe in G-d's unity at all, like Aristotle and his associates, who are more terribly evil than the idol-worshippers. They at least acknowledged G-d's unity, referring to Him as 'the G-d of gods' (end of tractate *Menachos*)" (*Toras Chaim, Bereishis* of the Mittlerer Rebbe. 78c; See also *Ma'amarei Admor ha-Emtzoie, Bamidbar* vol. 2, p. 802 and sources cited loc. cit.)

17. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi notes that the term *emunah* ("faith") is not employed throughout the entire Bible and Talmud as a reference to *general* belief in G-d, but only to faith in specific Divine promises. This, he argues, indicates that throughout the Biblical and Talmudic eras, faith in G-d was never doubted and was held to be self-evident, like the existence of the soul.

But as a result of the school of philosophy, which demands proof for the existence of G-d and opposes the notion of creation etc., the term "emunah" was used in reference to G-d's unity, i.e. to believe in G-d's unity in the absence of proof. This was not the case in prior generations when no view was espoused that denied creation, even among non-Jewish nations (Meah She'arim, p. 32a; Ma'amarei Admor ha-Zakein ha-Ketzarim p. 444)

18. Contrary to what many scholars maintain, it appears that Rambam had been exposed to the kabbalah since he testifies (in his introduction to *Mishneh Torah*) to having read all the halachic treatises of the Ge'onim, many of which make numerous kabbalistic references, such as the works of R' Hai Ga'on, and R' Sherira Ga'on (*Sichas Shabbos Parshas Acharei Kedoshim* 5745, par. 24.). Furthermore, many passages in the *Mishneh Torah* are uncannily similar, if not word for word translations, of the *Zohar* (See *ha-Rambam ve-ha-Zohar* by Rabbi Reuvain Margolios, in *Sinai* issues 32 and 34; *Likutei Sichos* vol. 26, p. 116). There is also a view that Rambam became familiar with the Kabbalah near the end of his life (See *Migdal Oz* to Laws of Foundations of the Torah ch. 1-2; *Maharam Alshakar*, responsa no. 117; *Avodas ha-Kodesh* 2:13; and see *Shomer Emunim* 1:13; Rabbi Moshe Botril, commentary to *Sefer Yeztirah* 4:3).

However, none of Rambam's works make any overt reference to the kabbalah. Evidently, Rambam wrote at a time where public discussion of the kabbalah, especially in works with a broad intended readership such as his own, was out of the question.

number of possible reasons: i.) In all likelihood, people were so drawn to Aristotle's philosophy, both culturally and intellectually, that it was not an immediately realistic goal to wean them off it. ii.) The kabalah had probably not been sufficiently formulated and developed to a point where it could be digested by the ordinary person.¹⁹ iii.) Perhaps no Jewish leader felt sufficiently authorized to publicize the kabalah, despite the extenuating circumstances.

Whatever the case, during this period an alternative path was trodden, that of generating a parallel Jewish philosophical literature. This would, on the one hand embrace the thought-system of the Arabic Aristotelians and the rational approach to life, but on the other hand, offer powerful arguments against those conclusions that were at odds with Jewish belief. (The most famous and influential of these works was Rambam's own *Guide for the Perplexed*).

Such a stance was, of course, highly apologetic.²⁰ It meant that traditional Judaism was forced to embrace foreign elements and claim them to be its own. It also downgraded the spirituality of Judaism to intimate that truth is subject to ratification by the intellect. And the rabbis were forced to find logically palatable reasons for even the suprarational commands of the Torah out of fear that these precepts might otherwise be rejected by philosophically inclined Jews.²⁰

Furthermore, in order to make it clear that Aristotle did not have something to offer that surpassed Judaism, Rambam argued that the Greeks had in fact based their ideas on the ancient philosophy of the Jewish Sages, which had since been lost. Rambam taught that the "Account of the Chariot" mentioned by the Mishnah—which Jews had heard of, but were unfamiliar with what it referred to—was essentially synonymous with the core ideas of Greek philosophy.²¹ In this way, Jews felt comfortable that by studying philosophy they were in fact immersing in a Jewish form of spirituality and not a secular one.

(Inevitably, such a path led to controversy. In French lands where Aristotle's thought had not reached the masses, the Rabbinic leadership was horrified to discover an apologetic Torah literature which embraced rational philosophy as part of the Jewish tradition. These events have been chronicled elsewhere and there is no need to repeat them here.²¹)

19. This was, of course, one of the significant innovations of Chasidic thought, especially the Chabad school. See at length *Communicating the Infinite* by Naftali Loewenthal (Chicago University Press, 1990).

20. See *Igros Kodesh* vol. 7, p. 134; *Sichah* of second day of *Shavuot* 5743, par. 31-35, and *Shabbos Parshas Naso* *ibid.*, par. 16-24.

21. *Guide* 1:71, 2:11; *Commentary to the Mishnah*, *Chagigah* *ibid.*

21*. An extensive bibliography is found in: Rosner, Fred (trans.), *Wars of the Lord and the Maimonidean Controversy* (Haifa: The Maimonides Research Institute, 2000).

It was amid this backdrop of events that the *Thirteen Principles* were composed. As a simple formulation, it was clearly aimed at familiarizing the masses with basic philosophical truths.

Our attitude towards the *Principles* therefore depends, to some extent, on the way Jewish medieval philosophy is to be perceived now that it has outlived its immediate usefulness, several hundred years after Aristotelian thought lost much of its credibility in secular culture.

On the one hand, one might imagine that, being it is essentially a compromise of pure Torah truth, texts such as the *Guide* have little validity nowadays. Now that the kabbalah has been revealed we know that the “Account of the Chariot” did not, after all, refer merely to rational philosophy but to our own esoteric tradition, what value is there in an apologetic text of yesteryear when the “apology” is no longer needed?

In truth, however, the *Guide*, together with all the Jewish works of rational philosophy, constitute genuine Torah literature for a number of reasons:

i.) They were composed by genuine Torah scholars who feared G-d and wrote their words under the guidance of Divine inspiration.²² Even if the immediate source of their subject material was secular, they only incorporated ideas that were not antithetical to Torah, and they sanctified these ideas by incorporating them into Torah literature.

ii.) More importantly, even from a kabbalistic perspective the conclusions reached by the philosophers were, in fact, true. While G-d intrinsically defies intellectual comprehension, the kabbalah teaches that there nevertheless exists a certain realm where G-d has emanated Divine attributes which *can* be grasped, to some extent, by the mind. When the philosophers rigorously applied logic to fathom truths about G-d, they succeeded in actually knowing G-d as He exists in this projected, emanated state.²³ Thus we find that kabalists and chasidic Rebbes studied Jewish rationalist works, and even composed commentaries on them.²⁴

22. See sources cited on p. 48.

23. See *Tanya* ch. 2, author's note. Thus, the limitations ascribed to G-d by the philosophers as a result of their rational approach are in fact correct in the context of this contracted emanation (see *Likutei Sichos* vol. 27, p. 252. See also above p. 194).

24. Such as *Sefer ha-Chakirah* of the *Tzemach Tzedek* (Kehos Publication Society, revised edition 2003). Thus, the Rebbe was critical of those who did not perceive the *Guide* as a genuine work expressing Torah truths (*Sichah* of 20th of *Teves* 5745, par. 14; *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Va'eira* 5748, addendum to par. 6. See discussion in *Kovetz Ha'aros u'Burim Oholei Torah*, issue 855, p. 82ff.)

One apparently troubling feature of medieval Jewish philosophy is its lack of continuity with biblical and Rabbinic Judaism, for the philosopher will often propose a rational interpretation which is totally unprecedented. However, it is noteworthy that this quality is not unique to philosophy and is also shared by the approach of *peshat*, the literal interpretation of scripture (see *Succah* 6b and *Tosfos s.v. ve-Rebbi; Likutei*

So, certainly, all the conclusions of Rambam's *Thirteen Principles*, even those which are based on philosophy, are true from a Torah perspective. Furthermore, of all the different formulations which followed from the other medieval philosophers,²⁵ it is Rambam's that ultimately gained universal acceptance.²⁶

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that there is more to Jewish theology than the *Principles* alone. Aside from the fact that they are in any case a relatively brief text, they speak from the somewhat limited viewpoint of rational philosophy. Since Rambam's times, however, much traditional Jewish thought (rooted in Sinaitic revelation) has been uncovered in the works of Jewish mysticism, which frames the topics of G-d, Torah, reward etc., in a more profound and more traditional light. So while the Principles might act as a first base for any theological investigation,²⁷ a thorough appreciation of these ideas requires study of a wider range of texts, especially the expansive treatment of the subject in kabbalah and chasidus.²⁸

Sichos vol. 16, p. 529), i.e. it is acceptable for an interpretation of scripture at the level of *peshat* to be at odds with its traditional or halachic interpretation (for a number of examples see *Torah Shlaimah* by Rabbi Menachem Kasher, addendum to vol. 27, sec. 8).

25. In the centuries following the composition of the *Principles*, Jewish philosophers debated the meaning of the term "principles" and whether Rambam was correct in asserting that there are thirteen of them. Notable works in this field include *Magen Avos* by *Rashbatz* (Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach of Duran, c. 1361-1441); *Ohr Hashem* by Rabbi Chisdai Crescas (1340-1410); *Sefer ha-Ikarim* of Rabbi Yosef Albo (1380-1444); *Derech Emunah* by Rabbi Avraham Bibago (d. c. 1489) and *Rosh Amanah* of Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (1437-1508).

26. See *Sichas Acharon Shel Pesach* 5722 (*Sichos Kodesh* 5722, p. 379).

The popularity of the principles is evidenced the fact that most editions of the prayer book contain the Thirteen Principles in poetic form (*Yigdal*, by Daniel ben Yehudah of Rome, or perhaps Immanuel ben Shlomo of Rome, both 14th century), and as the *Ani Ma'amin* series of faith declarations, "I believe..." (authorship unknown. See *Ha-Nusach ve-ha-Nikud be-Sidur Admor ha-Zaken* by Rabbi Baruch Oberlander, ch. 7, in *Ha-Siddur* (Heichal Menachem Monsey, 2003), p. 232ff.) For an explanation as to why *Yigdal* and *Ani Ma'amin* were omitted from Arizal's siddur, see *Igros Kodesh* vol. 12, pp. 18-19.

However, while *Rambam's* thirteen-point definition did gain universal acceptance, the consensus of later authorities did not necessarily favor every *detail* expressed in *Rambam's* formulation. For example, *Rambam* maintained that the ultimate perfection of mankind which will be enjoyed at the end of history, long after the resurrection, will be for souls without bodies, but the consensus of *Ramban* and the later authorities (and the position of kabbalah and chasidus) is that the soul will endure in a body (see *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 1, p. 141). Likewise, *Rambam's* assertion that the Messianic Era will not herald miraculous changes to the world order was rejected by latter authorities (See *Sicha* of *Acharon Shel Pesach* 5748, note 76).

27. See *Igros Kodesh* vol. 15, p. 377, where in response to the question "What beliefs are necessary for a person to have?" the Rebbe referred the person to the Thirteen Principles.

28. See *Igros Kodesh* vol. 22, p. 34.

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- Maharzu**—Commentary to Midrash Rabah by Rabbi Ze'ev Wolf Einhorn (19th century). See Midrash Rabah.

- Mareh ha-Panim**—First comprehensive commentary to the Jerusalem Talmud, by Rabbi Moshe Margolis (c. 1710-1781), Rabbi in several communities in Lithuania and teacher of the Vilna Ga'on.
- Megaleh Amukos**—252 explanations of Moshe's Prayer in Parshas Va'eschanan and 1000 explanations on the small alef in the first word of Vayikra, according to kabbalah, by Rabbi Noson Noteh Shapiro. First printed in Cracow in 1637.
- Megilah**—Talmudic tractate in Order of Mo'ed (Festivals).
- Meiri**—Extensive commentary to the Talmud by Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri (c. 1249–c. 1306).
- Menachos**—Talmudic tractate in Order of Kodashim (Offerings).
- Midrash Mishlei**—Agadic teachings of the Sages arranged according to the verses of the book of Mishlei.
- Midrash Rabah**—A major collection of homilies and commentaries on the Torah, ascribed to Rabbi Oshiah Rabah (c. 3rd century), perhaps assembled during the early Geonic period. First printed in Constantinople 1512.
- Midrash Shmuel**—Commentary on *Pirkei Avos* by Rabbi Shmuel Ozidah (16th century), of Tzefas.
- Midrash Tanchuma**—Agadic Midrash on the Torah by Rabbi Tanchuma bar Abba (4th cen.).
- Midrash Tehilim**—Agadic teachings of the Sages arranged according to the verses of the book of Psalms. Also known as *Midrash Shocher Tov*.
- Mikdash Melech**—Commentary to the Zohar by the Rabbi Shalom Buzaglio (c.1700-1780), Rabbi in Marrakech, Morocco and later London.
- Minchas Chinuch**—Scholarly supercommentary to Sefer ha-Chinuch by Rabbi Yosef Babad (1800-1875), Rabbi of Tarnipol, Poland.
- Mishnah**—Fundamental collection of the legal pronouncements and discussion of the Tanna'im, compiled by Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nassi early in the third century. The Mishnah is the basic text of the Oral Law.
- Mishneh Torah**—Fourteen volume halachic code by Rambam (Maimonides) encompassing all the laws found in the Talmud. (see: *Rambam*).
- Mitteler Rebbe**—See Biuray ha-Zohar, Ma'amarei Admor ha-Emtzoie, Sha'arei Teshuvah.
- Mizrachi**—Exhaustive supercommentary to *Rashi's* commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (1450-1525) of Constantinople, Chief Rabbi of the Turkish Empire.
- Moreh Nevuchim**—See Guide for the Perplexed.
- Nesivos ha-Mishpat**—Halachic commentary on *Choshen Mishpat*, the fourth and last section of Shulchan Aruch, by Rabbi Ya'akov Lorberbaum (1760-1832).
- Noda bi-Yehuda**—See Tzlach.
- Ohr Hashem**—Important work of Jewish philosophy, critical of Aristotelian thought, by Rabbi Chisdai Crescas of Spain (1340-1410).

- Ohr ha-Torah***—Extensive exposition of Chabad Chasidic thought by the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel (the Tzemach Tzedek, 1789-1866). Printed in New York between 1951 and 1983 in 48 volumes.
- Ohr Torah***—Anthology of Chasidic commentaries by Rabbi Dovber, the Maggid of Mezritch (d. 1773). First published in Koretz in 1781.
- Ohr Yekaros***—Commentary to the Torah by Rabbi Yosef Binyamin Zev Wolf, a descendant of the Bach, published in 1735.
- Orach Chayim***—First of the four sections of the *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, dealing with laws that follow a time cycle.
- Orchos Tzadikim***—Treatise on Jewish ethics attributed by some to Rabeinu Yonah Gerondi (c. 1180-1263) author of *Sha'arei Teshuvah*. Others attribute it to an unknown author as late as the 15th century.
- Otzar Midrashim***—An anthology of two hundred minor Midrashim, edited with introductions and notes by Rabbi Yehuda David Eisenstein (New York, 1915).
- Pardes ha-Rimonim***—A systematic exposition of the entire spectrum of kabalistic thought which preceded it, resolving many contradictions and unanswered questions, by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero. See Ramak.
- Pesachim***—Tractate of Talmud in the Order of Mo'ed (Festivals).
- Pirkei Avos***—Tractate of Mishnah in Order of *Nezikin* (damages) devoted to the ethical teachings of the Sages.
- Rabbi Chaim of Brisk***—Rabbi Chaim ben Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1853-1918), Rosh Yeshiva in Volozhin who later succeeded his father as Rabbi in Brisk. Developed a popular, conceptual approach to Talmudic studies.
- Ra'avad***—Rabbi Avraham ben David of Posquieres (c.1120–c.1197), talmudist halachist, and kabalist. Author of critical notes on *Rambam's* *Mishneh Torah* and numerous other works.
- Rabeinu Tam***—Rabbi Yaakov ben Meir (1100-1171), whose Talmudic discourses served as the basis for the *Tosfos* commentary to the Talmud. He often challenged *Rashi's* interpretations, offering original and brilliant insights. Rabeinu Tam was also a successful wine merchant and financier.
- Radak***—Rabbi David Kimchi of Provence (1160-1235), leading Bible commentator and author of grammatical works.
- Radvaz***—Rabbi David ibn Zimra (c.1480–1573), Chief Rabbi of Egypt. Authored a commentary to *Rambam's* *Mishneh Torah* and extensive responsa.
- Ramak***—Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, preeminent kabalist of 16th century Tzefas. Student of Rabbi Yosef Caro. Author of numerous works, including *Pardes Rimonim*. See *Pardes Rimonim*.
- Rambam***—“Maimonides,” Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1135-1204), halachist, philosopher and leading Torah scholar of the Middle Ages. His major works are: *Sefer ha-Mitzvos* (Book of Commandments), *Commentary to the Mishnah*; *Mishneh Torah* (*Yad ha-Chazakah*), a comprehensive code of Jewish law, and *Moreh Nevuchim*, “Guide for the Perplexed,” a primary work of Jewish philosophy.

- Ramban**—“Nachmanides,” Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman of Gerona, Spain (1194-1270), one of the leading Torah scholars of the Middle Ages. Author of an important commentary to the Torah and numerous other works.
- Ran**—Rabbenu Nissim (1308-1376). Authored an important commentary to the Talmud, published in most major editions.
- Rashba**—Rabbi Shlomo ibn Aderes, Rabbi of Barcelona, known for his talmudic commentary and many responsa (1235-1310).
- Rashbatz**—Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach of Duran (c. 1361-1441). Left Spain in the aftermath of the 1391 massacres and moved to Algiers, where he later became Chief Rabbi. Author of the halachic treatise *Tashbetz*, and *Magen Avos* on Pirkei Avos.
- Rashi**—Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), author of fundamental commentary to the Bible and Talmud.
- Rashab**—Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneerson of Lubavitch (1860-1920), grandson of the *Tzemach Tzedek* and fifth Rebbe in the Chabad dynasty. See Hemshech Ayin Beis, Hemshech Samech Vav.
- Recanti**—Rabbi Menachem ben Binyamin Recanti (13th century), of Italy. Author of commentaries on the Torah and the Siddur, and kabalistic works on the deeper meanings of the commandments.
- Rema**—Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1530-1572), Rav and Rosh Yeshiva of Cracow. Author of many works including annotations to Rabbi Yosef Caro's *Shulchan Aruch*, which transformed this predominantly Sephardic work into a universal Code of Jewish Law.
- Ritva**—Rabbi Yom Tov Ibn Isvili (1248-1330), important talmudic commentator and halachist.
- Rogatchover Ga'on**—See Tzafnas Pane'ach.
- Rosh Amanah**—Systematic defense of Rambam's codification of the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* from his critics, by Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel. See Abarbanel.
- Rosh Hashanah**—Talmudic tractate in Order of Mo'ed (Festivals).
- Sa'adia Ga'on**—(882-942) Author of works in many areas of Torah, including the philosophical work, *Emunos ve-Deos*. See *Emunos ve-Deos*.
- Sanhedrin**—Tractate of Talmud in Order of Nezikin (Damages).
- Sdei Chemed**—Multi-volume halachic encyclopedia by Rabbi Chaim Chizkiyahu Medini (1832-1904), Rav of Karasubazar in Crimea, Russia, and later Chief Rabbi of Chevron in the Land of Israel. Revised edition by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, New York, (Kehos Publication Society, 1949-1953).
- Seder ha-Doros**—A chronology of events and personalities from creation until 1696, based on Rabbinic sources, by Rabbi Yechiel Heilprin (1660-1746) Lithuanian rabbi, kabalist, and chronicler. First published in 1769.
- Sefer ha-Chinuch**—Compendium of basic explanations on the 613 mitzvos by an unknown Spanish author among the Rishonim of the 13th century.

Sefer ha-Ikarim—See Ikarim.

Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Melukat—Chasidic discourses of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in six volumes, published by Vaad le-Hafatzas Sichos (Kehos) between 1987 and 1992.

Sefer ha-Mitzvos—Codification of the commandments and their basic sources by Rambam. See: Rambam.

Sefer ha-Sichos—Public addresses of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, from the years 1986-92, published by Vaad le-Hafatzas Sichos (Kehos) in 12 volumes.

Sefer ha-Yashar—Responsa and novellae on the Talmud by Rabbi Ya'akov ben Meir Tam (c. 1100-1171), Tosafist and grandson of Rashi.

Sha'arei Teshuvah—Chasidic discourses by Rabbi Dov Ber of Lubavitch (1773-1827). First published in Zhitomir in 1864.

Shabbos—Talmudic tractate in Order of Mo'ed (Festivals).

Shaloh—*Shnei Luchos Habris* ("The two tablets of the Covenant"), an encyclopedic compilation of ritual, ethics, and mysticism by Rabbi Yeshayah Hurwitz (1560-1630). There is a tradition that the *Tanya* was significantly influenced by the Shaloh.

Shemoneh Perakim—Philosophical treatise of Rambam, discussing the ills and cures of man's soul, prophecy, reward and punishment, free will, and the rule of the "golden mean."

Shemos—The Book of Exodus.

Shemos Rabah—The section of Midrash Rabah on the Book of Exodus. See Midrash Rabah.

Sherira Ga'on—Rabbi Sherira bar Chanina (906-1006 CE), talmudist, halachist and kabalist. Head of talmudic academy in Babylonia, who provided authoritative answers about Jewish law to world Jewry. Many of his rulings became a source of normative Jewish practice.

Shiurim be-Sefer ha-Tanya—The *Tanya* of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi elucidated by Rabbi Yosef Wineberg. (Kehos Publication Society, 1980-6, in 4 volumes). See *Tanya*.

Shiurim le-Zecher Aba Mari—Scholarly lectures delivered by Rabbi Yosef Ber Solveitchik (1903-1993), Rosh Yeshiva of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, New York.

Shulchan Aruch—Universally accepted Code of Jewish Law encompassing all areas of practical halachah, by Rabbi Yosef Caro (1488-1575).

Sichos Kodesh—50 volumes of public addresses by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, delivered from 1950-1981 in Yiddish. Published in 1985-7.

Siddur—Set order of daily prayers, including core passages composed by the Biblical prophets and Sages of the Second Temple era to which later texts were appended.

Ta'anis—Talmudic tractate in Order of Mo'ed (Festivals).

Talmud—Comprehensive term for the Mishnah and Gemara as joined in the two compilations known as Babylonian

Talmud (6th century) and Jerusalem Talmud (5th century).

Tanna d'bei Eliyahu—A Midrash consisting of two parts, whose final redaction took place at the end of the tenth century. The first part is called "Seder Eliyahu Rabah" (31 chapters); the second, "Seder Eliyahu Zuta" (15 chapters).

Tanya—Primary Chasidic text authored by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi. (See: *Alter Rebbe*).

Torah Ohr—Fundamental Chasidic discourses on Genesis and Exodus by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi. See *Alter Rebbe*.

Toras Shmuel—Chasidic discourses of Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch (1834-1882), the Rebbe Maharash. Published by Kehos Publication Society from 1945 to 2007 in 16 volumes.

Tosfos—Talmudic commentary of the French, German and English rabbis of the 12th and 13th centuries.

Tosfos Yeshanim—Talmudic commentary by the early Tosafists, much of which was published by Yosef ben Wolf ha-Levi in *Sugyos ha-Shas* (Berlin, 1736), and was later incorporated into the standard Vilna edition of the Talmud.

Tosfos Chadashim—A compilation of commentaries to the Mishnah from authors of the 17th and 18th century.

Tosfos Yom Tov—Major commentary to the Mishna by Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipman Heller (1579-1654), Chief Rabbi of Prague and later Rabbi in Crakow.

Tzemach Tzedek—Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch (1789-1866), commonly known as Tzemach Tzedek after the name of his halachic responsa.

A grandson of the Alter Rebbe, he succeeded his father-in-law, the Mittlerer Rebbe, as third Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty.

Tzlach—commentary on Talmud by Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (1713-1793), rabbi in Prague and one of the foremost halachic authorities. Commonly known after his responsa *Noda bi-Yehuda*.

Tzafnas Pane'ach—Highly original commentary to Rambam's Mishneh Torah by Rabbi Yosef Rosen, Chief Rabbi of Dvinsk, known as the Rogatchover Gaon (1858-1936). He also authored Responsa and a commentary on the Torah by the same name.

Tzur Teuda—Ethical essays by Rabbi Moshe Aharon Alufin, Rabbi in Lapitch. Printed in Warsaw 1879.

Urim ve-Tumim—Halachic commentary on Choshen Mishpat, the fourth and last section of the Shulchan Aruch, by Rabbi Yonason Eybeschütz (1690-1764), Rabbi in Prague, and later in Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek. His other works include *Ya'aros Devash* (sermons), *K'reisi u-Pleisi* on Shulchan Aruch, and *Shem Olam* on kabbalah.

Vayikra—The Book of Leviticus

Vayikra Rabah—The section of Midrash Rabah on the Book of Leviticus. See *Midrash Rabah*.

Vilna Ga'on—R' Eliyahu ben Shlomo of Vilna (1720-1797) Lithuanian talmudist, kabbalist, grammarian, and mathematician.

Ya'aros Devash—See: *Urim ve-Tumim*.

Yad Malachi—Compendium of rules and principles on which various major Rabbinic

texts are based, by Rabbi Malachi ben Yaakov ha-Kohen. Published in 1767.

Yalkut Shimoni—Comprehensive Midrashic anthology, covering the entire Bible, attributed to Rabbi Shimon ha-Darshan of Frankfurt (13th century).

Yom Tov Shel Rosh Hashanah 5666—See Hemshech Samech Vav.

Yedei Moshe—Commentary to *Midrash Rabah* by R' Ya'akov Moshe Ashkenazi (17th cen.).

Yoma—Tractate of Talmud in the Order of Mo'ed (Festivals).

Yoreh De'ah—Second of the four sections of the *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, dealing with laws of kashrus and purity.

Zohar—Primary text of kabbalah, compiled by Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai and his disciples in the form of a commentary on the Torah. First published in the late 13th century by Rabbi Moshe de Leon (c.1250–1305), in Spain.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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Thirteen Principles—General

Bleich, Rabbi J. David, *With Perfect Faith: The Foundations of Jewish Belief* (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, Inc, 1983).

Danin, Rabbi D., *Portals of Faith* (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 2002).

Epstein, Rabbi Isadore, *The Faith of Judaism* (London, Jerusalem, New York: Soncino Press, 1954).

Fendel, Rabbi Zechariah, *Torah Faith: The Thirteen Principles*, (Hashkafah Publications, NY 1985)

Gurary, Rabbi Noson & Miller, Rabbi Moshe, *The Thirteen Principles of Faith: A Chasidic Viewpoint* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1996).

Hirschfeld, Hartwig (trans.), *Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel by Judah ha-Levi* (New York: Schocken, 1964).

Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh, *Handbook of Jewish Thought*, (New York and Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, vol. 1, 1979; vol. 2, 1992).

Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh, *Maimonides Principles: The Fundamentals of Jewish Faith* (Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, 1993).

Kellner, Menachem (trans.), *Principles of Faith: Rosh Amanah of R' Isaac Abravanel* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 1982).

Max, Rabbi Moshe, *I Believe: An exposition of Maimonides Thirteen Principles of Faith and their implementation in Jewish life* (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1973).

Rosner, Fred (trans.), *Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah: Tractate Sanhedrin* (New York: Sepher Hermon Press, 1981).

Semah, Rabbi Daniel, *The Thirteen Principles of Faith* (Lakewood: private publication, 2006).

- Tauber, Rabbi Ezriel, *Beyond Survival* (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1997).
- Touger, Rabbi Eliyahu, *What We Believe*, (New York: Sichos in English, 2000).
- Touger, Rabbi Eliyahu (trans.), *Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah* (New York and Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1990).
- Touger, Rabbi Eliyahu (trans.), *Maimonides, Shemoneh Perakim of the Rambam and the Thirteen Principles of Faith* (New York and Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1994).
- Waldman, Rabbi Shmuel, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt: Convincing Evidence for the Truths of Judaism*, (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 2002).

Eighth and Ninth Principles

- Kelemen, Lawrence, *Permission to Receive*, (Southfield, Michigan: Targum, 1996).
- Lampel, Rabbi Zvi (trans.), *Maimonides Introduction to the Talmud*, (New York: Judaica Press, 1998, 3rd edition).
- Lampel, Rabbi Zvi, *The Dynamics of Dispute* (New York: Judaica Press, 1992).
- Rabinowich, Rabbi Nosson Dovid (trans.), *The Iggeres of Rav Sherira Gaon*, (Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1988).
- Schimmel, Harry C, *The Oral Law* (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1987, 2nd edition).
- Shachter, Jacob (trans.), *The Student's Guide Through the Talmud by Zevi Hirsch Chajes*, (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1960, 2nd revised edition).

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ר' דוד וזוגתו לאה סלאגער
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ר' דוד שיחי' סלאגער
וזוגתו מרת לארא תחי'
ובנותיהם:
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לכבוד קדושת אדוננו מורנו ורבנו
נשיא דורנו