

13 Fundamentals of Faith

PART III:

MUST A JEW BELIEVE ANYTHING?

1. Rabbi J. David Bleich, *With Perfect Faith*, pp. 18 – 19

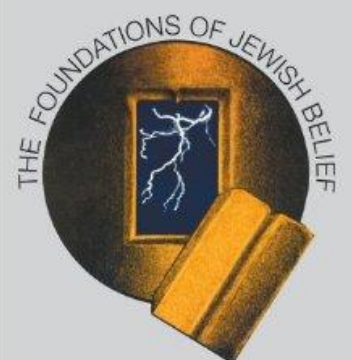
Rabbi Dr. Bleich is an authority on Jewish law and ethics and bioethics. He is a professor of Talmud (Rosh Yeshiva) at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, an affiliate of Yeshiva University, as well as head of its

It appears that in compiling divergent lists of principles Maimonides, Crescas, and Albo are not so much in disagreement with regard to substantive teachings or the need to accept these teachings as divinely revealed truths (although there do exist disagreements with regard to the nature and status of some of these principles), as they are with regard to what it is that they are endeavoring to formulate. Albo is intent upon formulating a system of axioms consisting of the *sin qua non* of any system of religious belief. Every theological system must, by definition, posit the existence of a Deity. Any such system must embody the concept of revelation; else religion can make no demands upon man. And the concept of reward and punishment must be established in order to provide a basis for compliance with the demands of revelation. Crescas, on the other hand, is not concerned with the premises of religious belief in general but with the unique claims of faith set forth by Judaism. Crescas presents the distinctive demands, which Judaism makes upon faith and formulates the beliefs which are unique to Judaism. Finally, Maimonides, depending upon which explanation is accepted, either presents the particular beliefs which require bolstering and



J. DAVID BLEICH

WITH PERFECT FAITH



reinforcement or enumerates the minimum content of the theological knowledge necessary for development of the acquired intellect which, in turn, makes possible the reality of immortality.

2. Rambam, Avodah Zarah 2:2-3

הלכה ב

ספרים רבים חברו עובדי כוכבים בעבודתה היאך עיקר עבודתה ומה מעשיה ומשפטיה, צונו הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא לקרות באותן הספרים כלל ולא נהרהר בה ולא בדבר מדבריה, ואפילו להסתכל בדמות הצורה אסור שנאמר אל תפנו אל האלילים, ובענין הזה נאמר ופן תדרוש לאלהיהם לאמר איכה יעבדו שלא תשאל על דרך עבודתה היאך היא אף על פי שאין אתה עובדה שדבר זה גורם להפנות אחריה א ולעשות כמה שהן עושין שנאמר ואעשה כן גם אני.

הלכה ג

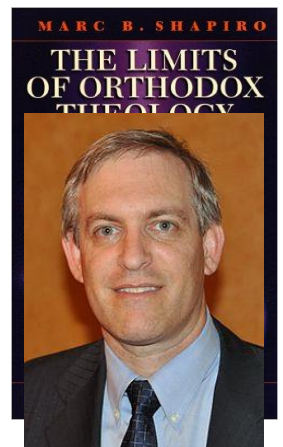
וכל הלאוין האלו בענין אחד הן והוא שלא יפנה אחר עבודת כוכבים וכל הנפנה אחריה בדרך שהוא עושה בו מעשה הרי זה לוקה, ולא עבודת כוכבים בלבד הוא שאסור להפנות אחריה במחשבה אלא כל מחשבה שהוא גורם לו לאדם לעקור עיקר מעיקרי התורה מזהרין אנו שלא להעלותה על לבנו ולא נסיח דעתנו לכך ונחשוב ונמשך אחר הרהורי הלב, מפני שדעתו של אדם קצרה ולא כל הדעות יכולין להשיג האמת על בורין, ואם ימשך כל אדם אחר מחשבות לבו נמצא מחריב את העולם לפי קוצר דעתו, כיצד פעמים יתור אחר עבודת כוכבים ופעמים יחשוב ביחוד הבורא שמא הוא אינו, מה למעלה ומה למטה מה לפניו ומה לאחור, ופעמים בנבואה שמא היא אמת שמא היא אינה, ופעמים בתורה שמא היא מן השמים שמא אינה, ואינו יודע המדות שידין בהן עד שידע האמת על בורין ונמצא יוצא לידי מינות, ועל ענין זה הזהירה תורה ונאמר בה ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זונים, כלומר לא ימשך כל אחד מכם אחר דעתו הקצרה וידמה שמחשבתו משגת האמת, כך אמרו חכמים אחרי לבבכם זו מינות ואחרי עיניכם זו זנות, ולאו זה אף על פי שהוא גורם לאדם לטרדו מן העולם הבא אין בו מלקות.

3. Torah UMadda and the Freedom of Inquiry, Rabbi Yehuda Parnes

Based on all of the above, Torah u-Madda can only be viable if it imposes strict limits on freedom of inquiry in areas that may undermine the י"ג עיקרי אמונה. Then, Torah u-Madda will have the opportunity to represent itself as an authentic and historical tradition in Jewish thought.

4. Maimonides' Thirteen Principles: The Last Word in Jewish Theology? Marc Shapiro

Having made these preliminary remarks we may proceed to analyze R. Parnes' point that heresy is defined by rejection of any one of Maimonides' thirteen principles. Presumably, R. Parnes does not mean to say that only the thirteen principles, and nothing else, are the determinants as to what constitutes heresy, for it is undeniable that no rabbinic figure has ever believed this. I say this for the simple reason that Maimonides' thirteen principles are not allinclusive. Thus, they do not include the idea that the Jews are God's Chosen People. In addition, there are a number of dogmas which Maimonides discusses in other places but excludes from his thirteen principles. For example, there is no mention in the principles about the existence of only one God or of free will, despite their overriding importance in Maimonides' thought.²⁰ All this lends credence to Arthur Hyman's point, already anticipated in part by Abravanel, that the thirteen principles were never intended to comprise, in their totality, the most important aspects of Judaism. Rather, they were merely formulated so as



to correspond with the structure of the Mishnah in Tractate Sanhedrin upon which Maimonides was commenting. Because of this, not all of Maimonides' dogmas were included in his thirteen principles but this does not in any way imply that they are less important. We will now proceed to show, one by one, how Maimonides' thirteen principles met with great opposition.

...

Conclusion

This goal of this essay was to examine the claim that Maimonides' principles were the last word in Jewish theology. Simply by looking at traditional Jewish sources, and many more could have been quoted, it has been shown clearly that both before Maimonides' time and after, many of his views were not been regarded as authoritative. The fact that Maimonides placed the stamp of apostasy on anyone who disagreed with his principles did not frighten numerous *Rishonim* and *Aharonim* away from their search for truth. The lesson for moderns is clear.

5. The Forward

<http://forward.com/news/6488/author-challenges-rambam-s-principles/>

Rabbi J. David Bleich, a leading Orthodox authority on rabbinic law, who has not read Shapiro's book, argued that alternative positions from the past are not relevant if they have been rejected by contemporary Orthodox rabbis. "Once dogmas are presented, there is no room for rejected opinions," even if they were articulated by great rabbis, Bleich told the Forward. "The attempt to revive such rejected opinions would now be regarded as heresy by normative Judaism." In other words, Bleich said, even if one observes all of the religious commandments, failure to accept Maimonides's principles is a rejection of Orthodox theology. "You could call yourself Orthodox all you want," Bleich said. "But you're really Orthoprax."

Such arguments, Shapiro said, inspired him to write the book. "It used to be OK to believe something, but now it is heretical because today's rabbis believe it to be," Shapiro said. Such an approach "is politics, not theology," he added. "I would argue," Shapiro said, "that there is little need for such policy statements and that traditional Jewish theology should be about including people, not about seeing how many people can be excluded."

6. Review from Rabbi Zev Leff, OU Jewish Action



https://www.ou.org/jewish_action/06/2007/the_thirteen_principles_of_rambam/

Every serious yeshivah student knows that there were disagreements as to whether the Thirteen Principles were, in fact, beneficial to posit, and if so, which ones were to be considered Principles. Is there a serious yeshivah student who is ignorant of Rabbi Yosef Albo's Sefer Haikarim or Rabbi Moshe de Trani's Beit Elokim? Yes, there were disagreements as to what kind of disbelief rendered one a heretic (e.g., open rebellion, erroneous intellectual conclusions or ignorance). Yet while there were disagreements with regard to the various details and the parameters of the Principles, the Thirteen Principles have been accepted in their general form as the expression of Torah Judaism, and, as stated above, one who denies any of them is outside the pale of the faith community of Torah Judaism. For example, the conviction that God is a corporeal being like any other corporal being is a belief that is outside the realm of Judaism, despite the fact that the Sages do not agree whether to deem one a heretic for harboring this belief. Hence, the principle is true, although its exact parameters are subject to the debate of Torah scholars.



This situation is comparable to that which occurred with the publication of the Shulchan Aruch. Despite the fact that there was debate among bona-fide Torah scholars as to the benefit and propriety of creating a code of Jewish law, and despite the fact that there are instances where the rulings of the Shulchan Aruch have not been accepted, the Shulchan Aruch overall has been accepted by Klal Yisrael—its sages and the rank and file of observant Jews—and has therefore become the definitive code of Jewish observance. Similarly, over the generations, the Thirteen Principles have been accepted as the definitive code of Jewish belief, albeit not every detail of Rambam's presentation of them has been accepted. Hence, Yigdal and the Thirteen Principles are recited by most Jews every day in Shacharit.

...

As for *The Limits of Orthodox Theology*, I cannot recommend it to the general public, who can be easily misled by some of the questionable theses in this book. For the discerning reader who will carefully check the sources, this book will provide an interesting historical perspective as to the various opinions surrounding the Thirteen Principles.

Flexibility With a Firm Foundation: On Maintaining Jewish Dogma YITZCHAK BLAU

On the book's last page, Shapiro writes of the book's significance in the context of reigning trends in Orthodoxy. "Together with the turn to the right in Orthodoxy, which has led to an increasing stringency in many areas of *halakhah*, an ever increasing dogmatism in matters of



belief is also apparent” (p. 158). Shapiro apparently sees this volume as an important resource against this dogmatism, and indeed it is. If R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik can be accused of heresy for writing that secular Zionists acquired the land of Israel through building an altar of factories (a homiletic expression of their dedication);³ and if Rav Kook can be termed a well known heretic,⁴ then the misuse of the term “heresy” has gotten out of hand. More recent misuse of the term “heresy” includes attacks on the *revadim* approach to gemara learning⁵ and the banning of books that portray the human dimension of biblical heroes.⁶ *Yahadut* can accommodate a good deal of diverse opinion and even sharp debate without anyone being branded a *kofer*.

However, Shapiro makes no reference to a danger found on the opposing point of the Orthodox spectrum. Under the influence of modern relativism and epistemological skeptics, many contemporary writers attempt to deny the significance of dogmas in Judaism altogether. Tamar Ross argues that Rav Kook views Jewish beliefs as having only instrumental value but not as cognitive truths.⁷ She argues for a position in which we view Buddhism, Christianity and Islam as equal manifestations of the same truth as Judaism.⁸ Menachem Kellner published a book arguing that beliefs are not a basis for deciding who is part of the religious community.⁹ In a more quixotic venture, Aryeh Botwinick tries to identify Rambam’s negative theology with post-modern skepticism.¹⁰ Gili Zivan explores the post-modern implications of contemporary Jewish theologians who despair of the notion of objective truth.¹¹ David Singer compares David Berger to Torquemada for arguing that the idea of a messiah having a second coming in order to fulfill the messianic prophecies is beyond the pale.¹² While it is difficult to estimate the influence of these writers, I think it fair to say that the liberal edge of Orthodoxy is tempted by this position. Self-referential usage of the term “halakhic” in place of “Orthodox” may reflect this ideology.¹³ No doubt, adherents of the Orthoprax approach will be quick to utilize Shapiro’s work as a support. Had Shapiro also kept this second extreme in mind and taken steps to more forcefully combat it, he would have written a better book.

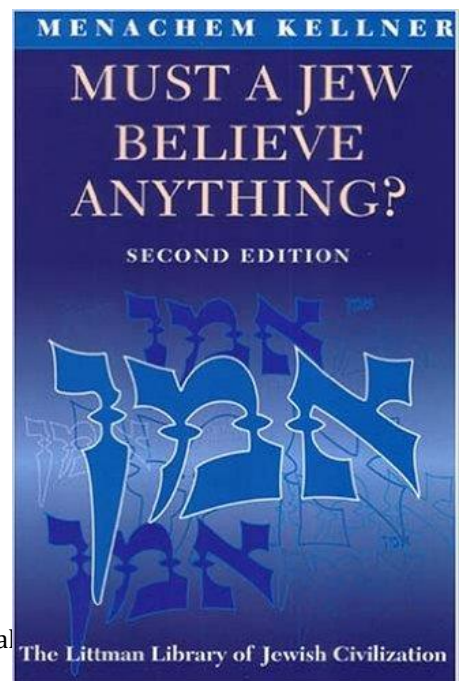
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Judaism resembles a structure with much leeway on most floors but an inflexible foundation at the ground level. Shapiro deserves credit for showing that that Rambam did not precisely identify the foundation. Nevertheless, the foundation continues to exist.

7. Must a Jew Believe in Anything? Dr Menachem Kellner



Rabbi Ya'akov



Must a Jew believe anything? If belief is a matter of trust in God expressed in obedience to the Torah, my answer to the question is that a Jew must believe everything. If "belief" is the intellectual acquiescence in carefully defined statements of dogma, the answer is that there is nothing that a Jew must believe

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there are limits to what one can affirm or deny and still remain within the Jewish community. Denying the unity of God, for example, or that the Torah is of divine origin in some significant sense, or affirming that the Messiah has already come, are claims which place one outside the historical community of Israel. This is not to say that such persons are technically heretics-nor is it to say that they are not; that is not the issue here-but it is to say that they have placed themselves beyond the broadest limits of historical Jewish communal consensus



8. Tradition Book Review, Dr David Berger

Unlike Kellner, however, I use, even insist upon, terms like "legitimate" and "authentic." We have an obligation to maintain the boundaries of the faith bequeathed us by our ancestors, and we cannot do this by describing even fundamental deviations as points on a continuum. Let me illustrate this point in a very personal way. In my mid-teens, I experienced periods of perplexity and inner struggle while reading works of biblical criticism. While I generally resisted arguments for the documentary hypothesis with a comfortable margin of safety, there were moments of deep turmoil. I have a vivid recollection of standing at an outdoor kabbalat Shabbat in camp overwhelmed with doubts and hoping that God would give me the strength to remain an Orthodox Jew. What saved me was a combination of two factors: works that provided reasoned arguments in favor of traditional belief and the knowledge that to embrace the position that the Torah consists of discrete, often contradictory documents was to embrace not merely error but apikorsut. If I had been told by a credible authority that there is nothing a Jew really must believe and that the only danger was that I would move to a different point on a continuum, I am afraid to face the question of what might have happened.



Finally, an unanticipated consequence of the refusal to draw red lines may well be the fostering of intolerance within Orthodoxy itself. Since every orthodoxy-indeed, every coherent movement- must have boundaries, setting them in a reasonable place encourages respect for differences within those boundaries. Refusing to set them at all may well lead to the blurring of the central and the peripheral, the ikkar and the tafel, and lead to the position that virtually all deviations delegitimate. It hardly needs to be said that this danger is very much with us. This book has much to recommend it. Both scholarly and accessible, it is marked by a humane vision and a passionate commitment to a vibrant, outward looking Orthodox Judaism. Nonetheless, its central thesis is deeply flawed, misrepresenting Judaism's past and providing a prescription that could jeopardize its future.

יגדל

אלהים חי וישתבח, נמצא ואין עת אל מצואותו.
אחד ואין יחיד ביהודו, נעלם וגם אין סוף לאחדותו.
אין לו דמות הגוף ואינו גוף, לא נערך אליו קדשתו.
קדמון לכל דבר אשר נברא, ראשון ואין ראשית לראשיתו.
הט אדון עולם, וכל נוצר יורה גדלותו ומלכותו.
שיפע נבואתו נתנו אל-אנשי סגלתו ותפארתו.
לא קם בישראל במשה עוד נביא ומביט את תמונתו.
תורת אמת נתן לעמו אל על יד נביאו נאמן ביתו.
לא יחליף דאל ולא ימיר דתו לעולמים לזולתו.
צופה ויודע סתרינו, מביט לסוף דבר בקדמתו.
גומל לאיש חסד במפעלו, נותן לרשע רע ברשעתו.
ישלח לקץ ימין משיתנו לפדות מחפי קץ ישועתו.
מתים יחיה אל ברב חסדו, ברוך עדי עד שם תהלתו.

אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו הוא בורא ומנהיג
לכל הברואים והוא לבדו עשה ועשה ויעשה לכל המעשים:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו הוא יחיד ואין
יתדות כמוהו בשום פנים והוא לבדו אלהינו הוה הוה ויהיה:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו אינו גוף ולא
ישגורו משיגי הגוף ואין לו שום דמיון כלל:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו הוא ראשון
והוא אחרון:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו לו לבדו ראוי
להתפלל ואין לזולתו ראוי להתפלל:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שכל דברי נביאים אמת:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שנבואת משה רבנו עליו השלום
היתה אמתית ושהוא היה אב לנביאים לקודמים לפיו
ולבאים אחריו:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שכל התורה המצויה עתה בדינו
היא הנתונה למשה רבנו עליו השלום:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שזאת התורה לא תהא מחלפת
ולא תהא תורה אחרת מאת הבורא יתברך שמו:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו יודע כל
מעשה בני אדם וכך מתשובתם שנאמר היוצר יחד לבם
המבין אל כל מעשיהם:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו גומל טוב
לשומרי מצותיו ומעניש לעוברי מצותיו:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה בכיאת המשיה ואף על פי שיתמהמה
עם כל זה אכתוב לו בכל יום שיבא:
אני מאמין באמונת שלמה שיהיה תחית המתים בעת שתעלה
רצון מאת הבורא יתברך שמו ויתעלה זכרו לעד ולנצח נצחים: