

Maimonides Thirteen Principles of Faith – and the Issue of Belief in Judaism

Torah Study – Temple Beth Sholom – June 17, 2017 – Mike Rubin [11058598]

- 1) Instead of leading a Torah Study on the parashah of the week (Shelach Lekha - the incident with the 12 spies/scouts, which itself is a very juicy parashah), I am choosing to focus on Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith, and the overall issue of whether religious Jews have a universal system of beliefs, versus a system of praxis.
- 2) If religious Judaism has a system of beliefs, what is that belief system?
- 3) If religious Judaism has no system of fixed beliefs is that a good or bad thing?
- 4) Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith present the case that there is a universal system of beliefs binding upon all Jews (and if you do not have "perfect faith" in the belief, you have no part in the world to come).
 - a) Moses Maimonides place in Judaism is so pivotal that we still say today: "From Moses to Moses there were none like Moses."
 - b) Maimonides born in Cordova Spain in 1135 and died in 1204. His family fled Cordova when he was 13 years old when Cordova fell to the Almohades, fanatical Muslims who demanded conversion or death. They wandered until 1160 when they settled in Fez, Morocco. In 1165 they moved to Israel and not long afterwards left Israel to live in Egypt. Maimonides became the physician to Saladin's grand vizier, Alfadhil. His writings and correspondence made him the leading Jewish authority of his generation, though he was a controversial figure and some Jews considered some of his teachings heretical at the time. He is known for melding Judaism with rational philosophy, finding that parts of the Torah that do not stand up to rationale scrutiny must have been intended as metaphorical.
 - c) Maimonides is the author of many of the most important texts in Jewish thought, including:
 - i) Commentary on the Mishnah (the 13 Principles come from this work, particularly his commentary on Mishnah Sanhedrin).
 - ii) His Mishneh Torah – or Code of Torah, 14 volumes which are the first codification of the Jewish Law.
 - iii) Guide to the Perplexed. A philosophical masterpiece that blends Torah with rationale philosophy. This is widely read today and was relied upon by famous Christian theologians and Muslim theologians in formulating their own religious philosophies and adapting their philosophies to the modern world.
 - iv) Sefer HaMitzvos or "Book of Commandments" where he enumerates the 613 commandments in the Torah.
 - d) Review excerpt - Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith.
 - e) Review summary of Maimonides' discussion of Principles 8 and 9. [see excerpt]
- 5) Mendelssohn is the other pole, as is well presented in attached excerpt: "Judaism knows of no ...doctrinal opinions, no saving truths, no universal dogmas." Reform Judaism, through the Central Conference of American Rabbis, has adopted Principles of Reform Judaism that have changed over time (the first was in 1885). The most recent was adopted in 1999. See attached. [also see <https://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/statement-principles-reform-judaism/>] [for the official commentary by the Central Conference of American Rabbis propounded in 2004 on these principles see <https://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/commentary-principles-reform-judaism/>]

10/14/2008 2:14 PM THE THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES

THE THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES

1. I believe with perfect faith that God is the Creator and Ruler of all things. He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.
2. I believe with perfect faith that God is One. There is no unity that is in any way like His. He alone is our God—He was, He is, and He will be.
3. I believe with perfect faith that God does not have a body. Physical concepts do not apply to Him. There is nothing whatsoever that resembles Him at all.
4. I believe with perfect faith that God is first and last.
5. I believe with perfect faith that it is only proper to pray to God. One may not pray to anyone or anything else.
6. I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the prophets are true.
7. I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses is absolutely true. He was the chief of all prophets, both before and after him.
8. I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that we now have is that which was given to Moses.
9. I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will not be changed, and that there will never be another given by God.
10. I believe with perfect faith that God knows all of man's deeds and thoughts. It is thus written (*Psalms 33:15*), "He has moulded every heart together, He understands what each one does."
11. I believe with perfect faith that God rewards those who keep His commandments, and punishes those who transgress Him.
12. I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. How long it takes, I will await his coming every day.
13. I believe with perfect faith that the dead will be brought back to life when God wills it to happen.

YIGDAL

1

1. Great is the living God, and praised He exists, yet His existence has no time.
2. He is One, no unity is like His, He is hidden, His unity has no end.
3. He does not have bodily form, He is not a body He is beyond compare in His holiness.
4. He preceded all things that were created, He is first, yet without beginning.
5. He is the Lord of the world, and all things created Display His greatness and His majesty.
6. He has granted the bounty of His prophecy To the men of His choice and glory.
7. There has not arisen another like Moses A prophet who looked upon His image.
8. God gave a true Torah to His people, Through His prophet, trusted in all His house.
9. God will not replace nor change His Law For all time, for anything else.
10. He sees, He knows our secrets, He see each thing's end at its very beginning.
11. He rewards man with love, as his deeds deserve, He gives the wicked evil, according to their wrong.
12. He will send our Messiah at the End of Days, To redeem those who await His final salvation.
13. God will bring the dead to life with His great love, May His glorious name be blessed for all time.

THE TORAH

MAIMONIDES' PRINCIPLES The Fundamentals of Jewish Faith רמב"ם עקרונות האמונה

Aryeh Kaplan

The Eighth Principle

I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that we now have is that which was given to Moses.

Yigdal

God gave a true Torah to His people,
Through His prophet, trusted in all His house.

Commentary on Mishnah

The eighth principle is that the Torah given to us by Moses originated from God. It is therefore called "God's word."

We do not know exactly how the Torah was transmitted to Moses. But when it was transmitted, Moses merely wrote it down like a secretary taking dictation. In this way, he wrote the events of his time and the other stories in the Torah, as well as the commandments.⁵⁴ Moses was therefore called a "secretary."

Every verse in the Torah is equally holy. The Torah might contain verses such as (*Genesis 10:6*), "the sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim," (*Ibid. 36:39*), "his wife's name was Mehitabel," and (*Ibid. 36:12*), "Timneh was his concubine,"⁵⁵ alongside of (*Exodus 20:2*), "I am the Lord your God..." and (*Deuteronomy 6:4*), "Hear O Israel, [the Lord is our God, the Lord is One]." All these verses are perfectly equal. They all originate from God, and are all part of God's Torah, which is perfect, pure, holy and true.⁵⁶

The person who says that some passages were written by Moses of his own accord is considered by our prophets and sages to be the worst sort of nonbeliever, and a perverter of the Torah.⁵⁷ Such a person claims that the Torah must be divided into a core and a shell, and that the stories and history contained in it were written by Moses and are of no true benefit.

Such a person is in the category of those who say, "the Torah is not from heaven."⁵⁸ Our sages teach that this category includes even one who says the entire Torah was given by God with the exception of a single word, which was composed by Moses and not spoken by God.⁵⁹ Re-

garding such a person, the Torah says (*Numbers 15:31*), "He has despised the word of God [... his soul shall be utterly cut off]."

If one really understands the Torah, then he finds every word filled with wondrous wisdom. It contains a depth that can never be plumbed completely—"it is broader than the earth and wider than the sea."⁶⁰ One need only follow the example of King David, the annointed of God and Jacob, who prayed (*Psalms 119:18*), "Uncover my eyes, that I may behold the wonders of Your Torah."

The same is true of the accepted explanation of the Torah, which was also given by God. [Following this oral tradition,] we make such things as the Succah, Lulav, Shofar, Tzitzis and Tefillin in exactly the manner that God dictated to Moses. Moses transmitted this to us as a trustworthy messenger.

The Torah teaches us this principle when it says (*Numbers 16:28*), "Moses said, 'Through this you shall know that God sent me to do all these things, and I did not do it on my own accord.'"

Introduction to Yad

Every commandment given to Moses on Mount Sinai was given together with an explanation. God thus told Moses (*Exodus 24:12*), "[Come up to Me to the mountain... and I will give you the tables of stone, the Torah and instruction.]" "Torah" refers to the written Torah, while "instruction" is its interpretation. We are thus commanded to keep the Torah according to its interpretation. This interpretation is what we call the Oral Torah (*Torah SheBal Peh*).⁶¹

Moses wrote the entire Torah with his own hand shortly before he passed away. He gave a copy to each tribe, and another Torah was placed in the Ark as a testimony.⁶² [Moses thus told the Levites] (*Deuteronomy 31:26*), "Take this scroll of the Torah and place it [by the side of the ark of the covenant...]"

The interpretation, however, was not written down but was orally taught to the elders, Joshua, and the rest of the Jews. Moses therefore said (*Deuteronomy 13:1*), "All this word that I instruct you, you shall keep and obey." It is for this reason that it is called the Oral Torah.

Although the Oral Torah was not written down, it was taught by Moses to his council, which was made up of seventy elders:⁶³ Elazar, Pinchas and Joshua thus all received the tradition from Moses. Joshua, however, was Moses' main disciple, and he was given [responsibility for] the Oral Torah, and received special instruction in it.⁶⁴

Joshua likewise taught this tradition orally as long as he lived. There were then many elders who received the tradition from Joshua...

Rabbi Judah, the son of Rabbi Simeon, was known as Our Holy Rabbi⁶⁵. And it was Our Holy Rabbi who wrote the Mishnah.⁶⁶

From the time of Moses until Our Holy Rabbi, there was no book from which the Oral Torah could be taught publicly. In each generation, however, a prophet or the head of the Sanhedrin would write down his own notes in order that he might remember what he learned from his teachers. He would then use these notes in his oral teachings. Everyone listening would also take notes according to his ability.⁶⁷

Similar notes were taken on laws that were not transmitted from generation to generation, but were derived through the Thirteen Principles [which were used to expound the Torah]⁶⁸ and agreed upon by the Sanhedrin.

This continued until the time of Our Holy Rabbi. He then gathered all the traditions, laws, explanations, and commentaries on the entire Torah, which had been handed down from Moses and expounded by the Sanhedrin in each generation. This was then all compiled into the book known as the Mishnah.⁶⁹

The Mishnah was then publicly taught to the sages and revealed to all the Jews. Everyone wrote it down, and it was spread to every community. The Oral Torah was thus preserved and not forgotten.

The reason why Our Holy Rabbi broke the tradition [of leaving the Oral Torah unwritten] was because he saw that the number of students was declining; new troubles continually arising; and the Roman Empire spreading throughout the world and constantly becoming stronger. The Jews were also being separated, travelling to the four corners of the globe. He therefore wrote a single volume that everyone could have. It was something that could be learned rapidly and not forgotten.

Our Holy Rabbi spent all his life together with his council, publicly teaching the Mishnah.

Among the sages who were part of Our Holy Rabbi's council were... Rabbi Chiya, Ray, Bar Kapara... Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Hoshia... Besides these, there were tens of thousands of other sages who received the tradition [from Our Holy Rabbi].

Ray then wrote the *Sifra* and *Sifri* (commentaries on *Leviticus*, *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*) to explain and expound upon the main points of the Mishnah. Rabbi Chiya wrote the *Tosfota* to elucidate other concepts in the Mishnah. Rabbi Hoshia and Bar Kapara likewise wrote *Beravos* to

explain the words of the Mishnah. Finally, Rabbi Yochanan wrote the Jerusalem Talmud, in the land of Israel, some 300 years after the destruction of the Holy Temple....

Ravina and Rav Ashi were the last of the sages of the Talmud. It was Rav Ashi who wrote the Babylonian Talmud in Babylon, approximately a hundred years after Rabbi Yochanan had written the Jerusalem Talmud.⁷⁰ Both Talmuds (or Gemorahs) were commentaries on the Mishnah, explaining its depth and expounding all the new concepts that had been resolved in the courts since the time of Our Holy Rabbi.

The two Talmuds, the *Toseffa*, the *Sifta* and the *Sifti* all explain what is permitted and forbidden, clean and unclean, liable and innocent, fit and unfit. It was all as it had been handed down from generation to generation, and ultimately from Moses himself....

Ravina and Rav Ashi were therefore the last great Jewish sages to transcribe the Oral Torah.... Every Jew therefore follows the Babylonian Talmud... This is because every single Jew had agreed to accept the teachings of the Talmud... for it included the teachings of all our sages, or at least the majority of them. They, in turn had received the tradition regarding the foundations of the Torah from generation to generation, and ultimately from Moses himself....

Code, Repentance

(*Yad, Teshuvah*)

3:8 Three are in the category of those who deny the Torah: A person who says that the Torah does not come from God, even if he only says this with respect to one verse, or even one word. If a person says that Moses wrote it on his own, then he denies the Torah. The same is true of one who denies its interpretations as included in the Oral Torah. Such a person is then like Tzaduk and Baithus [who denied the Oral Torah].⁷¹

Code, Rebellion

(*Yad, Mammin*)

1:1 [The Sanhedrin,] the great court in Jerusalem, is the basis of the Oral Torah. It stood as the pillar of Law, and from it laws and judgments emanated to all Israel. The Torah assures us [of this court's authority] when it says (*Deuteronomy 17:11*), "[You shall abide] by the Torah according to how they teach it to you." This in itself is a commandment of the Torah.

Everyone who believes in the Torah must therefore accept this court's authority and depend on it regarding all matters concerning our religion.

3:1 One who does not believe in the Oral Torah... is counted as a heretic (*Apikores*).

3:2 If one openly denies the authenticity of the Oral Torah, he is in the same category as all other heretics, people who deny that the Torah came from heaven, informers and renegades. All of these are not counted as Jews.

3:3 This is only true when one denies the Oral Torah on the basis of his own thoughts and opinions. This is the person who follows his own limited intellect and stubbornly denies the Oral Torah on his own. He thus follows the footsteps of Tzaduk, Baithus and their followers.

But this does not include the children of those who go astray or their descendants. These are raised among the Karaites⁷² and are convinced by their parents. Such people are therefore in the same category as a person kidnapped by gentiles as an infant⁷³ and raised by them. He may not eagerly abide by the commandments, but he is like one under constraint.⁷⁴

Even though such a child may later find out that he is a Jew and see Jews practicing their religion, he is still considered to be under constraint, since he was raised in such a misguided manner.

The same is true of those who follow the ways of their fathers who are Karaites who have strayed.

It is therefore fitting to bring them back and draw them with words of peace, until they return to the strength of the Torah.

The Ninth Principle

I believe with perfect faith that the Torah will not be changed, and that there will never be another Torah given by God.

Yigdal

God will not replace nor change His Law

For all time, for anything else.

Commentary on Mishnah

The ninth principle involves permanence. The Torah is God's permanent word, and no one else can change it.

Nothing can be added to or subtracted from either the written Torah or the Oral Torah. It is thus written (*Deuteronomy 13:1*), "You shall not add to it, nor subtract from it." This has already been discussed in detail in our introduction to this *Commentary on the Mishnah*.

Code, Foundations of the Torah

(*Yad, Kesodey HaTorah*)

9:1 The Torah clearly states that its commandments will remain binding forever, with neither change, addition nor subtraction. The Torah thus states (*Deuteronomy 13:1*), "All this word that I command you, you shall keep and do. You shall not add to it, nor subtract from it." The Torah likewise says (*Ibid. 29:28*), "Things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever, to keep all the words of this Torah." We thus see that we are commanded to keep the words of the Torah forever. Similarly, with regard to many laws, the Torah clearly states, "It shall be an everlasting statute, for all your generations."⁷⁵

The Torah furthermore says (*Ibid. 30:11, 12*), "[T]his commandment which I give you today... [is not in heaven." From this we learn that a prophet can no longer add anything to the Torah.⁷⁶ Therefore, if any prophet comes to alter [the Torah, which is] the prophecy of Moses, we immediately know that he is a false prophet. It does not matter whether he is Jewish or non-Jewish, or how many signs or

5

miracles he performs. If he says that God sent him to add or subtract a commandment of the Torah or explain it differently than our tradition from Moses, he is a false prophet. The same is true if he teaches that the commandments given to Israel were only given for a limited time and not forever...

In all such cases, we know that such a prophet is speaking presumptuously in God's name, making up something not told to him by God. For God Himself told Moses that this commandment (the Jewish religion) is "for us and for our children [forever]."

[And as the Torah says (*Numbers 23:19*)] "God is not man that He should speak falsely."

9:2 One may then wonder what God meant when He told Moses (*Deuteronomy 18:18*), "I will raise up a prophet like you from among your brothers."

But the truth is that such a prophet will not be sent to start any new religion. A prophet only comes to command us to keep the Torah and warn people who violate it. We thus find that the very last words of prophecy ever spoken were (*Malachi 3:22*), "Remember the Torah of Moses, My servant."

A prophet may likewise come to tell us things that have nothing at all to do with the commandments. Thus, for example, he might instruct us whether or not to go on a journey, wage a war, or build a wall. In such cases, we are commanded to obey his instructions...

Code, Repentance

(*Yad, Tshuvah*)

Three are in the category of those who deny the Torah.... One who says that God has exchanged His religion for another or that the Torah no longer applies, even though it was originally from God.

Points for Discussion

1. Why do we believe that the Torah will never be changed or substituted?
2. Christianity claims that the Torah was the "old testament," which has now been replaced by a "new testament." How would this principle apply to their belief?
3. How does this principle apply to Islam?
4. Many Jews feel that the commandments of the Torah are no longer valid since "times have changed." Discuss this belief.
5. Does God know the future? When He gave the Torah, could He anticipate what the present world would be like?
6. The Torah contains commandments regarding many things, such as sacrifices and the laws of purity, which no longer apply. Why does this not contradict this principle?
7. Will we still keep the Torah in the Messianic Age?
8. Can anything in the Torah ever become "old fashioned?"
9. Did God give the world any religion other than Judaism?

around the square, peering at the cobblestones and actually seeing spots of light from bits of melted moon.

There was another little incident which occurred a few weeks later in connection with the moon event which shouldn't be left untold. One night Berel happened to run into Gimpel coming home from the Synagogue. Berel pointed to the orange moon riding low in the heavens and righteously remarked, "I don't like to criticize you, brother Gimpel, but was it right telling us the moon melted when it really escaped?"

Gimpel replied with the greatest tolerance, "This is *not* the same moon as the one we captured, brother Beadle. Every month there is a new moon."

Moses Mendelssohn

FROM JERUSALEM

Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) was a noted German Jewish philosopher and grandfather of composer Felix Mendelssohn. His writings were influential in the German Enlightenment. In Jerusalem, he set forth his understanding of how Jews could confront modernity and still retain their Jewish heritage.

It is true, I acknowledge no other eternal truths but those, which are not only comprehensible to human reason, but which can likewise be proved and confirmed by human powers. But he is still deceived by an incorrect appreciation of Judaism, if he believes that I cannot maintain this, without deviating from the religion of my fathers. On the contrary, I hold this for an essential point of the Jewish religion, and believe, that this doctrine constitutes a characteristic difference between it and the Christian religion. To express my meaning with one word: I believe that Judaism knows of no revealed religion, in the sense this is understood by Christians. The Israelites have divine legislation, laws, commandments, precepts, rules of life, instruction of the will of God, how they have to conduct themselves, in order to attain temporary and everlasting happiness; statutes and prescriptions of this kind were revealed unto them through Moses, in a wonderful and preternatural manner; but no doctrinal opinions, no saving truths, no universal dogmas. These the eternal Lord always reveals to us, as to all the rest of mankind, through nature and outward objects, but never through word and writing. . . .

Those positions are called *eternal* truths, which are not subject to time, and remain the same to all eternity. These are either *necessary*, in themselves *unchangeable*, or *accidental*; that is to say, their permanence is either founded on their *essence*,—they can therefore not be otherwise by any possibility, because they are *conceivable* in no other manner, or they are based on their *reality*; they are therefore universally true, therefore to be taken as they are, and not otherwise, because they have become *real*, in the manner we meet with them, and not otherwise, because they are, among all possible ones of their kind, the *best* as they are, and not otherwise. In other words: the necessary, no less than the accidental truths, emanate from a common source, out of the Source of all truths; the first from the *intellect* (reason), the last out of the *will of God*. . . .

Besides these eternal truths, there are yet *temporary*, *historical truths*; things which did occur at a certain period, and perhaps may never come again; positions which have become true through a concurrence of causes and effects at one point of time and space, and can therefore be conceived as true, in reference alone to this very point of time and space. Of this kind are all truths of history, in their widest extent, including the events of times past, which have once occurred and are told to us, which we ourselves, however, can never have the opportunity to observe.

I now revert to my preceding remarks. Judaism boasts of no *exclusive* revelation of eternal truths which are indispensable to salvation; of no revealed religion, in the sense in which this word is generally used. A revealed religion is one thing, a revealed legislation

* * *

According to the ideas of real Judaism, all the inhabitants of the earth are destined to use property? felicity, and the means thereto are so extensively spread abroad as mankind itself, and are so bountifully scattered abroad as the means to ward off hunger and the other wants of nature; both when they are left under the control of rude nature, which perceives inwardly its power, and makes use thereof, without being able to express itself in words and speech, except in the most defective manner, and, so to say, stammeringly; and when they are upheld by sciences and arts, resplendent through words, images, and metaphors, by which means the perceptions of the inward spirit are transformed into an intelligible series of written signs, and are perpetuated by the same.

I therefore do not believe, that the powers of human reason are not sufficient to convince mankind of the eternal truths, which are indispensable to human happiness, and that it was necessary for God to reveal the same to them in a preternatural manner. They, who maintain this, derogate, on the one side, from the omnipotence or the goodness of God, what they mean to attribute to his goodness on the other. He was, according to their opinion, good enough to reveal unto men those truths on which their happiness depends; but not potent enough, or not good enough, to endow them with the ability to discover the same themselves. Besides this, the necessity of a preternatural revelation is rendered, by this assertion, more universal than the revelation itself. If, therefore, the human race must, of necessity, be corrupt and miserable without a revelation, why has the far greater part of the same lived at all times without a *true revelation*? or why are both the Indies compelled to wait, till it pleases the Europeans to send them a few comforters, who are to bring them a message (gospel), without which, according to this opinion, they can neither live virtuously nor happily? to bring them a message which, from their circumstances and the state of their knowledge, they can neither understand correctly nor use properly?

* * *

In the same manner as these classes of positions and truths are differing in their nature, they differ likewise in respect to their means of producing conviction, or in the manner and process by which men can convince themselves and others of their reality. The doctrines of the first species, or the necessary truths, are based upon *reason*,—i. e. upon the unchangeable concatenation and essential connexion between the ideas, according to which they presuppose or exclude each other. Of this kind are all mathematical and logical demonstrations. . . .

To comprehend the truths of the second class, *observation* is required, in addition to reason. If we wish to know what laws the Creator has prescribed for his creation, according to what general rules the changes in the same take place, we must experience, observe, and test the individual cases,—i. e. we should in the first instance, make use of the evidence of our senses, and afterward deduct, by means of reason, out of several particular cases, that which they have in common. . . . But historical truths, the passages, so to say, which occur only once in the book of nature, must be elucidated through themselves, or they will remain unintelligible, i. e., they could have been perceived through means of the senses by those only who were present at the time and place when they occurred in the course of nature. By every other person they must be received upon authority and testimony. . . . Hence the respectability and the trustworthiness of the narrator constitute the sole evidence in historical matters. Without testimony, we cannot be convinced of any historical truth. Without authority, the truth of history vanishes with the occurrence itself.

something very different. The Voice, which caused itself to be heard on Sinai on that great day, did not proclaim, "I am the Everlasting One, thy God! the necessary self-existent Being, who is almighty and all-knowing, who recompenses men in a future life according to their doings." This is the universal *religion of mankind*, not Judaism; and this universal religion of mankind, without which men can neither become virtuous nor happy, was not intended to be revealed here; in truth it could not; for whom should the rolling thunder and the sounding cornet convince of those eternal saving doctrines? . . .

No! all this was presupposed, was perhaps taught in the preparatory days, explained and placed beyond doubt by human reasoning; and when the people stood before Sinai, the Divine Voice proclaimed, "I am the Everlasting One, thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery," &c., reciting an historical truth upon which the legislation of *this* people was to be based; and it was laws that should be revealed in this place, commandments and ordinances; no eternal religious truths. The whole legislation seems to say, "I am the Lord thy God, who have made a covenant with thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and sworn unto them to raise unto myself a people from their seed. The period has at length arrived when this promise is to be accomplished. I have for this purpose redeemed you from the servitude of the Egyptians, and redeemed you with unheard of miracles and signs. I am your Saviour, your Chief, and your King; I now make a covenant with you also, and give you laws according to which you are to live in the land which I will give unto you for a possession, whereby you can become a happy people." All these are historical truths, which, from their nature, rest upon historical evidence, *must* be verified by authority, and *can* be fortified through miracles.

Wonders and extraordinary signs are, in accordance with Judaism, no proof for or against eternal truths recognisable by reason. We are, therefore, ordered in Scripture itself, not to listen to a prophet, if he should teach or advise things which are contrary to established truths, though he were to fortify his mission by miracles; nay, to condemn to death the performer of the miracle if he endeavours to mislead us to idolatry. Because wonders can only verify testimonies, support authority, and strengthen the credibility of witnesses and messengers; but all evidences and authorities are not able to overthrow any settled truth demonstrable by reason, or to place the doubtful idea beyond the reach of doubt and uncertainty.

Although now this divine book, which we have received through Moses, should, properly speaking, be a book of laws and contain ordinances, rules of life, and prescriptions: it does, nevertheless, include, likewise, as is well known, an inexhaustible treasure of truths which are founded on reason, and of religious doctrines, which are so intimately connected with the law, that they constitute with it but one and the same religion. All laws refer to, or are based upon the just-named everlasting truths, or remind us of and awaken reflections concerning the same; so that our Rabbis say, justly, "That laws and doctrines are related to each other, as body and soul." . . . But all these excellent doctrines are offered to our power of understanding, laid before our reflection, without being forced upon our belief. Among all the prescriptions and ordinances of the Mosaic law, not one is in the words, "Thou shalt believe, or not believe," but all say, "Thou shalt do, or not do." No injunction is laid upon the belief, for it can receive no other commandments than those that come to it in the way of conviction. All the commandments of the divine law are directed to the will, to the acting power of men. . . . Command and prohibition, reward and punishment, are only suited for acts, for doing and omission, which things are under a man's control, and can be influenced by ideas of good and evil, and therefore by hope and fear likewise. Belief and doubt, assent and dissent, however, are not governed by our capacity of expecting to possess certain things, not according to our wish and desire, not by fear and hope, but by our own perception of truth and untruth.

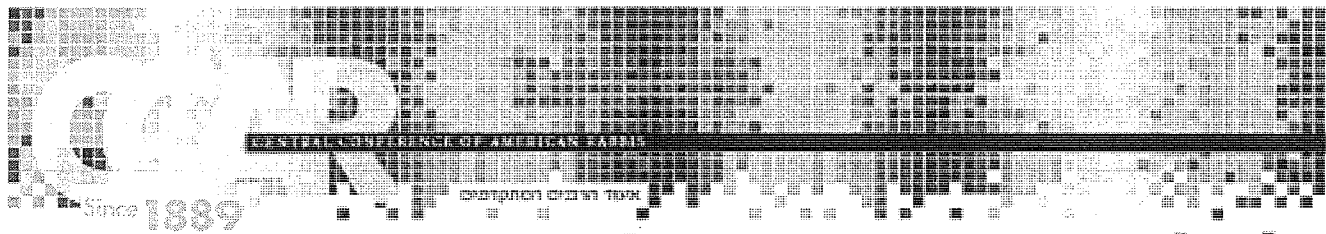
Ancient Judaism, therefore, has no symbolic books, no *articles of faith*. No one was permitted to swear to symbols; no one was called upon to take an oath that he believed certain articles of faith; nay, we have no conception of what are called test-oaths, and must consider them as inadmissible according to the spirit of pure Judaism. *Maimonides*

In truth, everything depends here also upon the difference between *believing* and *knowing* religious doctrines and religious commandments. We will admit that all human knowledge admits of being confined to a few fundamental ideas, which may be taken as the basis. The fewer these are, the firmer will the superstructure stand. But laws can admit of no abridgment. In them everything is fundamental, and in this respect we can say with reason: "That to us all the word of Scripture, all the positive and negative precepts of God, are fundamental." If you wish now to have the quintessence thereof, then listen to what one of the very greatest teachers of our nation, *Hillel, the elder, who lived before the destruction of the second temple*, considered as such. A heathen said to him one day: "Rabbi, teach me the whole law, whilst I stand on one foot!" Shammai, to whom he had addressed previously the same intimation, had ordered him away with contempt; but Hillel, famed for his unconquerable calmness and mildness of temper, spoke to him: "My son, *love thy neighbour like thyself*; this is the text of the law; all the rest is but commentary. Now go and learn it!"

was the first to conceive the idea to condense the religion of his fathers into a certain number of principles; in order that, as he gives us to understand, religion, like all other sciences, might have its fundamental ideas, from which all the others are deduced. From this merely accidental thought have originated the *Thirteen Articles* of the Jewish catechism, to which we owe the hymn *Yigdal*, and some good writings by *Chisdat, Albo*, and *Abarbanell*. These, however, are, at the same time, all the consequences which they have produced hitherto. They have not yet, thank God! been forged into fetters in matters of belief.

DANIEL CHODOWICZKI, *Moses Mendelssohn*.
 Late 18th century. Colored drawing.
 Kunstsammlung der Jüdischen Gemeinde,
 Berlin. Max. A. Polster Archive.





■ ENRICHING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ■ FOSTERING EXCELLENCE IN RABBINIC LEADERSHIP ■

HOME ABOUT US RABBIS SPEAK LIFELONG LEARNING CCAR PRESS PLACEMENT RABBIS & COMMUNITIES DONATE NOW MEMBERS

Rabbis Speak

- Rabbinic Voice
- Resolutions
- Reform Responsa
- Platforms
- CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly
- CCAR News
- RavKav
- RavBlog

[Home](#) » [Rabbis Speak](#) » Platforms

A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism

Oct. 27, 2004
 Adopted in Pittsburgh - 1999

Adopted at the 1999 Pittsburgh Convention
Central Conference of American Rabbis
May 1999 - Sivan 5759
See Commentary on the Principles for Reform Judaism

Preamble

On three occasions during the last century and a half, the Reform rabbinate has adopted comprehensive statements to help guide the thought and practice of our movement. In 1885, fifteen rabbis issued the Pittsburgh Platform, a set of guidelines that defined Reform Judaism for the next fifty years. A revised statement of principles, the Columbus Platform, was adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1937. A third set of rabbinic guidelines, the Centenary Perspective, appeared in 1976 on the occasion of the centenary of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Today, when so many individuals are striving for religious meaning, moral purpose and a sense of community, we believe it is our obligation as rabbis once again to state a set of principles that define Reform Judaism in our own time.

Throughout our history, we Jews have remained firmly rooted in Jewish tradition, even as we have learned much from our encounters with other cultures. The great contribution of Reform Judaism is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition, to embrace diversity while asserting commonality, to affirm beliefs without rejecting those who doubt, and to bring faith to sacred texts without sacrificing critical scholarship.

This "Statement of Principles" affirms the central tenets of Judaism - God, Torah and Israel - even as it acknowledges the diversity of Reform Jewish beliefs and practices. It also invites all Reform Jews to engage in a dialogue with the sources of our tradition, responding out of our knowledge, our experience and our faith. Thus we hope to transform our lives through **קדושה** (*kedushah*), holiness.

God

We affirm the reality and oneness of God, even as we may differ in our understanding of the Divine presence.

We affirm that the Jewish people is bound to God by an eternal **ברית** (*b'rit*), covenant, as reflected in our varied understandings of Creation, Revelation and Redemption.

We affirm that every human being is created **בצלם אלהים** (*b'tzelem Elohim*), in the image of God, and that therefore every human life is sacred.

We regard with reverence all of God's creation and recognize our human responsibility for its preservation and protection.

We encounter God's presence in moments of awe and wonder, in acts of justice and compassion, in loving relationships and in the experiences of everyday life.

We respond to God daily: through public and private prayer, through study and through the performance of other **מצוות** (*mitzvot*), sacred obligations -- **בין אדם למקום** (*bein adam la Makom*), to God, and **בין אדם לחבירו** (*bein adam la-chaveiro*), to other human beings.

We strive for a faith that fortifies us through the vicissitudes of our lives -- illness and healing, transgression and repentance, bereavement and consolation, despair and hope.

We continue to have faith that, in spite of the unspeakable evils committed against our people and the sufferings endured by others, the partnership of God and humanity will ultimately prevail.

We trust in our tradition's promise that, although God created us as finite beings, the spirit within us is eternal.

In all these ways and more, God gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

Torah

We affirm that Torah is the foundation of Jewish life.

We cherish the truths revealed in Torah, God's ongoing revelation to our people and the record of our people's ongoing relationship with God.

We affirm that Torah is a manifestation of אהבת עולם (ahavat olam), God's eternal love for the Jewish people and for all humanity.

We affirm the importance of studying Hebrew, the language of Torah and Jewish liturgy, that we may draw closer to our people's sacred texts.

We are called by Torah to lifelong study in the home, in the synagogue and in every place where Jews gather to learn and teach. Through Torah study we are called to מצוות (mitzvot), the means by which we make our lives holy.

We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of מצוות (mitzvot) and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these מצוות (mitzvot), sacred obligations, have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times.

We bring Torah into the world when we seek to sanctify the times and places of our lives through regular home and congregational observance. Shabbat calls us to bring the highest moral values to our daily labor and to culminate the workweek with קדושה (kedushah), holiness, מנוחה (menuchah), rest and אונג (oneg), joy. The High Holy Days call us to account for our deeds. The Festivals enable us to celebrate with joy our people's religious journey in the context of the changing seasons. The days of remembrance remind us of the tragedies and the triumphs that have shaped our people's historical experience both in ancient and modern times. And we mark the milestones of our personal journeys with traditional and creative rites that reveal the holiness in each stage of life.

We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God's creation. Partners with God in תיקון עולם (tikkun olam), repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age. We seek dialogue and joint action with people of other faiths in the hope that together we can bring peace, freedom and justice to our world. We are obligated to pursue צדקה (zedek), justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger, to protect the earth's biodiversity and natural resources, and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage. In so doing, we reaffirm social action and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform Jewish belief and practice. We affirm the מצוה (mitzvah) of צדקה (zedakah), setting aside portions of our earnings and our time to provide for those in need. These acts bring us closer to fulfilling the prophetic call to translate the words of Torah into the works of our hands.

In all these ways and more, Torah gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

Israel

We are Israel, a people aspiring to holiness, singled out through our ancient covenant and our unique history among the nations to be witnesses to God's presence. We are linked by that covenant and that history to all Jews in every age and place.

We are committed to the מצוה (mitzvah) of אהבת ישראל (ahavat Yisrael), love for the Jewish people, and to קולל ישראל (k'lal Yisrael), the entirety of the community of Israel. Recognizing that כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה (kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh), all Jews are responsible for one another, we reach out to all Jews across ideological and geographical boundaries.

We embrace religious and cultural pluralism as an expression of the vitality of Jewish communal life in Israel and the Diaspora.

We pledge to fulfill Reform Judaism's historic commitment to the complete equality of women and men in Jewish life.

We are an inclusive community, opening doors to Jewish life to people of all ages, to varied kinds of families, to all regardless of their sexual orientation, to גרים (gerim), those who have converted to Judaism, and to all individuals and families, including the intermarried, who strive to create a Jewish home.

We believe that we must not only open doors for those ready to enter our faith, but also to actively encourage those who are seeking a spiritual home to find it in Judaism.

We are committed to strengthening the people Israel by supporting individuals and families in the creation of homes rich in Jewish learning and observance.

We are committed to strengthening the people Israel by making the synagogue central to Jewish communal life, so that it may elevate the spiritual, intellectual and cultural quality of our lives.

We are committed to **מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל** (*Medinat Yisrael*), the State of Israel, and rejoice in its accomplishments. We affirm the unique qualities of living in **אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל** (*Eretz Yisrael*), the land of Israel, and encourage **עֲלִיָּה** (*aliyah*), immigration to Israel.

We are committed to a vision of the State of Israel that promotes full civil, human and religious rights for all its inhabitants and that strives for a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors.

We are committed to promoting and strengthening Progressive Judaism in Israel, which will enrich the spiritual life of the Jewish state and its people.

We affirm that both Israeli and Diaspora Jewry should remain vibrant and interdependent communities. As we urge Jews who reside outside Israel to learn Hebrew as a living language and to make periodic visits to Israel in order to study and to deepen their relationship to the Land and its people, so do we affirm that Israeli Jews have much to learn from the religious life of Diaspora Jewish communities.

We are committed to furthering Progressive Judaism throughout the world as a meaningful religious way of life for the Jewish people.

In all these ways and more, Israel gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

בְּרִיד שְׂאֵמַר תְּהִיָּה הַעוֹלָם.

(Baruch she-amar ve-haya ha-olam).

Praised be the One through whose word all things came to be.
May our words find expression in holy actions.
May they raise us up to a life of meaning devoted to God's service
And to the redemption of our world.



Copyright © 2015 Central Conference of American Rabbis
355 Lexington Avenue | New York, NY 10017 | (212) 972-3636 | info@ccarnet.org
For questions or comments about this site email the
webmaster: webSupport@ccarnet.org



