



CONGREGATION  
SHOMREI EMUNAH

**WHAT MUST WE BELIEVE:**  
AN ANALYSIS OF RAMBAM'S  
13 PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

**PART II**

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It is not the case that classical Judaism adopted an 'anything goes' attitude towards matters of belief. The rabbis functioned in a context in which who was and who was not a Jew was relatively clear, and in which there was a broad consensus concerning matters of religious belief and very little attempt to pin down and codify the details of that religious belief. Persons who violated that theological consensus were probably considered up to a point as simply strange, and after some point as having placed themselves outside the community altogether. The attitude of the rabbis towards matters of theology, it would seem, was more laissez-faire than totally uninterested.<sup>6</sup>

Mishnah *Sanhedrin* x. 1, therefore, ought not to be seen as an attempt to lay down a self-conscious system of dogma for Judaism or set up a theological test for admission to the world to come. It does, however, represent part of what is the first recorded theological debate in Judaism, that between the Sadducees and Pharisees, and as such is certainly a harbinger of things to come.<sup>18</sup>

David Berger, review of Kellner, Must a Jew Believe Anything? *Tradition* 33:4 (1999) p. 83

Let us begin at the beginning. It is perfectly evident that Hazal did not present us with a Maimonidean-style creed. At the same time, it is also evident that they did regard the denial of specific theological propositions as grounds for exclusion from the world to come. When Kellner has completed his discussion of the "one possible exception" to his rule, he has shown that Mishna *Sanhedrin* 10:1 is not a work of systematic theology but has done nothing to undermine the obvious and unavoidable reality, to wit, that it excludes from the world to come people who deny resurrection and the belief that the Torah is from Heaven. Even if we were to endorse the debatable assertion that only people who adver-

tise their denial forfeit eternal felicity, the fateful action would remain nothing more than a statement of disbelief in a dogmatic proposition.

Now, it may well be that the Rabbis were impelled to single out these doctrines in the wake of attacks by Sadducees and other sectarians (p. 36), but this position does little to salvage Kellner's overall argument. It means that the Rabbis did believe that membership in good standing in the community of Israel rested on certain articles of faith. Since they were indeed not interested in systematic theology, they did not articulate these principles until they were challenged, but once challenged, they fleshed out a position that they had always taken for granted.

Kellner, p 31

Now, it is clear that some sorts of behaviour reflect or are the consequence of some beliefs. A person who on philosophical or theological grounds rejects monotheism may be led to idolatry. A person may admit the existence of one God, but deny reward and punishment, and thus be led to *perikat ol*, the throwing off of the 'yoke' of the commandments. But in all such cases, the individual's sin is the forbidden behaviour, not the forbidden thought. That is not to say that the Jewish tradition would actively welcome an extremely observant atheist or agnostic; but so long as the individual kept his or her unconventional thoughts private, no great attempt would be made to root them out.

Thus far I have examined three crucial transitions in the life of a Jew: from childhood to adulthood; from being a Gentile to being a Jew; and from this life to the next. Had the rabbis of the Talmud been interested in theology as such, these are the sorts of points at which we could reasonably expect to find them clearly laying out the basic teachings of Judaism in a dogmatic or at least theologically systematic fashion. But, in fact, we do not find them doing so. This I take as convincing evidence for my claim that pre-medieval Judaism did not express itself in terms which could be reduced to ordered theological formulations, formulations according to which the rabbis could clearly and neatly determine who was 'in' (a good Jew) and who was 'out' (a heretic).

Berger, p 84

Thus, while it is historically true that Hazal did not compose systematic theologies, it is not true that they considered theological deviation insufficient to exclude someone from the community of the faithful. Even if their beliefs were not "carefully defined" by the standards of later philosophers, what matters is the fundamental principle that false belief is a criterion for *minut* and exclusion from the world to come. To take Kellner's own example of idolatry, his assertion that Hazal saw only

action as sinful is incorrect. They explicitly tell us that thoughts of heresy or idolatry are biblically forbidden (*Sifrei to Numbers* 15:39; *Berakhot* 12b); Maimonides did not create this prohibition out of whole cloth (*Hilkhot Avoda Zara* 2:2-3).<sup>2</sup> Once we recognize that beliefs can be of such central importance, it is difficult to express fundamental reservations about the process by which they are more carefully defined.

Principles of Faith (Rosh Amich), trans.  
M. Heller (East Brunswick, N.J., 1982) p. 194

על אמת אברהם (פרק טז)

That which I believe to be "true, certain, and established" in this matter is that these men—Maimonides and those who follow after him<sup>2</sup>—are peaceable with us [Genesis 34:21]. They were brought to postulate principles in the divine Torah only because they were drawn after the custom of gentile scholars as described in their books. For they saw in every science, whether natural or mathematical, roots and principles which ought not to be denied or argued against. They

ואשר אמינתו אני אמת וצדק ונכון כדורש הזה הוא שהאנשים האלה שלמים הם אתנו הרב הגדול והנמשכים אחריו לא הביאם להניח עיקרים ויסודות בתורה האלנית כי אם להמשכם אחרי כנהג חכמי האומות כספריהם כי הם ראו בכל חכמה מן הנכמות טבעיות או למודיות שרשים ויסודות שאין ראוי לכפור ולהתוכח בהם ואך בעל

הדרך תקח הנכמת הטבע התהלותיה מהנכמת האלהות וחכמת הגנון מהנכמת הספר. וחכמי אומתנו אחרי אשר התערבו בגוים בעיון ספריהם ויריעת הכחותיהם לסור ממעשיהם והעתיקו דרכיהם ועניינם בתורה האלנית כאמרו איכה יעבדו הגוים האלה את חכמותיהם הלא בהגות התהלות ושרשים אשר עליהם הסוכינה וצעשה כן גם אני בהגות עיקרים ויסודות לתורה האלה. ובניני אין הגוון. דומה לראיה כי חכמות הגוים וספריהם להוות כדרך

Our scholars, having been dispersed among the nations and

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having studied their books and sciences, learned from their deeds and copied their ways and customs with respect to the divine Torah. They said: "How do these gentiles pursue their sciences? By positing first principles and roots upon which a science is based. I will do so also and postulate principles and foundations for the divine Torah."

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Therefore, I said, this I recall to my mind [Lamentations 3:21] that the divine Torah, with all its beliefs, is completely true. All of its commandments were divinely revealed. The validation and substantiation of all the beliefs and commandments, minor as well as major, is the same. The validation of one is like the validation of another. I, therefore, believe that it is not proper to postulate principles for the divine Torah, nor foundations in the matter of beliefs, for we are obliged to believe everything that is written in the Torah. We are not permitted to doubt even the smallest thing in it that it should be necessary to establish its truth with those principles and roots. For he who denies or doubts a belief or narrative of the Torah, be it small or great, is a sectarian and apikoros. For, since the Torah is true, no belief or narrative in it has any advantage over any other.

כולל וקודמת אליה מתורתנו כדי שנקח ממנה התהלותיה ויתכבדו ויתאמתו שמה. ע"כ אמרתי זאת אשיב אל לבי שהתורה האלנית באמונתיה כולה אמת וכל מצותיה נצטוו מן השמים האמת והקיום שיהיה בכל האמונות ובכל המצוות כקטן כגדול כאמת זה כן אמת זה ולכן האמת שאין ראוי שיגונה בתורה האלנית עיקרים ולא יסודות בענין האמונות לפי שמחוייבים אנהנו להאמין כל מה שנכתב בתורה ואין בדינו לספק בדבר הקטן שבה כדי שנאמת אותו עם אותם העיקרים והשרשים כי הכוסר או המספק בדבר קטן או גדול כהאמונות והסיפורים שבאו בה הוא מן ואפיקורוס כי אין באמונת ובסיפורים המוריים מצד שהוא אמת מעלה לאחד מהם על האחר וכן אמרו בספר הלך נרף

על אמת אברהם (פרק טז)

ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא. זה מורה מה שכבר ספרתי מדעתי שאין צריך להניח עיקרים כמדת השם שיאמין אותם כל בן ישראל כדי שיזכה להי העולם הבא כמו שכתב הרב הגדול והנמשכים אחריו כי התורה כולה וכל ססוק וססוק וכל מלה ומלה וכל אות ואות שבה הוא עיקר ושרש שראוי שנאמין ולכן אמרו שלא יצריך האדם

world to come." This points toward what I have already recounted on the basis of my own opinion, that there is no need to lay down principles for the Torah of God which ought to be believed by every Israelite in order to merit life in the world to come as Maimonides and those who follow after him wrote, for the entire Torah, and every single verse, word, and letter in it is a principle and root which ought to be believed. Therefore they said that in order to acquire the

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### המאמר השני

בנות התורות רל שהם יסודות וצמודים אשר בית אלהים נכון עליהם, וכמציאותם יצד מציאת התורה מסודת משני יתברך, ואלו יציר העזר אחת מהם תפל התורה בכללה חלילה.

יבשחקרנו בהם מצאנום ששה: האחד, היצת השם כמציאות. השני, השגחתו בהם. השלישי, יכלתו הרביעי, הנבואה. החמישי, הבחירה. השישי, התכלית. וזה, למה שהיתה התורה פעל רצוני, מהמציאה, שהוא הפועל, אל המצוה, אשר הוא המתפעל — יחייב בהכרח, שהיתה הפועל יחיד ורוצה ויכול, והמתפעל רוצה ובוחר. לא חקרתי ואנוס. ולהיות הפועל אשר מהפועל אל המתפעל, אין המלט לו מהתחטות-מה ביניהם, יחייב, שהיתה התחטות ודבקות-מה ביניהם, והוא הנבואה. ולהיות כל פעל, טבעי או מלאכותי, וכל שכן רצוני, ומפועל ככית השלמות, לתכלית ידע; אין המלט בפועל השלם הזה להיותו לתכלית חשוב. ולזה ראוי לחלק המאמר לששה קללים.

Treatise II. Concerning the corner-stones of the Torah, i.e., the foundations and pillars upon which the house of the Lord rests. With their existence, the existence of the Torah as ordered by God is conceivable; could we conceive the lack of one of them the entire Torah would collapse, heaven forbid.<sup>45</sup>

Upon investigating them we found them to be six: (1) God's knowledge of existents; (2) His providence over them; (3) His power; (4) prophecy; (5) choice;<sup>46</sup> and (6) purpose.<sup>47</sup> This is so since, in so far as the Torah is [the product of] a volitional activity from the Commander, who is the Agent, to the commanded, who is acted upon, it necessarily follows that the Agent knows, wills, and has power and that which is acted upon wills and chooses and is neither determined nor compelled. Furthermore, in so far as there is an activity produced by the Agent upon those acted upon, there must necessarily be some relationship between them. It is necessary that there be some relationship and conjunction between them; this is prophecy. In so far as every natural and artificial activity — and *a fortiori* the volitional activity of an infinitely perfect Agent — has some known purpose there is no escaping the fact that this perfect activity must have some important purpose.

For this reason we have seen fit to divide this treatise into six sections.<sup>48</sup>

R. Bleich (p14)

account. Crescas asserted that the list should be limited to six fundamentals, or beliefs, without which Judaism as a religious faith is inconceivable: (1) God's knowledge of all created things; (2) divine providence; (3) divine omnipotence; (4) prophecy; (5) freedom of the will; (6) the Torah leads man to his true goal and ultimate happiness. Crescas declared that the existence of God, a concept which includes the notion of unity and incorporeality as well, is in a class by itself and need not be included in this listing because it is logically prior to any enumeration of the fundamentals of Jewish belief.

#### ספר העיקרים (מאמר ראשון פרק ד)

הדרך הנכון שיראה לי בספירת העקרין שהם שרשים ויסודות לתורה האלהית הוא, כי העקרין הכוללים וההכרחיים לדת האלהית הם שלשה, והם מציאות השם, וההשגחה לשכר ולעונש, ותורה מן השמים. ואלו השלשה הם אבות לכל העקרין אשר לדתות האלהיות, כמו תורת אדם ותורת נח ותורת אברהם ותורת משה, וזולת זה מן התורות האלהיות אם אפשר שימצאו יותר מאחת בזמן אחד או בזו אחר זו. ותחת כל עקר מאלו שרשים וסעיפים משתרגים ומסתעפים מן העקר ההוא

#### ספר העיקרים (מאמר ראשון פרק ו')

ולהיות אלו הג' הם עקרין כוללים לדת האלהית, הוא שמנו אותם רבותינו ז"ל בפרק חלק במשנה, ואמרו שהכופר באחד מהם אינו בכלל בעלי הדת, ולזה אין לו חלק לעולם הבא, אמרו (סנהדרין צ' ע"ג) כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא שנאמר ועמך כולם צדיקים לעולם יירשו ארץ (ישעיהו ס' כ"א), ואלו הן שאין להם חלק לעולם הבא, האומר אין תחיית המתים מן התורה, כלומר שמכחיש השכר והעונש האלהי הנרמז בתחיית המתים, שהוא פעל אלהי אם לנפשות ואם לגופות לכלול כל מיני השכר, וזהו שנמצא לרבותינו ז"ל שם דברים שמורים בהם כי תחיית המתים שם נאמר בכללות ויחוד, אם על תחיית המתים בפרט ואם על עולם הנשמות והעולם הבא ויום הדין בכלל. . . ואחר כן מנו האומר אין תורה מן השמים, והוא העיקר האחר, ואחר כן מנו האפיקורוס, ולפי מה שנמצא לראשונים משם אפיקורוס, הוא איש היה חושב שהעולם נפל במקרה, והיה מכחיש מציאות השם שהוא הפועל, ונקראו הנמשכים אחר דעתו אפיקורוסין, הרי שמנו אלו הג' עקרין ואמרו שהכופר בהן אין לו חלק לעולם הבא, כי הוא יוצא מכלל בעלי הדת.

#### ספר העיקרים (מאמר ראשון פרק יג)

אבל עקר הענין הוא כי שלשת העקרין הללו הם עקרין כוללים לדת אלהית, שכל הכופר באחד מהן יוצא מכלל בעלי הדת האלהית ואין לו חלק לעולם הבא, לפי שאינו מודה בתורה אלהית כמו שראוי, ואולם המודה בהם עדין אין לו חלק לעולם הבא עד שיודה בהם ובשרשים הנתלים בהם והמסתעפים מהם, וכל הכופר באחד מן השרשים כאלו כופר בעקר שהשורש ההוא מסתעף ממנו.

Rav Albo, for his own part, divides the three primary *Ikkarim* into eight (or nine) *Sharashim* or "roots," as follows:

**I. Existence of Creator, includes:**

- (a) Unity (b) Incorporeality (c) G-d transcends time and is Eternal (d) Perfection of G-d.

**II. Divine Origin of Torah, includes:**

- (a) Actuality of Prophecy (b) Authenticity of G-d's "Messenger" — Moshe Rabbeinu

**III. Divine Reward and Retribution, includes:**

- (a) Omniscience of G-d<sup>4</sup> (b) Divine Providence for *S'char ve-Onesh*<sup>5</sup> (c) Free Will — *Bechirah*<sup>6</sup>

ספר העיקרים (מאמר ראשון פרק ד)

ואפשר כי דעת הרמב"ם במספר העקרין הוא על זה הדרך שכתבנו, אלא שהוא מנהיג שאמרנו שהם אבות עם השרשים המסתעפים מהם וקרא אותם כולם עקרין,

R. Bleich, p15

one of the three enumerated fundamental principles. Thus most of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles may be derived from the three principles to which they are reduced by Duran and Albo. Albo recognized still other beliefs which are a necessary and integral part of Jewish belief and binding upon its adherents. Although these beliefs, which include among others the doctrine of creation, resurrection of the dead and the

coming of the Messiah, cannot be derived from the basic principles in a vigorous and demonstrable fashion, they are included within the general framework of these principles. Albo's demonstration that most of the principles enumerated by Maimonides are reducible to three basic fundamental concepts makes it even more difficult to comprehend the purpose underlying Maimonides' formulation and enumeration.

R. Bleich, p17

The Brisker Rav acknowledges that Albo is correct in pointing to the essential redundancy inherent in Maimonides' list of principles. Albo, indeed with great acumen, formulates the philosophical arguments necessary for deriving additional propositions from the basic postulates. But not everyone has the intellectual prowess to examine these basic truths and to construct for himself the arguments, proofs, and conclusions which they entail. In order to guarantee that even those lacking contemplative power, as well as the intellectually lazy, may remain eligible for a portion in the world-to-come, an enumeration of the Thirteen Principles must be provided so that they may be affirmed by all. Once these principles have been formulated and presented in the form of a

creed, it is no longer necessary for every individual to undertake an arduous and intellectually taxing process of derivation in order to arrive at truths which serve as a guarantee of immortality. The Brisker Rav points to Maimonides' use of the verbs "to know" (*leida*) and "to believe" (*le-ha'amin*) rather than "to understand" (*le-havin*) as indicating that what is required is only simple knowledge or awareness rather than comprehensive understanding. The requirement as set forth by Maimonides is awareness rather than formal demonstration, affirmation of the conclusion rather than reconstruction of the argument form, acknowledgment rather than erudite analysis. In acquiring knowledge of the Principles of Faith, the individual attains a threshold of intellectual development sufficient to make the contemplative existence of the world-to-come meaningful and blissful. Although S. Urbach (*The*

R. Fendel,  
p. 313

*Ikkarim*, as does the *Ba'al halkkarim*. It is said that Rabbe Chaim Soloveichik clarified the Rambam's position regarding this matter, as follows.

When we are dealing with fundamental *emunah*-concepts, we cannot categorize them as "primary *emunah*-concepts," and as corollary or "secondary *emunah*-concepts." Every fundamental *emunah* concept is, *ipso facto*, a primary concept in its own right, and must be regarded as such. Because of its exceedingly great significance as a fundamental Torah concept, it cannot be reduced to a status of lesser significance, by including it as a corollary concept, under an all-inclusive heading or under a broad "general" category. Every *Ikkar* of Torah faith must be accepted in an absolute, unequivocal sense. The Rambam therefore stipulates the Thirteen *Ikkarim* as thirteen equally fundamental, unequivocal tenets of Torah faith, without singling out any among them as being of greater significance than any other.<sup>21</sup>

עקר שם הונח על דבר שעמידת דבר אחר וקיומו תלוי בו ואין לו קיום זולתו, כמו שהעקד הוא דבר שקיום האילן תלוי בו ולא יצויד מציאות האילן וקיומו זולתו, ורבותינו ז"ל נשתמשו בלשון הזה הרבה, אמרו דבר שיש לו עקר בדאודייתא או שאין לו עקר. ומוזה הצד יפול זה השם על השרשים והיסודות שעמידת הדת וקיומה תלוי בהם, כמו מציאות השם שהוא מבואר מענינו שהוא עקר שהאמנתו הכרחית לתורה אלהית, שאי אפשר לצייר מציאות תורה אלהית זולתו.

R Bleich, pp 18-19

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 sine 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 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.

M Heller, Principles (Introduction), pp 26-27

We have seen how Maimonides and Duran present what I have called a doctrinal or dogmatic interpretation of the principles of Judaism and how Crescas and Albo understand them in what may be called a logical or axiomatic sense. There is, however, a third understanding of the principles, one which sees them neither as doctrines which must be held in order to merit salvation nor as axioms from which the other

beliefs of the religion follow. This third interpretation of the principles sees them as nothing more than pedagogical devices, designed to help the unlearned understand some important truths about their faith. This may be called the heuristic interpretation of the principles. It is on this basis that Abraham Abravanel approves of Maimonides' principles and defends them from the attacks of Crescas and Albo.