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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 enriche 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

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*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.

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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 (kabalah 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 have likewise been 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 mean-
ing of the Talmud’s words, our 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 and so many other cases, the Rebbe’s insights uplift,
not merely by solving problems, but by uncovering an inner sanct-
ity in the question itself. Darkness has not merely been dispelled,
it 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 Shavuos 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.”

(Igros Kodesh vol. 15, p. 277)

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

(Igros Kodesh vol. 26, p. 88)