

SPECIAL ISSUE: JUDAISM'S FUNDAMENTALS

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YOU MUST
KNOW THE 13**

Teach them to your children



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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The 1st Principle

READER: Greetings to you. I have a question regarding Maimonides and his 13 principles. Basically, my question boils down to this: What is the first principle?

Some sources—such as the Jewish Virtual Library—seem to indicate the first principle is nothing more than “God exists.” Admittedly, this does seem to be pretty primary in the structure of monotheistic faith, so it is an apt first principle.

However, other sources—such as Chabad—appear to posit something more along the lines of “God is the Creator” or “God is the (First) cause of existence.” Your own website seems to concur with this interpretation of the first axiom of Maimonides.

Maybe I’m making a fuss about nothing; but to me, “God exists” and “God is the Creator” are two very distinct assertions. Moreover, the differences between one online source and another in portraying the first principle of Maimonides makes the matter quite confusing to me. Therefore, I’d appreciate your own clarification in this matter.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Lance

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RABBI: Lance, thank you for raising this important question. As you are questioning Maimonides' formulation, the answer will lie in his words:

*Principle I. To know the existence of the Creator
To believe in the existence of the Creator, and this Creator is perfect in all manner of existence. He is the cause of all existence. He causes them to exist and they exist only because of Him. And if you could contemplate a case, such that He was not to exist...then all things would cease to exist and there would remain nothing. And if you were to contemplate a case, such that all things would cease to exist aside from the Creator, His existence would not cease. And He would lose nothing; and oneness and kingship is His alone. Hashem of strength is His name because He is sufficient with His own existence, and sufficient [is] just Him alone, and needs no other. And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them...all need Him for their existence. And this is the first pillar and is attested to by the verse, "I am Hashem your God."*

We see, neither suggestion "God exists" or "God is the Creator" accurately represents Maimonides' precise formulation. For there is much more Maimonides includes in his words...

1) We must first "believe in the existence of the Creator"

That is, we must first realize:

- A) the universe in fact owes its existence to an ultimate "Cause."
- B) This further means this cause is a single cause.
- C) Additionally, we must not subscribe to the alternate view of an eternal universe.

2) "The Creator is perfect in all manner of existence"

What does this mean? This means we must recognize that as the Creator, God has a certain "type" of existence. When the term "existence" is applied to both the universe and God, typically, one understands the existence of both as equal. Maimonides' second point is to distinguish between God's existence, and the existence of all other things. All other things exist only accidentally. Meaning, of their own 'nature' (which too is not due to their own doing) all else has "dependent" existence. All else but God, was 'given' existence, and at one point in history, did not exist. This means that the universe's existence is not mandatory or absolute: it cannot exist on its own...it requires God's will to exist. In contrast, God' existence is not dependent. His very nature is to exist, whereas all created things by definition do not have existence as part of their nature.

3) Due to this distinguishing quality, Maimonides states "and oneness and kingship are His"

But can there be a king without subjects? This means that man—the only intelligent creature on earth—must view God as king. The knowledge of God's unique nature to (eternally) exist, and that He is the Creator (2 complementary truths) must generate in man a respect for God, as the king.

4) "Hashem of strength is His name"

Here, Maimonides says God has a name. A "name" by definition, is that which distinguishes one being from another. When applied to God, Maimonides means to teach that God's uniqueness is "known," it is famous. As in, "he made a name for himself." Maimonides teaches an idea similar to that of Rav Hai Gaon, who said the first of the Ten Commandments—"I am God"—is in fact not a command. Rav Hai Gaon said that God's existence is so obvious, it would belittle the honor due to God, had there been a "command" to know Him. God intentionally designed the universe precisely to reflect His existence and wisdom, so that mankind would stand in awe of God and all His marvels, and enjoy a life pursuing sciences, truths, and morality, to better understand the Creator. Thus, the overwhelmingly apparent wisdom reflected in the universe makes God's existence undeniable. A command to know God would thereby belittle the obvious nature of His existence.

5) "because He is sufficient with His own existence"

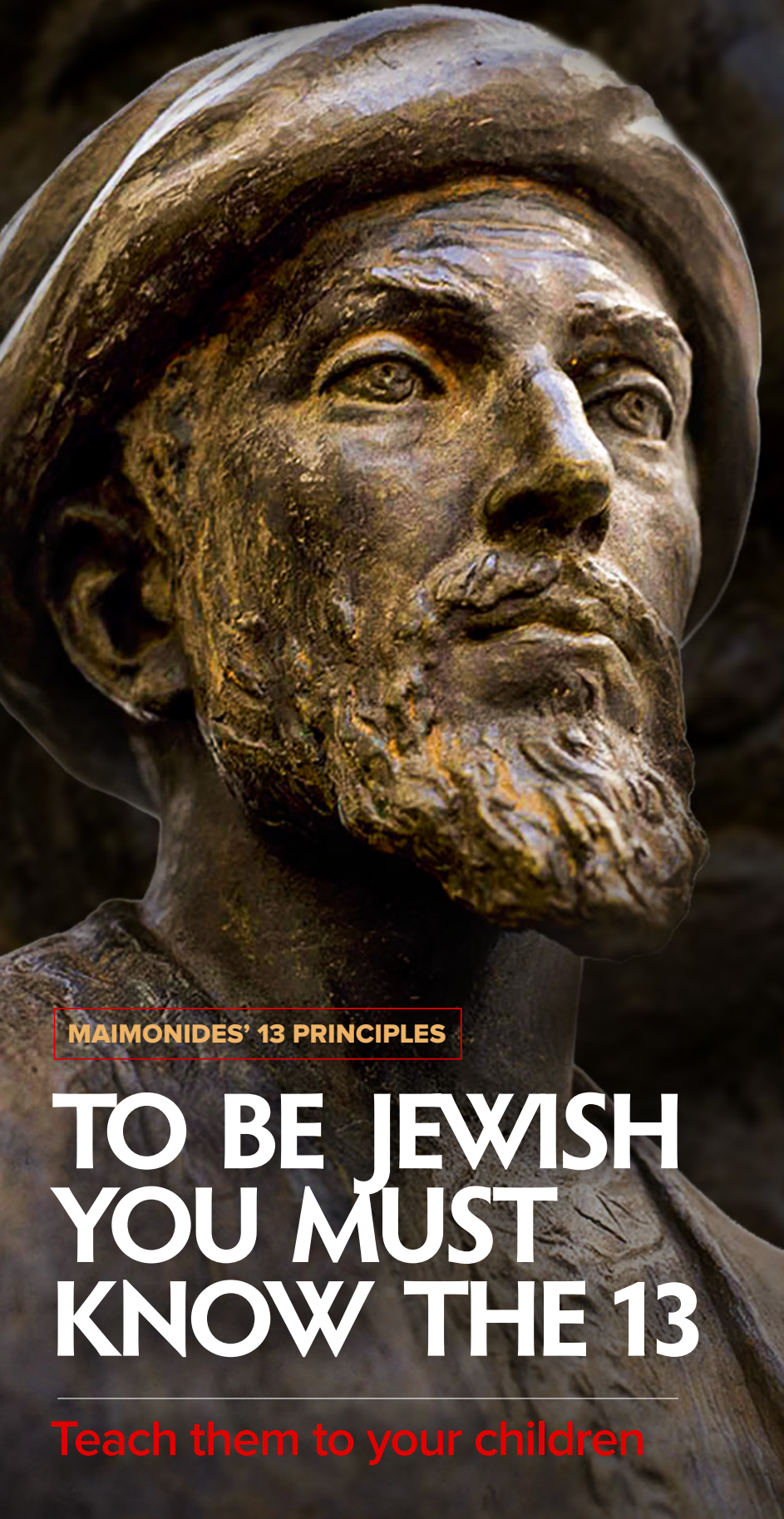
We must not assume creation was made due to anything lacking in God, as if He has a motive, or a need, or loneliness. For motive, need and loneliness are all human traits. And, as God created humans, He is not governed by human traits.

6) "And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them, all need Him for their existence"

Finally, Maimonides teaches that although the earthly creations may not be on par with God's existence, man might falsely equate higher beings' existences to God's existence. Therefore, Maimonides dispels this fallacy as his final lesson of his First Principle.

What is Maimonides' First Principle?

- To realize the Creator.
- To know He is one.
- To reject the eternity of the universe.
- To distinguish His existence from all else, knowing that He exist by His very nature, and all else has dependent existence.
- That honor is due to God.
- That His existence is obvious.
- Not to project human motive onto God for creating the universe.
- That He is elevated over all else, including the heavens and angels.
- Thank you for your question, as you have enabled me to better understand this principle. ■



MAIMONIDES' 13 PRINCIPLES

TO BE JEWISH YOU MUST KNOW THE 13

Teach them to your children

Principle I. To know the existence of the Creator

To believe in the existence of the Creator, and this Creator is perfect in all manner of existence. He is the cause of all existence. He causes them to exist and they exist only because of Him. And if you could contemplate a case, such that He was not to exist...then all things would cease to exist and there would remain nothing. And if you were to contemplate a case, such that all things would cease to exist aside from the Creator, His existence would not cease. And He would lose nothing; and oneness and kingship is His alone. Hashem of strength is His name because He is sufficient with His own existence, and sufficient [is] just Him alone, and needs no other. And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them...all need Him for their existence. And this is the first pillar and is attested to by the verse, "I am Hashem your God." Elaboration on this principle

Principle II. The unity of God

Meaning to say to accept that this is the quintessential idea of Oneness. It is not like the oneness of a pair (i.e. pair of shoes - one group) and not one like a species. And not like man that has many individual (members) nor like a body that divides into many different parts until no end (every part being divisible). Rather, God is one and there is no other oneness like His. This is the second principle and is taught in what it says, "Hear Israel, Hashem is Our God, Hashem is one."

Principle III. The denial of physicality in connection with God

This is to accept that this Oneness that we have mentioned above (Principle II) is not a body and has no strength in the body, and has no shape or image or relationship to a body or parts thereof. This is why the Sages of blessed memory said with regards to heaven there is no sitting, nor standing, no awakensness, nor tiredness. This is all to say that He does not partake of any physical actions or qualities. And if He were to be a body then He would be like any other body and would not be God. And all that is written in the holy books regarding descriptions of God, they are all anthropomorphic. Thus said our great Rabbis of blessed memory, "The Torah speaketh in man's language" (i.e. using human terms to offer some understanding). And the Rabbis have already spoken at length on this issue. This is the third pillar and is attested to by the verse, "For you saw no image" meaning that you did not see an image or any form when you stood at Sinai because as we have just said, He has no body, nor power of the body.

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Principle IV. God's Antiquity

This is that God existed prior to everything, and exists after everything. This is proved many times throughout scripture and is attested to by the verse, "Meuna Elokei kedem."

Principle V. That God, blessed be He is worthy that we serve Him, to glorify Him, to make known His greatness, and to do His commands

But not to do this to those that are below Him in the creation. Not to the angels or to the stars or the planets or anything else, for they are all created things in nature and in their functioning, there is no choice or judgment except by God Himself. Also it is not fitting to serve them as intermediaries to God. Only to God should you incline your thoughts and your actions. This is the fifth principle and it warns against idolatry and most of the Torah speaks out against this.

Principle VI. Prophecy

And this is that it is known to man that this (prophet) is a type of man who are created beings of great stature and perfection of the character traits. Who have tremendous knowledge until a different intelligence attaches to them when the intelligence of the person clings to the intelligence of God and it rests upon him. And these are the prophets; and this is prophecy; and the idea of it. The explanation of it is very long and the intention is not to bring a sign for every fundamental and to explain it all, encompassing of all knowledge (i.e. God's knowledge) but it is mentioned to us in a story form and all of the Torah attests to this.

Principle VII. The prophetic capacity of Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him

And this is that we accept that he was the father of all prophets that were before him and that will be after him. He was on a qualitatively different level than any other, and he is chosen from all other people before and after him of any that have any knowledge of God; for his was the greatest. And he, peace be upon him, rose to the levels of the angels. He was granted all areas of knowledge and prophecy and his physical attributes did not diminish. His knowledge was different and it is through this difference that it is ascribed to him that he spoke to God without any intermediary or angel.

My intention was to explain this puzzling concept and to open up the sealed areas in the Torah regarding the verses of "face to face" and other similar references, but its length would be tremendous and it would require numerous proofs from the Torah and other sources and

encompass many areas. Even to write it the briefest of briefest it would require 100 pages, so I will save it and write it in another book. I will now return to the intent of this seventh fundamental that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was different from all others in 4 ways:

1) Regarding all other prophets, God spoke to them through intermediaries. Regarding Moses, it was without one, as it says, "face to face I spoke to him".

2) Regarding all other prophets, prophecy came to them at night while they were asleep in a dream as it says, "in a dream of the night" and other such references; or in the day but only after a deep sleep-like state came over them, and all their senses were shut off except their thoughts. Not so by Moses. Moses would receive a prophecy any time when he would stand between the two figures [fixed] on the ark, as God attests to it, "and I will make it known to you there" and "not so my servant Moses. Face to face I speak to him."

3) When a prophet would receive prophecy he would not be able to stand the intense effect and he would shake and not be able to stand, as it relates regarding Daniel in his encounter with the angel Gabriel. Regarding Moses, he did not suffer from this. As it says, "Face to face do I speak to him as a person speaks to his friend". And even though this is the greatest connection to God, still, he did not suffer.

4) All other prophets could not receive prophecy at their will, [but] only when God desired to tell them. Some would go days or months without prophecy. Even if they wanted or needed something, sometimes it would be days or months or years or even never that they would be told [a prophecy]. Some would have people play music to put them in a good mood such as Elisha. But Moses, peace be upon him, received prophecy whenever he wanted, as it says, "Stand here and listen to what God will tell you what to do" and "God said to Moses tell Aaron your brother that he can't come to the holy of holies at any time [he wants]". Our rabbis said, "Aaron was prohibited to come whenever he wanted, but not Moses.

Principle VIII. That the Torah is from heaven [God]

And this is that you believe that all of this Torah that was given by Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, that it is all from the mouth of God. Meaning that it was received by him entirely from God. And it is not known how Moses received it except by Moses himself, peace be upon him, that it came to him. That he was like a stenographer that you read to him and he writes

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all that is told to him: all the events and dates, the stories, and all the commandments. There is no difference between “And the sons of Cham were Kush, and Mizraim, and his wife was Mehatbe’el” and “Timnah was his concubine” and “I am Hashem your God” and “Hear Israel [Hashem your God, Hashem is one]” for it was all given by God. And it is all Hashem’s perfect Torah; pure, holy, and true. And he who says that these verses or stories, Moses made them up, he is a denier of our sages and prophets worse than all other types of deniers [form of heretic] for he thinks that what is in the Torah is from man’s flawed heart and the questions and statements and the dates and stories are of no value for they are from Moses Rabbeinu, peace be upon him. And this area is that he believes the Torah is not from heaven. And on this our sages of blessed memory said, “he who believes that the Torah is from heaven except this verse that God did not say it but rather Moses himself did [he is a denier of all the Torah].” And this that God spoke this and that, each and every statement in the Torah, is from God and it is full of wisdom (each statement) and benefit to those who understand them. And its depth of knowledge is greater than all of the land and wider than all the seas and a person can only go in the path of David, the anointed of the God of Jacob who prayed and said “Open my eyes so that I may glance upon the wonders of Your Torah” (Psalms 119). And similarly the explanation of the Torah was also received from God and this is what we use today to know the appearance and structure of the sukka and the lulav and the shofar, tzitzis, tefillin and their usage. And all this God said to Moses and Moses told to us. And he is trustworthy in his role as the messenger and the verse that teaches of this fundamental is what is written (Numbers 16) “And Moses said, with this shall you know that Hashem sent me to do all these actions (wonders) for they are not from my heart.”

Principle IX. The completeness of the Torah

And this is that the Torah is from God and is not lacking. That to it you can’t add or take away from. Not from the written Torah or from the oral Torah, as it says, “Do not add to it and do not take away from it.” (Deut 13:1). And we already explained what needs to be explained about this fundamental at the beginning of this essay.

Principle X. That God knows man’s actions and does not remove His eye from them



His knowledge is not like someone who says God abandoned the land but rather like it says (Jer. 32) “Great in council and mighty in deed, Your eyes are cognizant to all the ways of mankind.” “And God saw for the evil of man on the land had grown greatly.” (Gen. 6) And it says, “The disgust of Sodom and Amorrhah is great” and this demonstrates the 10th principle.

Principle XI. That God gives reward to he who does the commandments of the Torah and punishes those that transgress its admonishments and warnings

And the great reward is the life of the world to come and the punishment is the cutting off of the soul [in the world to come]. And we already said regarding this topic what these are. And the verse that attests to this principle is (Exodus 32) “And now if You would but forgive their sins - and if not erase me from this book that You have written.” And God answered him, “He who sinned against Me I will erase from My book.” This is a proof that God knows the sinner and the fulfiller in order to mete out reward to one and punishment to the other.

Principle XII. The era of the Messiah

And this is to believe that in truth that he will come and that you should be waiting for him even though he delays in coming. And you should not calculate times for him to come, or to look in the verses of Tanach to see when he should come. The sages say: The wisdom of those who calculate times [of his coming] is small and that you should believe that he will be greater and more honored than all of the kings of Israel since the beginning of time as it is prophesied by all the prophets from Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, until Malachi, peace be upon him. And he who doubts or diminishes

the greatness of the Messiah is a denier in all the Torah for it testifies to the Messiah explicitly in the portion of Bilam and the portion of “You are gathered (towards the end of Deut)”. And part of this principle that there is no king of Israel except from the house of David and from the seed of Solomon alone. And anyone who disputes this regarding this family is a denier of the name of God and in all the words of the prophets.

Principle XIII. Resurrection of the dead

And we have already explained it And when the person will believe all these fundamentals and his faith will be clear in them he enters into the nation of Israel and it is a mitzva to love him and to have mercy on him and to act to him according to all the ways in which God commanded us regarding loving your neighbor. And even if he did all of the sins in the Torah due to desire of the emotions, and from his physical aspect’s conquering him, he will be punished for his sins, but he still has a share in the world to come and is among the sinners of Israel. However if he rejects one of these fundamentals he leaves the nation and is a denier of the fundamentals and is called a heretic, a denier, etc., and it is a mitzva to hate him and to destroy him (financially - not physically to kill him. And not to steal either). And regarding him it is said (Psalms 139) “Behold will not the enemy of God be my enemy?”

I have expounded at length many things and I have left the topic of my composition but I have done it for I saw a need in the dealings of the fundamentals of faith and I have gathered together many different and spread out areas Therefore know them and succeed in understanding them and review them many times and know them very well [i.e. not just memorization but to understand fully and to be able to support them and know their proofs]. Therefore if after one or ten times you think you have understood them, God knows that you are just involved in falsehood. Therefore do not read them quickly because I have not written them as it suddenly entered into my mind. But rather, after a deep and careful study of the whole area and after I have seen many clear and true ideas and I have seen what is proper to believe of them [as the fundamentals] and I have brought proofs and logical demonstrations for each and every one of them. May it be God’s will that I have been correct that He helped me through this area on the good path and now I will return to my explanation of this chapter [in the Talmud].. ■



ISRAEL

Do Elections Have Consequences?

RABBI REUVEN MANN

The insight that “elections have consequences” applies everywhere except Israel. That country has had 3 consecutive elections that did not result in a new administration. Finally, a new governing coalition comprised of groupings to the right and left and including, for the first time, an Arab party has just been sworn in.

The Prime Minister position will rotate between Naftali Bennet of the Yamina (“Rightward”) party and Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid (“there is a future”). It may sound strange to some that Bennet will be P.M. even though his party won only 7 seats. However, Israel is a parliamentary democracy whose Knesset has 120 seats. Whoever has a 61 seat majority gets to head the government.

In the recent election Netanyahu’s Likud came in with the most seats at 30. President Rivlin then granted him a thirty day mandate to form a government. No single party in Israel has ever won 61 seats. Therefore coalitions must be arranged in order to arrive at that number. Try as he might Bibi could not cobble together the necessary allies. The mandate was then handed to Lapid who proved extremely adroit in creating a political alliance made up of people whose political ideologies are severely disparate.

The fact that a person with only 7 seats can be P.M. is somewhat akin to Donald Trump’s becoming President over Hillary Clinton despite the fact that she got a few million more votes than him. The explanation is that America chooses its presidents on the basis of a majority in the Electoral College which Trump secured

and not on that of the popular vote where Hillary excelled. So too, in Israel one only needs enough votes to make it into the Knesset. Once there he might, due to the circumstances of coalition building find himself in a position to leverage his seats for a stint at the Prime Ministership as Bennet did.

Is the Israeli system a good one? In my opinion improvement is needed. There are too many parties and factions which encourages divisiveness and grants excessive influence to partisan interests. My sense is that Israel’s political “players” are excessively interested in preserving their own positions rather than pursuing the welfare of the nation.

It is interesting to note that in Naftali Bennet Israel will be led, for the first time, by a kippa wearing dati (religious) Jew and we need to consider the significance of this development. My opinion is that Bennett’s religiosity should be regarded as a double edged sword.

If he fails as Prime Minister it will not bring glory to the Jewish religion but not necessarily shame either. However, if his administration is tainted by corruption or other unseemly matters it could constitute a desecration of G-d’s Name. The same applies to all Jews of prominence whose religiosity is manifest.

In that case people will inevitably associate the immoral behavior of these Jews with the religion they practice and Orthodox Judaism will suffer a hit. However if an observant Jew acts in a wise and exemplary manner people connect this with the faith he practices which they then will view at in a positive way.

A notable illustration is Joe Lieberman, the

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former Senator from Connecticut who earned universal praise for his principled adherence to his religious beliefs. He did not work on Shabbat and if it was absolutely necessary to be present in the Senate for an extremely important vote would walk for miles rather than take transportation. His idealism in combination with his impeccable personal conduct earned him great praise and he was asked by Al Gore to run with him as the Vice Presidential candidate in the 2000 election. Lieberman proved to be extremely popular and a boon to the Democratic ticket which lost in a very controversial election (remember “hanging chads”?).

One has to recognize that Bennet faces a daunting challenge in managing a very divided coalition and in leading Israel at such a difficult time. We must be grateful that Israel has been able to put together a ruling team and avoid yet another round of elections. Israelis on all sides of the spectrum should support the new government and give the new leader a fair chance to prove his mettle. We should hope and pray for his success.

However, it did not take long for the spokesman of some religious parties to launch a ferocious and viscous assault on the character and spiritual legitimacy of Naftali Bennet. One of them even, shamefully,

called upon him to cease wearing his skullcap. This is an example of the type of behavior that does not bring credit to Torah Judaism. These leaders seem to be acting as partisan “hacks” who are only out to preserve their own bases of power.

One wonders why they are so focused on the sins of others. The Charedi community suffered greatly from the COVID crisis as well as the tragedy of Meron. There is reason to believe that faulty policies adopted by the leaders of the ultra Orthodox movements contributed greatly to the excessive deaths they sustained.

This should be a time for soul searching and introspection. All Jews need to participate in this endeavor. No group should regard themselves as so holy that all they need to do is point out the flaws of others.

And all of us should be able to accept the results of Israel’s democratic electoral process. We should give the new government and especially the kippa wearing P.M. a fair chance and pray for his success which in fact will also be Israel’s success.

Shabbat Shalom ■



God willed the universe We praise Him alone

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

THE 13

Maimonides' 4th Principle: God is First

Maimonides 4th principle reads as follows:

God is the exclusive first being, and all that exists aside from Him has no eternity.

The obvious question is that as the first principle is that God created everything, doesn't this mean—by definition—that God preceded everything? As such, this 4th Principle is redundant.

Aristotle maintained that the universe is to God, as a shadow is to an object: the universe is a forced result of God's existence. As such, God did not "will" the universe to exist. This is Maimonides 4th principle, that the universe exists as an act of God's will. Although the 1st principle is that God created the universe, according to Aristotle, that creation can be viewed as devoid of God's will, just as the shadow which I make is devoid of my will. Maimonides' 4th principle is that we must know that God "intended" the universe to exist. ■

Maimonides' 5th Principle

That He, blessed be He, is fit to worship, to praise, and make known His greatness and to perform His commands. And not to act in this manner to one who is below Him in existence, [whether] from the angels, the stars, the planets, the elements [matter] or what is constructed from them. For they are all natural, and concerning their behaviors there is no governing or choice, except [by] He alone, God, blessed be He. And so also it is not fitting to serve any of these that they

become intermediaries to draw close to Him. Rather, to God alone must man's thoughts be intent, and abandon all else. And this is the Fifth Principle that Torah has warned us against idolatry, and most of Torah warns against this.

Maimonides explains why anything but God is unfit to worship: "For they are all 'natural', and concerning their behaviors, there is no governing or choice." This statement has great meaning. By "natural," Maimonides means that everything except God has been "designed." Design refers to a defined and static scope of form and function, what we call "nature." The nature of "tree" is different than the nature of "animal." Their behaviors are distinct and fixed.

Nothing can deviate from its design. Thus, to project onto a rock that it possesses an ability to protect, wrongly assumes the rock's nature is other than what God defined. Nothing can deviate from its nature. Thus, idols, red strings, mezuzas, stars, and all else cannot affect man's fate, as God did not design them with such a capacity. God alone controls man's fate based on reward and punishment. To suggest a wicked person can escape a punishment by using red bendel or mezuzas, renders God unjust, and not in control. Astrology, luck, magic, spells, evil eyes, amulets, etc. are all false as none were ever validated throughout history. Nor can a human being do more than what his muscular strength allows.

All existences except God are natural: they are limited. They are unworthy of worship and praise, nor may they be valued for what they cannot accomplish.

We begin to appreciate Maimonides' brilliance in isolating his 13 Principles as fundamentals in defining who is a Jew, and who is outside its pale. ■

What Made God?

When seeing a beam of light hitting a wall at our right, it is not sensible to say that the beam coming from the left travels backwards infinitely, with no light source. With no source, the beam could not exist. Thus, there must be some flashlight, laser or source of light at the beginning of the beam. However far back it goes, it must have a source of origin.

The same applies to creation. It is illogical to say that the universe was created by God, and God was created by Z, and Z was created by Y, and Y by X, ad infinitum. This suggests that there is no cause for everything. Nothing can exist without a cause. Just as we arrived at the source for the beam of light, we must arrive at a first cause for all that exists. And that first cause is not preceded by anything. Although we don't understand God's existence, an existence independent of all else, the alternative of an endless series of things creating the next thing, is impossible.

We accept the astonishing over the impossible and say that God exists, not preceded by anything. ■



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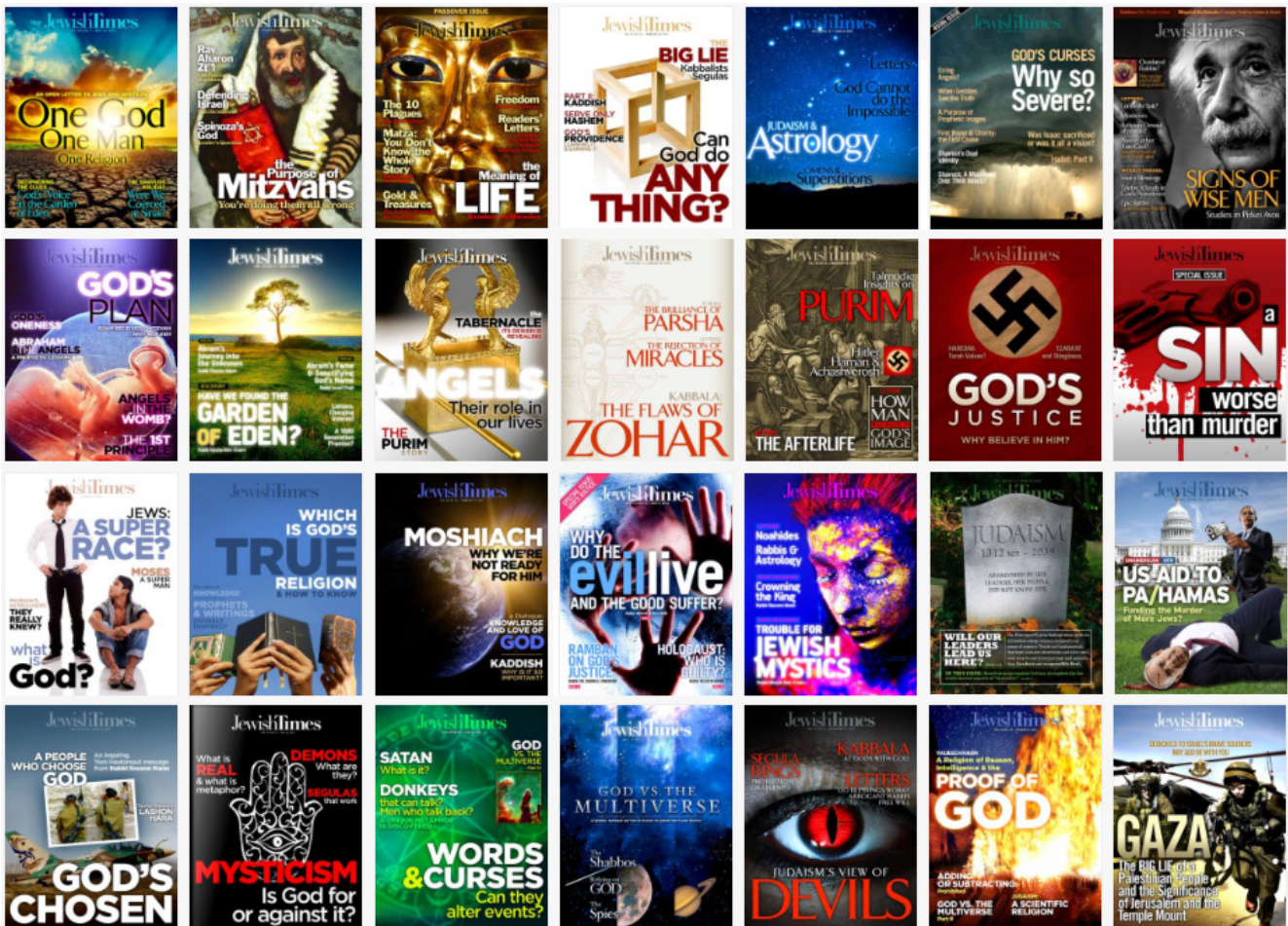
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God's Identity

Rabbi Israel Chait

Written by a student

THE 13

I must first thank Rabbi Chait. I regularly ask him questions, and again, the very next day he called to share his answer to a question Rabbi Mann discussed. Rabbi Mann questioned Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons. The Torah says, *"Jacob blessed Joseph and said, 'God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac lived, God who led me from times past until today, the angel who saved me from all evil should bless the children...'"* (Gen. 48:15,16).

Rabbi Mann meant that Judaism is most firm on the reality of all realities: God alone created and runs the world. Jacob could not have been blessing Joseph's sons, suggesting they relate to an angel (natural force) as opposed to relating to God directly. How then do we understand the mention of the angel?

Rabbi Chait explained, a word must be inserted as follows:

"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac lived, God who led me from times past until today through the angel, who saved me from all evil should bless the children..."

Meaning, God acts through angels. God uses angels — physical forces of nature — to achieve His will. Angels are not autonomous. Rabbi Chait said to attribute free will to an angel is idolatrous, as it supposes something other than God can willfully control the universe. While man has freewill, our powers are quite limited; no man would pray to another man to change his fate. But if we suggest an angel has freewill, and it can override natural law, we then suggest a being exists other than God which can alter my fate. That is idolatry.

Rabbi Chait agreed with my equation of animals to angels, in that both are restricted to a design and a limited behavior. Rabbi Chait said even when the angels bless God, this is not a freewill event, but their precise design dictates they must praise Him. Our error is equating human praise to angelic praise: ours is due to freewill, but angels "must" praise God. A school of fish swim uniformly, and in perfect unison the school darts in a new direction when approached by a hunter. Each fish in a given species shares an identical design and behavior. Angels are the same; they have no freewill and must behave in accordance with God's design of their natures.

Regarding the Akeida (Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac) where the words also change from "God" to "angel," Rabbi Chait said that Ibn Ezra states there is no difference between God and angel: God controls the angel, so it's all God's will.

In the end, God's identity is the sole cause and governor of the universe, and man's fate. ■



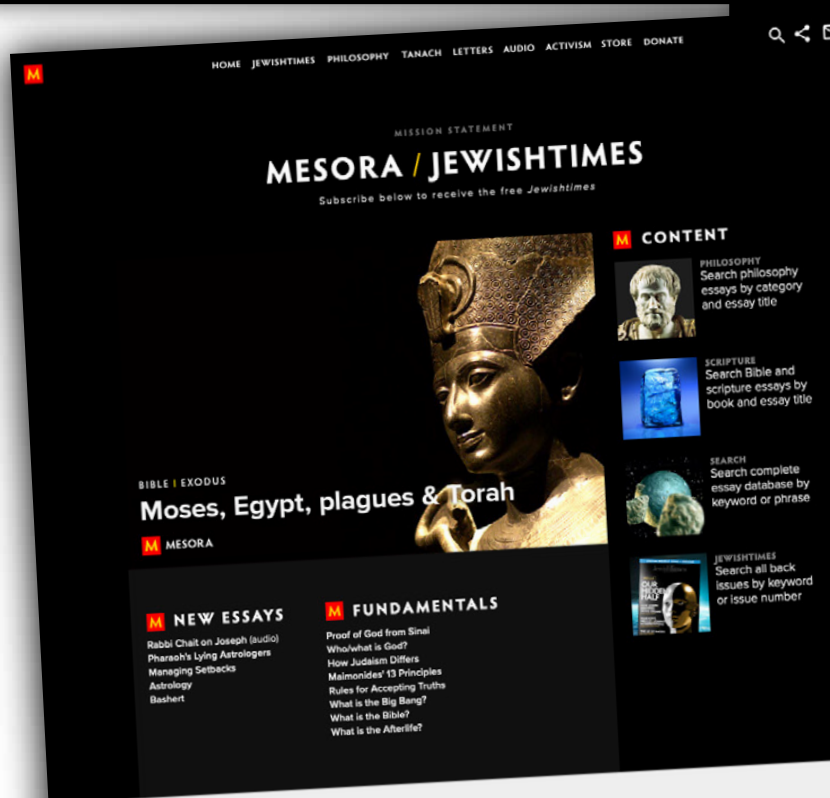
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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

[MORE BELOW](#)

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. [Black/white twins](#) unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:7). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

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Trust In God

Rabbi Israel Chait

We previously mentioned Abraham's perfection and his trials. We said that trials do not refer to a test where someone must act in a certain way. Trials refer to acceptance: the attitude of an individual regarding any untoward event.

Today, I would like to talk about the concept of bitachon, faith in God. I will first discuss it in practical terms and later I will discuss it philosophically.

We say that a person is to have bitachon in God. What is faith in God? Everyone seems to feel intuitively that they know what this means. As Maimonides says, everyone feels they know what Olam Haba is. Of course, they have no idea of it because they do not use their intellects, and they do not care to [attempt to] understand it because they feel they know what it is. This is a bad practice in Judaism. The same applies to bitachon. People feel they know what it is: an imminent catastrophe about which one says, "Have faith in God that He will help you." Does this mean that my belief in God dictates that He will help, which means to say that if the catastrophe occurs, it does so because I failed to believe in God? This produces a problem as there were people who were paragons of bitachon, and nevertheless they experienced catastrophe. Do we say that Abraham lacked bitachon because the Torah says, "The matter was very evil in Abraham's eyes regarding the tidings of his son" (Gen. 21:11 regarding Sarah's wish to exile Hagar and Ishmael)? Abraham had to send away his son while he had natural feelings towards him. Does this mean that if Abraham had more bitachon, that this would not have happened? It is absurd to say so.

The Chazon Ish raises the question of what bitachon is. He answers that bitachon does not

mean that God will fulfill a person's desire. For we see that this is false, for despite a person's great bitachon, his wishes do not necessarily occur, like Abraham sending Ishmael away. Now, if a catastrophe might occur, what is bitachon and its role?

The Chazon Ish wrote on the topic of bitachon and emunah, trust. He said that bitachon is the same phenomenon as emunah. Emunah means that a person believes that everything that occurs is due to God's will. But we do not know how God is going to proceed [when we encounter untoward events]. The Chazon Ish says that bitachon is nothing more than emunah actualized. This means that person can be walking in the jungle and a lion approaches him. His emunah tells him, "The lion may or may not destroy me; it depends on God's will." Bitachon is when he personally feels that way; his emotions are in line with his emunah. Meaning, just as one knows if he would be walking in a dangerous place, whether the danger will befall him depends on God's will, that is the way he feels at the time. That feeling is bitachon. Bitachon it was nothing more than emunah translated it into emotional, practical terms. Those are the words of the Chazon Ish.

I would like to elaborate more on bitachon. Bitachon is a certain kind of change in a person that takes place due to his knowledge of God. Everyone has basic fears. How do they handle them? Fear is a powerful force. By nature, most people handle their fears with some type of protective device, a manufactured psychological device that they create. It is like the Chofetz Chaim says: "When someone hears that another person died, at first it strikes him, but then the person denies his own death." The mind creates such

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devices to offer a personal security and peace of mind. Some people engage in certain activities to protect them from their fears. But the ultimate expression of these manufactured security devices is idolatry. Idolatry is created by man precisely to ward off any evil that might befall him. It is fueled by fear. Chazal say that the denial of idolatry is the essence of the entire Torah because idolatry has many forms, such as primitive idolatry and sophisticated idolatry. In the latter, a person becomes the idol, whether it is another person or his own sense of omnipotence with which he protects himself. In modern society the protective device or sense of greatness is usually some aspect of the self. An actor once commented after suffering a heart attack, "I never thought that it would happen me, because I am one of nature's favorites." This feeling also prevents a person from doing chessed because he has no identification with the person stricken with unfortunate circumstances. Maimonides says the one who does not mourn over a loss is an achzar; two words, "ach" and "zar," "only a stranger" mentioned in the book of Job (30:21). He is a stranger to others without any identification.

God created man in a way where he is not in constant psychological pain. The force in man for immortality and for omnipotence is so powerful that it emerges even from those who deny immortality. But if you listen to what such people say, you hear that what drives them is a sense of immortality, but in a disguised form. Many of their activities are attempts to grab immortality; they live a life riddled with the fear of death. Their actions were an attempt to overcome their own mortality, and their plunge into enjoyments were also an attempt to grab immortality. That is why it important [to them] to have certain words inscribed on their gravestones. But as a person who passed on is no longer here, there is no way to enjoy such words. [His desire for a gravestone inscription reveals a sense of immortality, for he feels he will not leave Earth and will somehow enjoy those words.]

But the immortality fantasy is unavoidable. A person can disguise it and try to fool himself that he is above it. But it is the most powerful force in man.

Then you have a person who listens to the Torah. He davens on Rosh Hashannah and says:

Man's foundation is from dust, and his end is dust. We labor by our lives for bread, we are like broken shards, like dry grass, and like a withered flower; like a passing shadow and a vanishing cloud, like a breeze that passes, like dust that scatters, like a fleeting dream. But You are the king who lives eternal. (Unisaneh Tokef prayer)

He recites the beautiful prayer that differentiates between God—the true king—and between man—the subservient king, who grasps for immortality as he tries to protect [perfect] himself before the inevitable dangers that lie before him. Old age and death cannot be talked away. But, as immortality is such a powerful force, even one who follows Torah and

accepts his mortality, where is all that psychological energy—that until now was directed towards immortality—going to be directed now?

The answer is that it is converted. God created man in a way that he can exist in a psychologically happy state. Where does all that energy go?

Yours, Lord, are greatness, might, splendor, triumph, and majesty—yes, all that is in heaven and on earth; to You, Lord, belong kingship and preeminence above all. (I Chronicles 29:11)

Man takes all his unrealistic emotions about himself and transfers them to God. All that man wishes to ascribe to himself can only be ascribed to God. And regarding the person who lives according to Torah, this transfer of energies from himself to God is what takes place. The emotions cannot be changed. God did not create man where his emotions will be frustrated. Perfected man will transfer all his emotions to God.

This is the concept of the entire book of Tehillim. It is a practical book, a unique book. It is a book [through] which the human emotions are translated and given directly towards their realistic and true expression. What book talks more about bitachon than Tehillim?

Those who know Your name trust You, for You do not abandon those who seek You, O Lord (Psalms 9:11).

Trust in the Lord and do good, abide in the land and remain loyal (Psalms 37:3).

Happy is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who turns not to the arrogant or to followers of falsehood (Psalms 40:5).

Many are the torments of the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord shall be surrounded with favor (Psalms 32:10).

O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and shield (Psalms 115:9).

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in mortals (Psalms 118:8).

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in the great (Psalms 118:9).

A song of ascents. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion that cannot be moved, enduring forever (Psalms 125:1).

Bitachon is constantly mentioned in Tehillim. Bitachon is a yesod hadas (a fundamental of Judaism). ■

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