THE SLAGER EDITION

Rambam

י"ג עיקרים של הרמב"ם

THE 13 PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

PRINCIPLES VIII & IX

With an anthology of commentaries
from the Talmud, Midrash,
Rishonim and Acharonim,
and elucidation from the works
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Compiled and Adapted by
Rabbi Chaim Miller

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Rambam - The 13 Principles of Faith

Principles 8 & 9: The Torah

with commentary from classic Rabbinic texts,
and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

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Preface

Following the remarkable success of the *Gutnick Edition* of the Torah, published over the last five years, *Kol Menachem* has recently expanded the size of its operation considerably and is in the process of preparing a number of works for the benefit of the public. One of our new enterprises is a series on the works of Rambam, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1138-1204—known in Western culture since the Renaissance as Maimonides), whose writings have exerted a colossal influence on Jewish thought and practice, both in his own day and in subsequent generations.

Our first task has been to address Rambam's *Thirteen Principles of Faith,* which was the first and, to this day, the most recognized statement of principles which attempt to define Judaism.

The Need for This Work

This is, of course, not the first book to discuss Rambam's *Principles*. But, at a time when Jewish publishing, especially in the English language, has blossomed exponentially in the space of just a few decades, it is remarkable how little attention the *Principles* have attracted.

Partially at least, this may be attributed to the fact that, even in Rambam's original text, the *Principles* themselves are an extremely brief summary of some very deep ideas. This means that to study the *Principles* in outline is a relatively short exercise, whereas to meditate upon them and come to a thorough appreciation of their true meaning is a huge undertaking. So most works on the *Thirteen Principles,* both in Hebrew and in English, tend to be either overly brief, or intensely philosophical, which means that the majority of people are lacking a commentary that is informative and at the same time accessible.

In our day, the need to study the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* is as pertinent as ever, when modern life forces most of us to engage

with cultures and thought-systems which are not based on the *Principles* and, in many cases, are antithetical to them.

Educating the next generation to act as observant, G–d fearing Jews is proving to be more difficult than ever, as the outside world appears to be increasingly colorful and enticing, while Jewish texts remain in "black-and-white." And why *should* our youth be attracted to Judaism if they are not imparted a profound appreciation of its basic beliefs and ideas?

Furthermore, each year there are countless Jewish men and women who are in the process of adopting a life of Torah and *mitzvos* and are thirsty to know its true, spiritual meaning. With the constant expansion of outreach efforts in every part of the global Jewish community, there are countless Jews whose interest has been sparked, and want to discover more about the Torah. How many times have we heard the question: I want to study, but where do I begin?

And even for those of us who are happy, observant Jews, not suffering a crisis of faith, and not in the process of major soul-searching, it is so important that our *mitzvah*-acts do not become dry and performed by rote. Studying the *Principles* refreshes our worship of G–d, invigorating every deed with an enhanced awareness of Who we are serving and why we are serving Him. While each *mitzvah* has its own specific *kavanah* (intention and purpose), the *Thirteen Principles* enrich us with the general *kavanah* which underlies all of the *mitzvos.*

Notes on Method

For these reasons, among others, I have long felt it necessary that a text be prepared from which thoughtful people can study the *Thirteen Principles of Faith,* so as to come to a deeper appreciation of the basic foundations of Judaism.

Faith is, of course, something we all grapple with and it cannot be "delivered" in book-form. Genuine faith demands much thought and reflection, a process of nurturing that "sixth-sense" that we are all born with by speaking with our souls and encouraging our spiritual sensitivities to become honed and refined.

Since time immemorial, Jews have done this, not by meditating on mountain tops, but by studying the Torah. Besides providing us

with fascinating and important information, the Torah's inner light guides its student on the right path and nourishes his or her spirituality.* While this is true for all Torah texts, whatever the subject may be, studying the *Principles of Faith* is more directly rewarding in this respect than, for example, examining minutiae of law.

In this volume, we have gathered a series of classic texts which address the *Principles* from over 150 sources—beginning with the Biblical canon, Mishnah, Midrash and Talmud, spanning across the gaonic and medieval period, to the era of Jewish philosophers, the kabalists, the chasidic masters, giants of the Lithuanian school, and modern thinkers up to the twentieth century.

We begin each *Principle* with *Rambam's* original formulation, excerpted from his *Commentary to the Mishnah.* Originally, it was our intention to place this text on the top of the page and have a running commentary underneath, but *Rambam* is so brief in his formulation of the *Principles* and so much commentary is required that such a layout proved unworkable. Instead, we have isolated a number of key topics and questions that arise from *Rambam's* text and address them in a series of "lessons."

While the lessons do follow a logical sequence, in most cases they can be studied independently, without knowledge of the material that preceded it, and many crucial ideas are cross-referenced.

A weakness common to some treatments of the *Thirteen Principles* is a tendency to drift off the subject. So in the lessons, we have endeavored to address only the subject-matter of *Rambam's* text, or questions that arise from it.

While the texts have been prepared primarily for the English reader, we are aware that nowadays works of English Judaica are used by a vast cross-spectrum of readers, ranging from total beginners to those well-versed in Torah study. Therefore, all the classic texts appear here alongside their Hebrew (or Aramaic) source, so that those who are capable of studying in the original may do so. Nevertheless, our translations of the texts are specifically geared to the reader who is studying *only* in English, so we have aimed to make them as readable and digestible as possible, often choosing

*See *Eichah Rabah, Intro.* 2 and *Yefey Anaf* ibid.; Jerusalem Talmud, *Chagigah* 1:7 and *Korban ha-Eidah* ibid.; *Mesilas Yesharim,* author's introduction; *Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 4:3.

to paraphrase or summarize more intricate Hebrew passages. The English rendition will therefore be of limited value, in many instances, for those who seek a precise, linear translation, so as to familiarize themselves with Hebrew etc.

Structure of the Lessons

Since the *Kol Menachem Chumash* was published, countless readers have noted how much they enjoyed the way in which information was presented. "In most Chumashim," wrote one reader, "questions are answered but not explicitly asked. Uneducated readers are lost. In the *Kol Menachem Chumash*, questions always precede answers. This means that the reader understands what he or she is about to read. Suddenly, the text makes sense. Not only has the reader studied Torah—he or she has actually understood it."

The English commentaries in the *Chumash* were basically built around three structural elements: a.) *Classic Questions*—addressed by a series of citations from the classic commentaries. b.) *Toras Menachem*—A discussion of these texts, based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's works, encouraging the reader to explore various possible interpretations. c.) A further layer of commentary offering a Chasidic angle, entitled *Sparks of Chasidus* (insights) and *The Last Word* (practical directives).

Presenting the material in this fashion proved to be effective for a number of reasons:

i.) By engaging in a Rabbinic debate before exploring possible solutions, the reader becomes an "active" participant in a multifaceted discussion, rather than being spoon-fed from a "flat text" (as the above citation illustrates).

ii.) Those familiar with the Rebbe's teachings found it refreshing to see how his thoughts interplayed with a host of different views.

iii.) For those unfamiliar with the Rebbe's approach, this structure brought to light the Rebbe's desire to be a genuine *teacher* of Torah and not a preacher of his own ideas.*

*Rabbi Pinchas Hirshprung (1912-1998), Chief Rabbi of Montreal and world renowned Talmudic scholar, once exclaimed to the Rebbe, "I particularly enjoy the footnotes in *Likutei Sichos.* They are remarkable!"

iv.) A pleasant balance was achieved between *information* (becoming familiar with different sources), *analysis*, *inspiration* (through Chasidic insights) and *direction* (through the "Last Word" commentaries).

In this volume, we have followed a virtually identical structure. The only significant change is the addition of a further element to the commentary, entitled "A Living Example," where authentic stories culled from classical texts are used to add further illustration to various points in the discussion.

The reader should also be reminded that the *Toras Menachem* commentaries are: a.) Adaptations and not translations.** The editor has taken extreme care not to add arguments of his own. Where it was deemed necessary to add background information, additional explanation or further illustrations, this was indicated in a footnote or by the use of square brackets. b.) The material here only represents a fraction of the Rebbe's teachings which fill some two hundred volumes. c.) Many essays have been constructed from a number of sources written or spoken on different occasions. d.) We have drawn primarily from sources which were edited for publication by the Rebbe himself, though in many instances we were forced to rely on unedited transcripts which are the only existing records of many of his teachings.

Since the format of the *Toras Menachem* commentary differs considerably from its original presentation by the Rebbe himself, if the reader finds the logical sequence of ideas uneasy or if any points are lacking clarity, the shortcoming is to be attributed to the editor and not to the original author.

The Rebbe replied, "There is another purpose here, which is why I endeavor to make all the references in *Likutei Sichos:* that if somebody does not agree with the explanation I offer in the *sicha,* he will be able to study the sources for himself in Mishnah, Gemara, Midrash, Zohar and Chasidic texts, beginning with the Tanya" (*Hisvaduyos* 5748, vol. 2, p. 558).

**In reference to publishing his own teachings in English translation, the Rebbe wrote: "As I have mentioned many a time, what matters is the content and not the word-for-word translation. Therefore, you should ensure that the language is clear and the style appropriate, for the main objective is that the readers should appreciate what is written" (*Igros Kodesh* vol. 28, p. 267).

[For further details on our methodology, the source texts which were available to us, and our system of transliteration, see Foreword to the *Kol Menachem Chumash*].

Other Approaches to this Subject

One of the reasons why the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* have not yet become an extremely popular topic for Torah study, despite their centrality and the fascinating nature of the subject material, is because existing works tend towards one of two extremes: they are either too *philosophical* or too *polemical.*

Much of the source material which relates directly to the *Principles* is to be found in works of medieval Jewish Philosophy. These texts tend to be long and complex, and demand background knowledge in the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought which was in vogue at the time they were composed. Perhaps the best book on our subject, *With Perfect Faith* by Rabbi J. David Bleich (Ktav, 1983), clearly possesses this drawback. While the author offers thought-provoking introductions to each Principle and remains loyal to the subject, his selections from the classic philosophical texts are far too long and intricate for anything less than an intense academic study. He also limits himself strictly to philosophical works, and does not draw upon Talmudic and Midrashic passages which serve to illustrate the *Principles,* nor does he touch upon the vast corpus of mystical texts (kabalah and chasidus), or quote from any Acharonim (post-medieval texts) or contemporary sources.

Other works make the mistake of being too polemical: they are on the offensive to prove their point aggressively with various arguments etc. In my opinion, such an approach is of very limited effectiveness, and can even prove counterproductive, for a number of reasons.

a.) Human nature is such that when we are "attacked" with proofs for ideas which we are uncomfortable with, and may well have a vested interest in rejecting, our defenses are raised. In one letter, the Rebbe wrote,

> *"In most polemics, debates, dialogues and the like, the usual outcome is not a rapprochement of minds and hearts; rather do they evoke an impulse of rivalry and the desire to score a point, or gain a victory over the opponent by any means. This is usu-*

> *ally the case even in non-religious polemics, and certainly very much so in religious debates, inasmuch as the subject matter touches one's inner soul; and even more so where religious zealots are concerned"* (*Letters from the Rebbe*, vol. 1, p. 7).

Obviously, this stands true for a written polemic as it does for a verbal one.

b.) Logical arguments tend to come and go as they are formulated and later refuted. If a person's Judaism is based on logical proofs, then his commitment will be shaky and liable to be refuted at any time. Just as he was once convinced by an argument, he might later find it unconvincing.

Of course, this does not mean to say that we should only have blind faith and never explore our beliefs intellectually. This book was conceived on the foundation that it is important for thoughtful people to try to appreciate their beliefs intellectually as much as possible, and that faith is strengthened when intellectually supported. But when the Jews were given the Torah they declared, "We will observe *and then* we will understand" (*Shemos* 24:7), indicating that intellectual inquiry is a necessary accessory to our faith, but it should not be the basis of it.

c.) Proofs tend to send a dogmatic message that if we harbor doubts we are not cut-out for religious life, leading a person to suffer feelings of rejection.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We all possess a *yezter hara* (evil inclination), which in all but the most exceptional of cases is never eliminated. And, consequently,

> *"one should not feel depressed or very troubled at heart even if he be engaged all his days in this conflict, for perhaps this is what he was created for, and this is the service demanded of him—to subdue the forces of evil constantly"* (*Tanya,* ch. 27).

Furthermore, the fact that our doubts *trouble* us is really an expression of faith:

> *"With reference to the other topic of our correspondence, namely, my suggestion that one's protestations against G–d are in themselves proof of belief in the existence of G–d—perhaps I did not make myself clear, in that it is not the negation which I consider to be proof, so much as the manner in which it is expressed. For, when one declares his atheism once and for all,*

> *affirming that henceforth he has no place for G–d in his thoughts, lexicon and daily life, then the matter is settled and closed. However, when one asserts that G–d does not exist yet at the same time, on seeing an injustice in the world, experiences pain and promptly demands, "Where is G–d?"—his harping on the same theme again and again is proof that deep in his heart he believes in G–d—which is precisely why he feels so hurt and outraged* (Letter written by the Rebbe in 5727).

This inner kernel of faith needs to be nurtured by a gradual process of reflection and study. It cannot be built overnight by a series of proofs.

A further important point concerning the process of faith-building is that observance of the commandments plays an important role:

> *"The physical body requires a daily intake of certain elements in certain quantities obtainable through breathing and food consumption. No amount of thinking, speaking and studying all about these elements can substitute for the actual intake of air and food. All this knowledge will not add one iota of health to the body unless it is given its required physical sustenance; on the contrary, the denial of the actual intake of the required elements will weaken the mental forces of thought, concentration, etc. Thus it is obvious that the proper approach to ensure the health of the body is not by way of study first and practice afterward, but the reverse, to eat and drink and breathe, which in turn strengthen also the mental powers of study and concentration, etc.*
>
> *Similarly in the case of the soul and the elements which it requires daily for its sustenance, known best to its Creator, and which He revealed to all at Mount Sinai, in the presence of millions of witnesses, of different outlooks, walks of life, character, etc., who in turn transmitted it from generation to generation, uninterruptedly, to our day, the truth of which is thus constantly corroborated by millions of witnesses, etc.* (undated letter by the Rebbe).

Consequently,

> *"the absence of the religious practice itself handicaps the powers of the intellect to grasp the truth. Furthermore, since the human intellect is by its very nature limited, while the subject it desires to grapple with is related to the Unlimited, it is only with*

> *the aid of the Infinite G–d that one hopes to be lifted across the unbridgeable chasm separating the created and the Creator, and such Divine aid can come only through Divine service* (Letter written by the Rebbe on 18th of Sivan, 5715).

To avoid these pitfalls, we have stayed clear, for the most part, of lengthy philosophical texts. Obviously one cannot ignore the contribution of the medieval philosophers, but we have attempted to present the essence of their arguments in a few short paragraphs. The other texts cited were chosen because they make their point briefly and clearly.

Likewise, we have steered away from polemics.* The lessons aim to enlighten and inform the reader and guide him or her through the various pathways of understanding the Principles of our faith. Very often, a person's difficulty with a Principle will arise because his understanding of it is too rudimentary and simplistic. By informing the reader of the various subtleties and nuances of the last two thousand years of Rabbinic discussion, it is hoped that many foundations of our faith will be freshly illuminated.

The Rebbe on Faith

While a full-length study of the Rebbe's analytical approach to the *Thirteen Principles* (and to Torah texts in general) is most definitely a project that needs to be undertaken in the future, it would be remiss of me not to mention at least a few words here on the subject.**

*With the exception of Lesson One. Here it was deemed necessary to give at least some logical underpinning for the core of Rambam's *Eighth Principle*. Our fears of dealing with polemics were allayed in this case since the content of the lesson is excerpted *verbatim* from letters penned by the Rebbe himself which, clearly, were written with sufficient sensitivity to avoid the problems mentioned above.

**As a Chasidic Rebbe, and leader of the Jewish community at large, the Rebbe dedicated much of his life to inspiring others with faith, and was a living example of one who took faith very seriously. However, we will touch here only on his approach to the study of faith-related texts, which is the subject of this work.

First, the scope of the Rebbe's treatment is staggering. While he spoke on many topics (often revolving around the weekly Torah portion or an upcoming festival) the themes of faith recur consistently—G–d, Prophecy, the Divine authorship and eternity of the Torah, Reward and Punishment, Mashiach, and Resurrection. If one were to collect all this material, it would no doubt fill many thousands of pages.

This persistent interest in faith is, in fact, quite unusual for a Torah scholar who had mastered both Talmuds and a vast array of other important texts. Most Rabbinic writing does not repeatedly stress the need for faith or discuss its parameters, except those works which are exclusively dedicated to the subject, such as the philosophical and *mussar* literature, etc. It is therefore quite remarkable that even amid complex legal discussions of Talmud, *Mishneh Torah* and Halachah, the Rebbe would, almost inevitably, find an opportunity to address faith issues.

A second point worthy of note is that the Rebbe approached faith-related texts with a level of analytical sophistication normally reserved for advanced Talmudic dialectics. Studying the *Principles of Faith* thus becomes an intellectually challenging enterprise, as this volume clearly demonstrates.

A third outstanding feature is the Rebbe's willingness to deal with difficult questions. When preparing the *Classic Questions* commentaries, it often surprised me how hard it was to find solutions for some glaringly obvious questions. This is all the more perplexing when one considers that modern research techniques, especially through the use of computers, and the general availability of information nowadays, means that we have at our fingertips many more texts than were accessible in the past. It is therefore notable that the Rebbe had a significant scholarly contribution to make on all of the twenty-eight issues addressed by the lessons of this book—and this is despite the fact that he never addressed the *Thirteen Principles* formally or systematically.

A final point—and this strikes me as being the most outstanding of all—is the *way* in which the Rebbe dealt with faith questions. As the reader will discover over the next few hundred pages, there are numerous statements of the Talmud, Midrash and later authorities which appear, at first glance, to be inconsistent with, or worse still, a contradiction to Rambam's *Principles*. For example, *Principle Nine* states categorically that the Torah will never be annulled, and yet

at least one view in the Talmud maintains that the commandments will be annulled in the future (*Nidah* 61b).

This leaves us in a conundrum. Apparently, something is going to have to "give-way": either our strict adherence to the simple meaning of the Talmud's words, our unquestioning faith in the *Ninth Principle*. In fact, the commentators tend to follow one of these two paths, either arguing that Talmud's "annulment" does not mean what it may at first seem; or by partially delimiting the scope of the *Ninth Principle*, proposing that it is only applicable before the Resurrection, but not afterwards.

While both interpretations are clearly within the pale of Orthodoxy, the Rebbe was dissatisfied with both of them. Our instinctive soul-reaction to both texts (the Talmud and the *Ninth Principle*) was to take them literally, and, in the Rebbe's view, we must seek to uphold that pure faith with an intellectually rigorous solution (see *Principle* 9*, Lesson* 8 for how the Rebbe deals with this problem).

Thus, repeatedly in this volume, the reader will find instances where the absolute integrity of one of the Principles appears to be challenged by a genuine Torah source, and the Rebbe demands a solution which confirms both our faith in the Principles and in the precision of Torah texts.

Furthermore, in many instances, the Rebbe succeeds in "turning the tables," and transforming something which was a *question* on the Principles into an argument which *supports* them. For example, the reader who is initially disturbed by the fact that the Oral Law contains so many differences of opinion, may be uplifted to hear that this actually represents something very beautiful: G–d's desire that the Torah be meaningful to us and sensitive to *our* condition, which is why He gave man the right to express his own opinion (see *Principle* 8, *Lesson* 5, and also *Lessons* 8-10).

In this, and so many other cases, the Rebbe's insights uplift, not merely by solving problems, but by uncovering an inner sanctity in the question itself. Darkness has not merely been dispelled, it it has been transformed to light.

Notes & Acknowledgements

The publication of the current volume, which contains commentary on Rambam's *Eighth* and *Ninth Principles* (Divine authorship and eternity of the Torah), has been arranged to coincide with the Festival of Shavuos 5767 (2007), when the Giving of the Torah will be celebrated for the 3319th time. We have also added an appendix discussing the Rebbe's view on conflicts between science and Torah, an issue which poses a significant challenge to fully embracing the *Eighth Principle* for many in our generation.

Further volumes, which are currently in preparation, will, G–d willing, address the remaining Principles.

Kol Menachem gratefully acknowledges the generous support and tireless dedication of our founding patron **Rabbi Meyer Gutnick.** For the past five years Rabbi Gutnick has not only kept our organization financially afloat, he has also devoted thousands of hours of his personal time to assisting our work and ensuring that our publications receive the widest publicity possible. His vision is to bring words of Torah, especially as they are illuminated by the teachings of Chasidus, to the English speaking world, with unprecedented clarity and quality of presentation—and it is a task which he carries out with the loyal dedication of a chasid.

In 2006 we had the privilege of welcoming a new partner to our enterprise, **Mr. David Slager**, who generously dedicated the Synagogue Edition of the *Kol Menachem Chumash.* His warm encouragement and continuing support have enabled us to expand the scope of our activities significantly and bring many more works to the public. This volume proudly bears his name, the *Slager Edition,* and is dedicated to the entire Slager family, **David, Lara** and their precious children **Hannah** and **Sara Malka.** May the merit of spreading words of Torah, illuminated by the teachings of Chasidus to thousands across the globe be a source of blessing for them for generations to come.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the following people who have assisted in producing this volume: Rabbi Itzick Yarmush, my dear colleague and friend who spent hundreds of hours discussing and clarifying the source material with me, and painstakingly checked the *Toras Menachem* commentaries against their source texts. I also received invaluable editorial assistance from Rabbi Mendy Lent, Rabbi Asher Lowenstein, Rabbi Zvi Homnick, Rabbi

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Finally, I would like to thank all those readers who took the time to send in positive feedback to our previous works, making what is sometimes a lonely profession into an extremely rewarding one.

May we soon merit the true and complete redemption, when all the Jewish people will be totally free to observe G–d's commands and study his Torah.

Rabbi Chaim Miller
General Editor
Kol Menachem
Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5767

One must educate a child in all areas of Torah and mitzvos, especially in the Thirteen Principles of Faith.

(Sichas Shabbos Parshas Terumah 5741)

In response to the questions in your letter.... What are the correct beliefs that a person should have? Those expressed by the classic statements of "Ani Ma'amin."

(Igros Kodesh vol. 15, p. 277)

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

(Igros Kodesh vol. 26, p. 88)

The 8th Principle

היסוד השמיני

Rambam's Text

The 8th Principle: Divine Authorship of the Torah

Rambam
Commentary to the Mishnah

The *Eighth Principle* is the Divine authorship of the Torah. Namely, that we are to believe that the whole Torah which is found in our hands today, is that which was given by Moshe our teacher, peace unto him, and is all from the mouth of the Almighty. In other words, it all was conveyed to him by G–d in a manner which is referred to metaphorically as "speech," though the only person who knew the true nature of that communication was Moshe, peace unto him, because he was the one who actually received it. He was like a scribe writing from dictation who chronicled the events of those days, both the episodes and the laws, and it is for this reason that he is referred to in scripture as an "engraver" (*Bamidbar* 21:18).

וְהַיְסוֹד הַשְּׁמִינִי — הֱיוֹת הַתּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. וְהוּא: שֶׁנַּאֲמִין, כִּי כָּל הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת הַמְּצוּיָה בְיָדֵינוּ עַתָּה, הִיא הַנְּתוּנָה עַל יְדֵי מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם, שֶׁהִיא כֻּלָּהּ מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה, כְּלוֹמַר: שֶׁהִגִּיעָה אֵלָיו כֻּלָּהּ מֵאֵת ה' יִתְבָּרֵךְ, בְּעִנְיָן שֶׁנִּקְרָא עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁאָלָה "דִּבּוּר". וְאֵין יָדוּעַ הֵיאַךְ הִגִּיעָה, אֶלָּא הוּא מֹשֶׁה עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם, שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לוֹ, וְכִי הוּא הָיָה כְּמוֹ סוֹפֵר שֶׁקּוֹרְאִין לוֹ וְהוּא כּוֹתֵב כָּל מְאֹרְעוֹת הַיָּמִים, הַסִּפּוּרִים וְהַמִּצְוֹות. וּלְפִיכָךְ נִקְרָא "מְחוֹקֵק".

[Apparently unimportant] verses such as *"And the children of Cham were Kush and Mitzrayim"* (*Bereishis* 10:6), *"His wife's name was Mehaytavail bas Matrayd"* (ibid. 36:39), and *"Timnah was a*

וְאֵין הֶפְרֵשׁ בֵּין "וּבְנֵי חָם כּוּשׁ וּמִצְרַיִם וּפוּט וּכְנָעַן", "וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ מְהֵיטַבְאֵל בַּת מַטְרֵד", "וְתִמְנַע הָיְתָה פִּילֶגֶשׁ", וּבֵין

concubine" (ibid. 36:12), are no different from [overtly significant] verses such as *"I am G–d your G–d"* (*Shemos* 20:2), and *"Hear O Israel"* (*Devarim* 6:4), since they are all from the Almighty's mouth. It is all *"the perfect Torah of G–d"* (*Psalms* 19:8), which is pure, holy, and true.

"אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ" וּ"שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד", כִּי הַכֹּל מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה, וְהַכֹּל תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה טְהוֹרָה וּקְדוֹשָׁה וֶאֱמֶת.

A person who says "these few verses and episodes were written independently by Moshe" is considered by our Sages and Prophets to be a heretic, one who corrupts the Torah more than all other heretics. For he believes that the Torah has a "core" and a "shell" and that these historical events and episodes serve no useful purpose and are consequently the independent product of Moshe! This is the meaning of one who "denies the Divine authorship of the Torah" (*Sanhedrin* 10:1).

וְזֶה שֶׁאוֹמֵר, שֶׁכָּתְבוֹ אֵלֶּה הַפְּסוּקִים וְהַסִּפּוּרִים מֹשֶׁה סִפְּרָם מִדַּעְתּוֹ, הִנֵּה הוּא אֵצֶל חֲכָמֵינוּ וּנְבִיאֵינוּ כּוֹפֵר וּמְגַלֶּה פָּנִים יוֹתֵר מִכָּל הַכּוֹפְרִים, לְפִי שֶׁחָשַׁב שֶׁיֵּשׁ בַּתּוֹרָה לֵב וּקְלִפָּה, וְשֶׁאֵלֶּה דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים וְהַסִּפּוּרִים אֵין תּוֹעֶלֶת בָּהֶם, וְשֶׁהֵם מֵאֵת מֹשֶׁה. וְזֶהוּ עִנְיַן "אֵין תּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם".

Our Sages of blessed memory taught: *"Any person who believes that the whole Torah is from the Almighty with the exception of one verse which he claims that G–d did not utter, but was said independently by Moshe, is guilty of having 'disdained G–d's word'"* (*Bamidbar* 15:31; *Sanhedrin* 99b)—May G–d be exalted far and beyond such heretical slander!

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמֵינוּ זִכְרוֹנָם לִבְרָכָה: "הוּא הַמַּאֲמִין שֶׁכָּל הַתּוֹרָה מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה חוּץ מִפָּסוּק זֶה, שֶׁלֹּא אֲמָרוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֶלָּא מֹשֶׁה מִפִּי עַצְמוֹ". וְזֶה "כִּי דְבַר ה' בָּזָה". הַשֵּׁם יִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְבָּרֵךְ מִמַּאֲמַר הַכּוֹפְרִים.

In truth, every word of the Torah contains immense wisdom and phenomenal insights for those who are capable of discerning them, though their full profundity can never be grasped—*"Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea"* (Job 11:9). A person need only but follow in the footsteps of David,

אֶלָּא: כָּל דִּבּוּר וְדִבּוּר מִן הַתּוֹרָה יֵשׁ בָּהֶן חָכְמוֹת וּפְלָאִים לְמִי שֶׁמֵּבִין אוֹתָם, וְלֹא תֵשַׂג תַּכְלִית חָכְמָתָהּ. "אָרְכָּהּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִדָּהּ, וּרְחָבָהּ מִנִּי יָם". וְאֵין לָאִישׁ אֶלָּא לְהַלֵּךְ בְּעִקְבוֹת דָּוִד,

anointed one of the G–d of Ya'akov, who prayed, *"Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things in your Torah"* (Psalms 119:18).

מְשִׁיחַ אֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב, שֶׁהִתְפַּלֵּל: גַּל עֵינַי וְאַבִּיטָה נִפְלָאוֹת מִתּוֹרָתֶךָ.

The above also stands true for the orally transmitted interpretation of the Torah, which was likewise received from the Almighty's mouth.

וְכֵן כֵּן פֵּרוּשׁ הַתּוֹרָה הַמְקֻבָּל, גַּם כֵּן מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה.

Thus, the way in which we observe today the precepts of *Succah, Lulav, Shofar, Tzitzis,* and *Tefilin* etc., is precisely the same way that G–d, blessed be He, told Moshe, who then informed us. And the one whom G–d appointed as His agent is surely to be relied upon.

וְזֶה שֶׁאָנוּ עוֹשִׂים הַיּוֹם מִתַּבְנִית הַסֻּכָּה וְלוּלָב וְשׁוֹפָר וְצִיצִית וּתְפִלִּין וְזוּלָתָם, הוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ הַתַּבְנִית אֲשֶׁר אָמַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ לְמֹשֶׁה, וְהוּא אָמַר לָנוּ, וְהוּא הַמַּגִּיעַ שְׁלִיחוּת — נֶאֱמָן בִּשְׁלִיחוּתוֹ.

The verse which teaches this principle is: *"Moshe said, 'Through this you will know that G–d authorized me to carry out all these acts, for it was not from my own heart'"* (*Bamidbar* 16:28).

וְהַמַּאֲמָר הַמּוֹרֶה עַל הַיְסוֹד הַזֶּה, הוּא מַה שֶּׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, בְּזֹאת תֵּדְעוּן כִּי ה' שְׁלָחַנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים הָאֵלֶּה, כִּי לֹא מִלִּבִּי.

Points to Remember...

- G–d dictated the Torah to Moshe.
- Every part of the Torah, even something that seems unimportant, is crucial.
- Every word of the Torah contains immense wisdom and phenomenal insights.
- The Oral Torah, which explains the Written Law, was also given from the Almighty's mouth to Moshe.

Lesson 1

A Logical Approach to Sinai

In This Lesson

- Logical, scientific proof that the Torah was given at Sinai.
- The difference between Judaism and other religions.
- Why every detail of the Torah is crucial.

Classic Question | ***How can we be assured of the Torah's authenticity?***

Sa'adia Ga'on

A report, unlike something perceived by the senses, could be distorted in two ways: Either, a.) through a mistaken understanding; or, b.) through willful falsification....

הַסִּפּוּר אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּפֹּל בּוֹ הֶפְסֵד מַה שֶּׁלֹּא יִתָּכֵן בְּמוּחָשׁ מִשְּׁתֵּי סִבּוֹת: הָאַחַת מִדֶּרֶךְ הַמַּחֲשָׁבָה, וְהַשֵּׁנִית מִדֶּרֶךְ הַזָּדוֹן ...

Mistaken ideas and deliberate falsification can only occur and remain unnoticed if they are the product of individuals. A large group, however, will not all make the same mistake, and if they decide to fabricate a report, they will not all be able to keep it secret....

כִּי הַמַּחֲשָׁבָה וְהַזָּדוֹן לֹא יִפָּלוּ וְיֵעָלְמוּ אֶלָּא לִבּוֹדְדִים, אֲבָל הַקִּבּוּץ הַמְּרֻבֶּה הֲרֵי מַחְשְׁבוֹתֵיהֶם לֹא יִשְׁתַּוּוּ, וְאִם יָזִידוּ וְיַסְכִּימוּ לְיַצֵּר סִפּוּר לֹא יֵעָלֵם הַדָּבָר בִּפְנֵי רַבִּים מֵהֶם ...

Thus, when a report is safe against these two said types of falsification, there is no third way in which it could possibly be distorted.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר הַסִּפּוּר נָקִי מִשְּׁנֵי אֵלֶּה, אֵין שׁוּם דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלִישִׁית הַגּוֹרֶמֶת הֶפְסֵדוֹ.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר אָנוּ מַעֲמִידִים סִפּוּרֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ עַל פִּי הַיְסוֹדוֹת הַלָּלוּ, יִמְצָאֵם הַבּוֹדֵק שְׁלֵמִים מִטְּעָנוֹת אֵלֶּה, אֲמִתִּיִּים וְקַיָּמִים. (אמונות ודעות מאמר שלישי אות ו')

If the reports of our ancestors will be examined according to these principles, it will be evident that they are safe from these criticisms and that they are true and firmly established (*Beliefs and Opinions* 3:6).

... אָז שָׁלַח לִקְרֹא לְאַחַד הַחֲכָמִים הַיְּהוּדִיִּים וַיִּשְׁאָלֵהוּ לֶאֱמוּנָתוֹ.

Kuzari | [The Prince of Khazar] invited a Rabbi and asked him about his beliefs.

אָמַר לוֹ הֶחָבֵר: אֲנִי מַאֲמִין בֵּאלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאוֹתוֹת וּבְמוֹפְתִים מִמִּצְרַיִם, וְכִלְכְּלָם בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהִנְחִילָם אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אַחֲרֵי אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱבִירָם אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמוֹפְתִים רַבִּים, וַאֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח אֲלֵיהֶם אֶת מֹשֶׁה בְּתוֹרָתוֹ וְאַחֲרָיו אַלְפֵי נְבִיאִים שֶׁכֻּלָּם קָרְאוּ אֶל תּוֹרָתוֹ בְּיֵעָדָם שָׂכָר טוֹב לְכָל שׁוֹמְרָהּ וְעֹנֶשׁ לְכָל עוֹבֵר עָלֶיהָ. אֲנַחְנוּ מַאֲמִינִים בְּכָל הַכָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וְהַדְּבָרִים אֲרֻכִּים.

[The Rabbi replied:] I believe in the G–d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, who took the Israelites out of Egypt with miracles and wondrous acts; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land of Cana'an, after bringing them across the sea and the Jordan in an extremely miraculous way; who sent Moshe with His law, and then thousands of prophets, who confirmed His law by promising reward to the observant, and punishment to the disobedient. We believe in everything that is written in this Torah, and the matter is an extremely broad one.

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: ... וְכִי לֹא הָיָה לְךָ לֵאמֹר אַתָּה הַיְּהוּדִי, כִּי מַאֲמִין אַתָּה בְּבוֹרֵא הָעוֹלָם וּמְסַדְּרוֹ וּמַנְהִיגוֹ, הוּא אֲשֶׁר בְּרָאֲךָ וְהוּא הַמַּטְרִיפְךָ לֶחֶם חֻקֶּךָ, וְכַדּוֹמֶה מִן הַתְּאָרִים הָאֱלוֹקִיִּים בָּהֶם יַאֲמִין כָּל בַּעַל דָּת, וּבְגָלָלָם שׁוֹאֵף הוּא אֵל–ל הָאֱמֶת וְאֵל–ל הַצֶּדֶק בִּרְצוֹתוֹ לְהִדָּמוֹת לַבּוֹרֵא בְּחָכְמָתוֹ וּבְצִדְקוֹ?

Prince of Kuzari: ...Shouldn't you have said to me, O Jew, that you believe in the Creator of the world, its Governor and Guide, Who created you and sustains you? Or some similar Divine attributes in which every religious person believes? Aren't these the things which have led you to pursue the G–d of truth and justice, since you wish to mirror the G–dly attributes of wisdom and justice?

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: מַה שֶּׁאַתָּה אוֹמֵר נָכוֹן הוּא בַּנּוֹגֵעַ לְדָת הַמְיֻסָּדֶת

Rabbi: What you are saying is true for a doctrine which is based on

עַל הַהִגָּיוֹן ... אָמְנָם מִן הָעִיּוּן אַךְ נוֹפְלִים בָּהּ סְפֵקוֹת רַבִּים. וְאִם עָלֶיהָ תִּשְׁאַל אֶת הַפִּילוֹסוֹפִים, לֹא תִמְצָאֵם מַסְכִּימִים עַל מַעֲשֶׂה אֶחָד וְלֹא לְדֵעָה אַחַת, כִּי דָּת כָּזֹאת בְּנוּיָה עַל טְעָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר רַק חֵלֶק מֵהֶן יְכוֹלִים הַפִּילוֹסוֹפִים לְהוֹכִיחַ בְּמוֹפֵת, וְאִלּוּ עַל אֲחֵרוֹת נִתָּן לְהָבִיא רְאָיוֹת מַסְפִּיקוֹת בִּלְבָד ...

rational speculation...but from logic alone many doubts can arise. If you'll inquire from the philosophers you'll find that they can't agree on one approach or one principle. Because such rational systems can be established only by logical arguments, of which only some can the philosophers prove to be conclusive, and others can be substantiated only with tenuous proofs....

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: רוֹאֶה אֲנִי דְּבָרְךָ זֶה יְהוּדִי מִתְקַבֵּל עַל הַדַּעַת יוֹתֵר מִדִּבְרֵי הַפִּתְיָחָה. וְהִנְנִי רוֹצֶה כָּעֵת לְהוֹסִיף וּלְהַקְשִׁיב לִדְבָרֶיךָ.

Kuzari: What you are telling me now, O Jew, makes more sense than your introductory comments. I would now like to hear more of what you have to say.

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: אוּלָם פָּתַח דְּבָרַי הוּא הוּא הַמּוֹפֵת, גְּדוֹלָה מִזֹּאת, הוּא הַהוֹכָחָה שֶׁאַחֲרֶיהָ אֵין צֹרֶךְ לֹא בִּרְאָיָה וְלֹא בְּמוֹפֵת.

Rabbi: Actually, my initial statement was, in fact, a powerful proof of this point. In fact, it is an argument so strong that no further proof or evidence is required.

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: וְאֵיךְ זֶה?

Kuzari: How is that?

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: תֵּן לִי רְשׁוּת לְהַקְדִּים הַקְדָּמוֹת אֲחָדוֹת, כִּי רוֹאֶה אֲנִי דְּבָרַי קָשִׁים עָלֶיךָ וְנִקָּלִים בְּעֵינַי.

Rabbi: Allow me to make a few preliminary remarks, because I see that you are not appreciating what I am saying.

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: הַקְדֵּם הַקְדָּמוֹתֶיךָ וְאֶשְׁמָעֵן.

Kuzari: Let me hear what you have to say.

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: אִלּוּ אָמְרוּ לְךָ כִּי מֶלֶךְ הוֹדוּ אִישׁ חֶסֶד הוּא וְעָלֶיךָ לְהַעֲרִיצוֹ וּלְהַגְדִּיל שְׁמוֹ וּלְסַפֵּר מַעֲשָׂיו חַסְדּוֹ, וְכָל זֶה רַק לְפִי שְׁמוּעָה שֶׁהִגִּיעָה אֵלֶיךָ עַל דְּבַר צִדְקַת אַנְשֵׁי אַרְצוֹ וּמִדּוֹתֵיהֶם

Rabbi: If you were told that the King of India was a kind man, and that you should therefore pronounce him as being great and praise his kind acts, and that you should do this only on the basis of a report you have heard about the righteousness of his people,

Kuzari (cont.)

their fine character and honest business dealings, would this be sufficiently convincing for you?

הַטּוֹבוֹת וּמַשָּׂאָם וּמַתָּנָם בֶּאֱמוּנָה, הַאִם הָיִיתָ רוֹאֶה צֹרֶךְ לְנַפְשְׁךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן?

Kuzari: Why should this be convincing for me when the matter is uncertain, for perhaps the Indian people themselves are in any case righteous? In fact, how do we know that they have a king at all? On the other hand, it is conceivable that the righteousness is because of the King, or perhaps, due to both the King and the nation?

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: מַדּוּעַ אֶרְאֶה צֹרֶךְ כָּזֶה לְנַפְשִׁי, הָיִיתִי מֵטִיל סָפֵק בַּדָּבָר אוּלַי צַדְקַת אַנְשֵׁי הֹדּוּ מִצַּד עַצְמָם הִיא? אַף יִתָּכֵן כִּי אֵין לָהֶם מֶלֶךְ כְּלָל, וְאוּלַי בֶּאֱמֶת מִצַּד מַלְכָּם הִיא, וְאוּלַי מִשְּׁנֵי הַצְּדָדִים גַּם יַחַד?

Rabbi: Now supposing the King's messengers came to you bringing various presents which you know for a fact are only to be found in an Indian royal palace, accompanied by a letter which is clearly written by the King of India.

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: אוּלָם אִלּוּ בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ מַלְאֲכֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַהוּא בִּתְשׁוּרוֹת אֲשֶׁר אֵין לְהָטִיל סָפֵק בַּדָּבָר כִּי נִמְצָאוֹת הֵן אַךְ וְרַק בְּאַרְמְנוֹת מַלְכֵי הֹדּוּ, וּבְמִכְתָּב אֲשֶׁר בָּרוּר לְךָ כִּי רַק מִמֶּלֶךְ הֹדּוּ הוּא, וְלַמִּכְתָּב מְצֹרָפִים סַמֵּי תְּרוּפוֹת הַמְרַפְּאִים אוֹתְךָ מִכָּל מַדְוֶיךָ וְשׁוֹמְרִים עַל בְּרִיאוּתְךָ, וְסַמֵּי מָוֶת לְאוֹיְבֶיךָ וּלְכָל הַלּוֹחֲמִים בְּךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּפִּילֵם בְּיָצאתְךָ לְקִרְאתָם בְּלֹא חֲיָלוֹת וּבְלֹא כְּלֵי מִלְחָמָה, הַאִם לֹא הָיִיתָ חַיָּב אָז לָסוּר אֶל מִשְׁמַעְתּוֹ?

Enclosed with the letter are drugs which heal all your illnesses and protect your health, poisons for all your enemies or anyone who dares to fight with you, and other means to fight and kill them without armies or weapons, would this not be convincing for you?

Kuzari: Yes it would. For this would remove my initial doubt whether the Indians have a king and I would believe that evidence of his power and dominion had reached me.

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: אָמְנָם כֵּן. כִּי אָז הָיָה הַסָּפֵק הָרִאשׁוֹן אִם אָמְנָם יֵשׁ לְאַנְשֵׁי הֹדּוּ מֶלֶךְ מִסְתַּלֵּק מִמֶּנִּי, וְאָז הָיִיתִי מַאֲמִין כִּי שִׁלְטוֹן מֶלֶךְ הֹדּוּ וּפְקֻדָּתוֹ נוֹגְעִים גַּם לִי.

Rabbi: So if you were asked about the King, how would you describe him?

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: וְאִם יִשְׁאָלְךָ אָז הַשּׁוֹאֵל לַמֶּלֶךְ זֶה, בַּמֶּה תְּתָאֲרֵהוּ?

Kuzari: Firstly, I would state what had been clearly proven to me with

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: רִאשׁוֹנָה בְּאוֹתָם הַתְּאָרִים אֲשֶׁר נִתְבָּרְרוּ אֲצָלִי

מִתּוֹךְ מַה שֶּׁרָאוּ עֵינַי, וְאַחֲרֵיהֶם בְּתִאָרִים שֶׁהִטַּלְתִּי בָּהֶם סָפֵק לְפָנַי זֶה אַחַר אַחֲרֵי כֵן נִתְבָּרְרוּ לִי עַל יְדֵי אֵלֶּה.

my own eyes. After that, I would describe the things that I had initially been skeptical about, but were later clarified to me by these proofs.

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: וּמֵעַיִן זֶה הֲשִׁבְתִּיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר שְׁאַלְתַּנִי אַתָּה, וּבְדוֹמֶה לָזֶה אָמַר מֹשֶׁה בְּפָתַח דְּבָרָיו בְּדַבְּרוֹ אֶל פַּרְעֹה "אֱלֹקֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלָחַנִי אֵלֶיךָ" רְצוֹנוֹ לוֹמַר אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, כִּי הָיָה דָּבָר הָאָבוֹת מְפֻרְסָם אָז בָּאֻמּוֹת, וְנוֹדַע כִּי הָעִנְיָן הָאֱלֹקִי נִתְחַבֵּר עִמָּם וְהִשְׁגִּיחַ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעָשָׂה לָהֶם נִפְלָאוֹת, וְלָכֵן לֹא אָמַר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה לְפַרְעֹה "אֱלֹקֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ שְׁלָחַנִי אֵלֶיךָ" וְלֹא "בּוֹרְאִי וּבוֹרַאֲךָ שְׁלָחַנִי אֵלֶיךָ", וְכֵן פָּתַח הָאֱלוֹ–הַ בְּדַבְּרוֹ אֶל כָּל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "אָנֹכִי יְיָ אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם" וְלֹא אָמַר "אֲנִי בּוֹרֵא הָעוֹלָם וּבוֹרַאֲכֶם".

Rabbi: This, precisely, was the way I responded to your initial inquiry.

Similarly, Moshe made his opening words to Pharaoh, *"The G–d of the Hebrews sent me to you"* (*Shemos* 7:16), namely, the G–d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. For the phenomenon of the Patriarchs was well known at the time to the nations, and they knew that a Divine being communicated with them, that He looked after them, and performed miracles for them. Thus Moshe did not say to Pharaoh, "The G–d of heaven and earth," or "Our Creator sent me."

Likewise, G–d's opening words to the assembled people of Israel were, *"I am the G–d your G–d who took you out of the land of Egypt"* (ibid. 20:2), but He did not say, "I am the Creator of the world and your Creator."

וְכֵן פְּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי בַּהֲשִׁיבִי לְךָ שַׂר הַכּוּזָרִים כַּאֲשֶׁר שְׁאַלְתַּנִי לֶאֱמוּנָתִי, בְּהוֹדִיעִי אוֹתְךָ מַה הוּא הַדָּבָר הַמְחַיֵּב אוֹתִי וְהַמְחַיֵּב אֶת כָּל עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל, דָּבָר שֶׁנִּתְבָּרֵר לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּרִאשׁוֹנָה עַל פִּי רְאוֹת עֵינַיִם, וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן נִמְסַר לְאִישׁ מִפִּי אִישׁ בְּקַבָּלָה הַדּוֹמָה לְמַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם. (מאמר ראשון אות י – כ"ה)

My initial response to you, Prince of Kuzari, when you asked me about my faith was in the same vein. I stated to you what obligates me and the whole Jewish people. I explained to you something which was initially clarified to the Jewish people with their own eyes, and subsequently transmitted through an uninterrupted tradition which is equivalent to seeing with one's own eyes (Part I, par. 10-25).

Classic Question | *How can it be demonstrated that the Oral Tradition is genuine?*

Ikarim | Perfection means that no enhancement or flaw is imaginable. Since King David described the Torah as being "perfect" (Psalms 19:8), it must contain no flaw that would prevent it from being absolutely perfect.

הַדָּבָר הַשָּׁלֵם הוּא אֲשֶׁר לֹא יְדֻמֶּה עָלָיו תּוֹסֶפֶת וְלֹא חִסָּרוֹן, וְאַחַר שֶׁנִּמְצָא דָּוִד יְתָאֵר תּוֹרַת הַשֵּׁם בְּשֶׁהִיא "תְּמִימָה", הִנֵּה אִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּהְיֶה בָּהּ שׁוּם חִסָּרוֹן לְהַגָּעַת שְׁלֵמוּתָהּ וְתַכְלִיתָהּ.

Now, any written document is liable to various, opposing interpretations, to the extent that one person will espouse a certain argument and another will contradict it....Therefore, in order for G–d's Torah to be perfect and understood correctly it is a logical imperative that when G–d gave Moshe the Written Law He must have explained to him the correct meaning. Moshe must have likewise done so to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets, and so on through the generations, so that no uncertainty should arise as to the correct meaning of the written text.

וּמֵאֲשֶׁר כָּל דָּבָר הַנִּכְתָּב מֵאֵיזֶה מִין שֶׁיִּהְיֶה כְּבָר אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיּוּבַן בִּשְׁתֵּי הֲבָנוֹת מִתְחַלְּפוֹת, עַד שֶׁאֶפְשָׁר שֶׁתִּהְיֶה הֲבָנָה הָאַחַת מַסְכֶּמֶת לְכַוָּנַת הָאוֹמֵר וְהַשֵּׁנִית מִתְחַלֶּפֶת לָהּ מִכֹּל וְכֹל ... בַּעֲבוּר זֶה הָיָה מְחֻיָּב כְּדֵי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ תְּמִימָה וְתוּבַן עַל הַכַּוָּנָה הָרְאוּיָה, שֶׁבְּתֹת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ אוֹתָהּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה בִּכְתָב יְפָרֵשׁ אוֹתָהּ לוֹ עַל הַכַּוָּנָה הָרְאוּיָה. וְכֵן מֹשֶׁה לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכֵן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לִזְקֵנִים וּזְקֵנִים לִנְבִיאִים וְכֵן דּוֹר אַחַר דּוֹר, כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִפֹּל שׁוּם סָפֵק בַּהֲבָנַת הַכְּתָב כְּפִי מַה שֶּׁרָאוּי.

This explanation of the Written Law, which was transmitted from Moshe to Yehoshua, and by Yehoshua to those that followed him, is called the "Oral Law," because it is impossible to write down this explanation. For any written text would render itself open to variant interpretations, as explained above in reference to the original text, and consequently a further explanation will be required of this "interpretation," and so on *ad infinitum*.

וְהַפֵּרוּשׁ הַזֶּה מֵהַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבִּכְתָב שֶׁמָּסַר מֹשֶׁה לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ וִיהוֹשֻׁעַ לַבָּאִים אַחֲרָיו הוּא שֶׁקָּרְאוּ תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה, לְפִי שֶׁאִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיָּבֹא הַפֵּרוּשׁ הַזֶּה בִּכְתָב, כִּי בַּכְּתָב הַהוּא יִפֹּל גַּם כֵּן הַסָּפֵק שֶׁאָמַרְנוּ שֶׁיִּפֹּל בַּמִּכְתָּב הָרִאשׁוֹן וְיִצְטָרֵךְ פֵּרוּשׁ לַפֵּרוּשׁ, וְכֵן לְבִלְתִּי תַכְלִית.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁקָּרָה לְחִבּוּר הַמִּשְׁנָיוֹת שֶׁהוּא פֵּרוּשׁ תּוֹרָה שֶׁבִּכְתָב, שֶׁנָּפַל בּוֹ מִן הַסָּפֵק וְהַמְּבוּכָה עַד שֶׁהֶצְרַךְ לְפֵרוּשׁ אַחֵר וְהוּא חִבּוּר הַגְּמָרָא שֶׁעָשָׂה רַב אַשִׁי לְפָרֵשׁ הַמִּשְׁנָיוֹת. וְכֵן הַגְּמָרָא שֶׁהוּא פֵּרוּשׁ הַמִּשְׁנָיוֹת הֶצְרַךְ לְפֵרוּשׁ גַּם כֵּן, וְרַבּוּ עָלָיו הַפֵּרוּשִׁים וְחִלּוּקֵי הַסְּבָרוֹת, וְכֵן עַל הַפֵּרוּשִׁים גַּם כֵּן.

This is precisely what occurred to the text of the Mishnah, which is an explanation of the Written Law. Its meaning became unclear, such that a super-commentary was required, which is the Talmud, authored by Rav Ashi to clarify the Mishnah. Likewise, the Talmud, which was meant to clarify the Mishnah, itself required a further explanation, and many commentaries were authored offering variant interpretations. These commentaries then engendered further commentary, and so on.

וּלְזֶה הוּא מְבֹאָר שֶׁאִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁתִּהְיֶה הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבִּכְתָב שְׁלֵמָה אִם לֹא בְּהִמָּצֵא עִמָּהּ הַפֵּרוּשׁ הַזֶּה עַל פֶּה, וְזֶהוּ הַנִּקְרָא תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה. (מאמר שלישי פרק כ״ג)

Thus we have explained that it would be impossible for the Written Law to be perfect unless it were accompanied by an oral interpretation, which is what we refer to as the "Oral Law" (Part 3, chapter 23).

Kuzari

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: וּבְאֵיזוֹ צוּרָה סָבוּר אַתָּה מָסַר מֹשֶׁה אֶת סִפְרוֹ לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל?

Rabbi: In what manner do you think Moshe gave the Torah Scroll to the Jewish people?

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: אֵין סָפֵק כִּי זֶה הָיָה סֵפֶר חָלָק אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָיוּ בּוֹ לֹא נְקוּד וְלֹא טְעָמִים, מֵעֵין הַסְּפָרִים אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדֵינוּ הַיּוֹם ...

Prince of Kuzari: Undoubtedly, it was a simple scroll, without vowels and cantillation marks, just like the Torah scrolls which are in our possession today...

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: אִם כֵּן הַקַּבָּלָה חוֹבָה עָלֵינוּ ... כָּל הַמּוֹדֶה כִּי זֹאת הַתּוֹרָה הַמְּצוּיָה עַתָּה בְּיָדֵינוּ וּבְדֶרֶךְ הַקְּרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר אָנוּ קוֹרְאִים בָּהּ הִיא תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם.

Rabbi: Obviously, then, the vowels and cantillation marks were preserved by memory....Thus any person who accepts that we read the Torah in this way is effectively accepting the Oral tradition of Moshe.

Kuzari (cont.)

אָמַר הַכּוּזָרִי: כַּךְ אוֹמְרִים גַּם הַקָּרָאִים, אוּלָם מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁמָּצְאוּ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה תְּמִימָה סוֹבְרִים הֵם כִּי אֵין צֹרֶךְ בַּקַּבָּלָה.

Kuzari: The Karaites* agree on this point. But since they find the Torah to be perfect as it is, they consider the Oral tradition superfluous.

אָמַר הֶחָבֵר: יִשְׁמְרֵנוּ הָאֵ–ל מִדֵּעָה זוֹ, שֶׁהֲרֵי אִם לְשֵׁם הַקְּרִיאָה הַנְּכוֹנָה שֶׁל תֵּבוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו שֶׁל סֵפֶר חָלָק זֶה סֵפֶר מֹשֶׁה עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם הֻצְרַכְנוּ לְקַבָּלָה מֵאֵת סִיעוֹת רַבּוֹת שֶׁל בַּעֲלֵי נִקּוּד בַּעֲלֵי טְעָמִים מְסַמְּנֵי פָּרָשִׁיוֹת וּבַעֲלֵי מָסוֹרָה, עַל אַחַת כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה צְרִיכִים אָנוּ לְקַבָּלָה לְשֵׁם הֲבָנַת תָּכְנוֹ, כִּי הֶקֵּפָה שֶׁל הוֹרָאַת הַמִּלִּים גָּדוֹל מֵהֶקֵּף קְרִיאָתָן, הֲלֹא תִרְאֶה לְמָשָׁל כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר לָהֶם הָאֱלוֹ–הַ לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֹאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים" לֹא נִתְעוֹרֵר סָפֵק בְּלִבָּם עַל אֵלּוּ חֳדָשִׁים הוּא מְדַבֵּר, עַל שֶׁל הַקּוֹפְּטִים הֵם הַמִּצְרִים שֶׁבֵּינֵיהֶם גָּרוּ אָז, אוֹ עַל שֶׁל הַסּוּרִים הֵם כַּשְׂדִּים תּוֹשָׁבֵי אוּר כַּשְׂדִּים בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם, עַל חֹדֶשׁ הַחַמָּה אוֹ עַל חֹדֶשׁ הַלְּבָנָה, אוֹ עַל חֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַת הַחַמָּה הַמַּתְאֶמֶת לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַת הַלְּבָנָה (מאמר שלישי אות כ"ט – ל"ה).

Rabbi: May G–d spare us from this ideology! If the rudimentary text of the Book of Moshe requires, just in order to be read, so many orally transmitted phonetic signs, such as vowels, accents, division of paragraphs and other masoretic information, then all the more so is an oral tradition required for the *comprehension* of the text, for the meaning of the words is certainly more ambiguous than their pronunciation.

Take the following example. When G–d said to them, *"This month shall be the head of the months for you"* (*Shemos* 12:2), it was evidently not at all unclear to them whether he was referring to the Coptic, i.e. Egyptian calendar (which was the local custom), or the Chaldean calendar (the people who lived with Avraham in Ur Kasdim), or the solar calendar, or the lunar calendar, or the intercalated lunar calendar (Part 3, par. 29-35. See ibid. where a series of such examples of obtuse scriptural statements is cited, which prove the necessity of an accompanying oral tradition).

*A sect of Jews that arose in the 9th century C.E., who accepted only the strict interpretation of the literal text of the scripture, but denied the authenticity of the Oral Law.

TORAS MENACHEM

A LOGICAL APPROACH TO SINAI*

In view of the various religions and creeds in the world, each claiming to be the truth and superior to all others, how is a Jew to be certain that his religion is the true one?

This and related questions have already been dealt with at length in the famous 12th century classic, the Book of ***Kuzari*** by the great Jewish philosopher Rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi. It is well documented and based on proofs that would stand up to the scrutiny of scientific method and common sense.

One basic scientific principle is that the first thing is to ascertain the facts, regardless whether they seem logical or not, and then to try to find the right explanation. Science does not come with foregone conclusions and beliefs with the idea of reconciling and adjusting facts to these beliefs. Rather the opposite, it deals with facts then formulates opinions and conclusions. This has been expressed in the dictum that knowledge is derived from reality, not vice versa. If according to one's reasoning the reality should be different, the fault is with one's reasoning, not with the reality.

A further basic principle of scientific method is that the veracity of testimony is compelling when it is based on the widest possible range of witnesses and observations, substantiated, moreover, by experience under the widest possible conditions, etc. Where there is such evidence it is accepted as a fact which is undeniable, even if it does not agree with a scientific theory. This is the accepted practice in science even where there are several

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**NOTE*: This lesson differs considerably from the others in this volume in two significant respects. First, it is *polemical*: it is trying to prove a point, in contrast to the other lessons which aim to explain rather than to argue or to prove. Second, the entire lesson (with the exception of one paragraph), is excerpted from letters penned by the Rebbe himself (in English), in contrast to the other lessons which have been adapted from his talks and writings by the editor.

reliable witnesses, and certainly scores of them, hundreds and thousands.

By way of illustration: If you are asked, how do you know there existed such a person as Maimonides, author of *Yad ha-Chazakah* [*Mishneh Torah*], *Sefer ha-Mitzvos,* etc., you will surely reply that you are certain about his existence from the books he has written, and although *Rambam* (Maimonides) lived some 800 years ago, his works now in print have been reprinted from earlier editions, and those from earlier ones, still uninterruptedly, going back to the very manuscript which the *Rambam* wrote in his own hand. This is considered sufficient proof even in the face of discrepancies or contradictions from one book of *Rambam* to

Sparks of Chasidus

Why is it a Problem to Deny Just One Verse?

Why should it be the case that if a person accepts the validity of every part of the Torah except for one apparently inconsequential verse (such as "*And the children of Cham were Kush and Mitzrayim*"—*Bereishis* 10:6), he is considered to have denied the validity of the *entire* Torah?

Chasidic thought elaborates upon the idea that a person's will is composed of many superficial layers but has a single, unified core. Every act that a person carries out is motivated by some sort of will—otherwise it simply would not take place—but many things that we do are merely a "means to an end" and do not represent our true, inner will.

[For example, every businessperson wishes to please his clients, but his will to do so is a relatively superficial one, motivated by a more powerful, immediate drive to bring in revenue. But even money is not the ultimate desire of a healthy human being, for money is but a tool that enables a person to fulfill his purpose and mission in life, etc.]

In a similar manner, G–d is also described as having many superficial "wants and desires" which are motivated by a single inner drive. We are taught that G–d created the entire universe, "*for the sake of the Torah and for the sake of the Jewish people*" (*Rashi* to *Bereishis* 1:1), and this is the driving force behind all His multitudinous acts of creation and Divine providence. So while the millions of species of animals and plants and the billions of people who inhabit the world only do so because G–d wills their specific existence, there is a single underlying will which motivates, so to speak, all of this: G–d's desire for the Torah and the Jewish people. And being the core of His innermost will, it is a single, *indivisible* drive.

Therefore, a denial of just one tiny part of the Torah is tantamount to denying it all, because when dealing with an essential will it cannot be divided into parts.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 30, p. 151)

another. Such contradictions do not demolish the above proof, but efforts are made to reconcile them, in the certainty that both have been written by the same author.

The same kind of proof substantiates any kind of historic past, which we ourselves have not witnessed, and all normal people accept them without question, except those who for some reason are interested in falsification.

Accordingly, as pointed out in the *Kuzari*, and in other sources through the ages, we Jews are certain that *"Moshe is true and his Torah is true"* (*Tanchuma, Korach* 11), on the basis of the historic events of the Exodus and the Revelation at Sinai, which were witnessed and experienced by 600,000 male adult Jews (apart from women and children). Among these original witnesses there were many who were initiated in the sciences of those days (i.e. Egypt), many achievements of which are still baffling nowadays; among them were philosophers and thinkers, as well as ignorant and uneducated persons, women and children of all ages. Yet all of them reported the event and phenomenon connected with it without contradiction to each other.

What our ancestors witnessed and experienced they transmitted to their children and children's children, from generation to generation to this day, for there has never been a break or any interruption in our history and tradition from the time of our first Patriarch Abraham. Even during the times of the greatest persecutions, and even after the destruction of the *Beis ha-Mikdash* [Holy Temple], there always survived large numbers of Jews who preserved the text of the Torah and the traditions, so that the chain has *never* been broken. At no time, even during the worst pogroms and massacres of Jews, were there less than millions of Jews faithfully maintaining this tradition.

Thus, the *identical* tradition has been transmitted to us by millions of Jews from all walks of life, and verified by the actual way of life and commitment to the same *mitzvos* of the same Torah (the same *Shabbos*, the same *Tefilin, Mezuzah, etc.*) from generation to generation, in different lands and under different conditions. While other factors which are usually associated with the preservation of other nations and their ethnic cultures—such as territory, political independence, language, dress, etc.—have changed in Jewish life from time to time and from place to place, the Torah and *mitzvos* did not change in the life of *all* Jews. This

fact that runs like a golden thread throughout our Jewish history not only confirms without the slightest doubt the authenticity of our Torah and *mitzvos*, but also clearly demonstrates which is the truly vital *constant* factor that has preserved us Jews under all possible circumstances and crises, namely, the Torah and *mitzvos*, *"our life and the length of our days"* [liturgy, evening prayers].

No other religion, without exception, even those whose followers by far outnumber our Jewish people, can claim such proof of authenticity. In all other religions, especially those which are more prevalent in the U.S.A., namely, Christianity and Islam, the religion itself bases its tradition and origin on a single individual, (Mohammed), or several individuals, (the Christian Apostles, and here, too, eventually on one person, Paul, the founder). The same is true of Buddhism, which was founded by an ancient Hindu sage, the Buddha, ("Enlightened One"), whose followers adopted his teachings and doctrines and called themselves Buddhists, after him. These religions themselves, and their followers, openly declare that they were so founded.

Consequently, despite the multitude of followers, the skeptic may question the veracity of the revelation claimed by the original founder, whether it was a genuine prophetic revelation as

The Last Word

The Torah: A Form of Instruction

Even though the Torah contains vast repositories of wisdom, as the verse states, *"It is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations"* (*Devarim* 4:6), the word "Torah" does not mean "wisdom," but rather, "instruction" (*Zohar* III 53b). Consequently, *every* part of the Torah, even passages which appear to mention no specific directives or *mitzvos*, convey practical instruction for a person's day-to-day life.

Therefore *Rambam* writes, *"Verses such as...'Timnah was a concubine'* (*Bereishis* 36:12), *are no different from* [*overtly significant*] *verses such as...'Hear O Israel'* (*Devarim* 6:4), *since they are all from the Almighty's mouth."* For even though *"Hear O Israel"* conveys one of the most significant commands to contemplate G–d's oneness, and the other verse is one detail of a narrative, both share the quality of being a Divine revelation that conveys practical instruction.

Our task is to take every verse of the Torah to heart and to meditate upon its personal relevance to our lives. Sometimes the message is obvious; other times it requires some contemplation, but instruction is always to be found.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 2, pp. 331-2)

claimed or perhaps a hallucination, and, in the case of a small group of founders, whether there was a genuine shared experience, or perhaps a collusion, and the like.

On the other hand, the Jewish religion goes back to the Revelation at Mount Sinai, (in which, incidentally, the Christians and Moslems also believe), which took place in the presence of 600,000 adult men, not including women, children and the elderly, all of whom, taken together, would total several million souls. This distinction is a very fundamental one, for where it is claimed that the religion originates with a single individual or group of individuals, one can argue that there may have been human error involved, or even conspiracy. No such argument can be made in regard to the Divine Revelation at Mount Sinai, which took place in the presence of the entire Jewish people—living witnesses—and was transmitted from parents to children, in an unbroken chain of tradition, to the present day.

By way of illustration: Suppose that 600,000 parents would today say to their children, "This morning you and we were all gathered at a certain place, and we all heard a Heavenly voice proclaim the Decalogue." The children would not accept this for they would say: "If we were there with you, why did we not hear or see anything?" Now, making the single assumption that human reactions have not essentially changed in the course of centuries, one can assume that such would have been the reaction also in the previous century, and two centuries ago and so on, until we reach the generation whose parents witnessed the event of the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

And let it be emphasized again that during this long chain of tradition, there has been no break, nor has the number of transmitters at any time been reduced to less than many hundreds of thousands, for at no time was there less than one million Jews in the world, Jews from all walks of life, who had no personal ax to grind, etc., yet in each generation of the uninterrupted and unbroken history of our people, this event was accepted as authentic history and the text of the Decalogue remained exactly the same. This is certainly undeniable evidence according to all the rules of scientific proof accepted today.

To deny such a fact is anything but scientific; it is the very opposite of science.

Bible Criticism

What, then, is the response to "Bible criticism"?

It is not a case where these people have a different tradition from ours, going back to all those ancient generations, but it is rather a case where this one or that one has come out with theories or hypotheses which are not only speculative, but have been shown to be unscientific as well as illogical. For, according to them, it would be a case where thousands upon thousands of Jews have at one point or another suddenly changed their views and attitudes toward the Torah in radical ways. With all the arguments about superstitions or mass hypnoses, etc., such radical changes by hundreds of thousands of people of different backgrounds in different parts of the world, etc. are very farfetched and most illogical.

Dead Sea Scrolls

How are we to understand the fact that ancient scrolls were found buried near the Jordan whose texts vary from our version of the Bible?

No conclusive evidence can be brought from these findings since it is possible, and indeed quite likely, that these scrolls were buried because they were *incorrectly written*. For Jewish law requires that incorrectly written scrolls must be buried and not destroyed.

Validity of the Oral Tradition

Granted that the Torah is being accepted as of Divine origin, how is it possible to be certain of the validity of the Oral Law, and of the traditional interpretation of the Torah?

Modern science has made all sorts of discoveries and opened new fields, such as electronics, etc., which are based on the

science of mathematics, the basic principles of which were known thousands of years ago, as is well known and admitted. Needless to say, the mathematics of old had no idea or conception of electronics, but there is no contradiction here, only the application of old principles and methods of deduction to new fields or branches of science. Therefore, the traditional interpretation of the Torah is already contained in the Torah itself, and is nothing but a continuation of the written Torah, so that only both together do they constitute one living organism.

In this case, too, we can apply the argument from common sense, as mentioned above. For it is unthinkable to assume that at any particular time there arose a new school of thought which claimed to give a new interpretation to the Torah which was in conflict with the accepted traditions of the past. No one would accept such a radical change, and certainly it would not be accepted by the whole Jewish people. For, it is not a case where a particular professor is studying with a group of students, but the study and interpretation of the Torah has been going on in numerous yeshivos and academies, all of which presented a remarkable degree of unanimity.

☙ DISPUTES IN THE ORAL TRADITION

Why then do we find so many differences of opinion in the Oral tradition?

To be sure, we will find differences of opinion in *Mishna* and *Gemara*, but the important thing is the resulting decisions, which became unanimous in the halachah. Thus, we also find in the Torah itself a difference of opinion, on occasion, between Moshe Rabbenu and others, but it is the final outcome of such differences that is important. We also find a difference of opinion between the first Jew, Abraham, and his wife Sarah, in which case there was a Divine directive that Abraham was to follow Sarah's opinion. Therefore, the integrity of the whole tradition and Oral Law is in no way challenged by differences of opinion which are mentioned in the Talmud, which are in themselves methods of deduction to arrive at the final decision, or *p'sak din*. [See below, Lessons 5-11].

Can it be so Obvious?

If all the above is so plain and logical, how is one to explain the comparatively small number of those who conform to the Torah and mitzvos, while transgressors are so numerous?

When one reflects upon his conduct and deeds, particularly in his everyday life (not during periods of special spiritual elation, such as during the days of *Yom Tov* [festivals], etc.)—it is not hard to see that a very great number of one's actions are motivated by one's desires and inclinations, not by one's intellect. This is particularly true where the conflict does not raise the immediate threat of "reprisals." The farther removed is the threat of sanctions, the weaker becomes the intellectual motive, and the more strongly is the conduct influenced by desire and emotion; even more so when the sanctions are of an "abstract" nature. For the fear of physical sanctions (imprisonment or fine, etc.) is more effective than admonition, or argumentation, in the name of morality, justice, humanity, etc.

There enters also an additional factor of human nature. When man succumbs to temptation and commits a "sin," he may experience one of two kinds of reaction: If he is honest and courageous, he will recognize his act for what it is, a failure, as well as a breach of his own true will and conscience. Recognizing his failure as a sign of weakness, he will seek to overcome it and to do better next time, and *"G–d has compassion with, and forgives, he who concedes his mistake and resolves to correct it."*

One, however, who is afraid to face the truth and its consequences in the case of a failure, begins to find excuses for himself and to justify his negative action. Moreover, as *"one transgression brings another in its train"* (*Avos* 4:2), the guilt complex and need for self justification will become ever more persistent and pressing, both in order to pacify his own troubling conscience, as well as to square himself in the eyes of others. *"Love covers up all offenses"* (Prov. 10:12), particularly self love, and *"bribery blinds the eyes of (even) the wise"* (*Devarim* 16:19), especially the self bribery that goes with vanity. He will thus become biased in his own favor, and in his befuddled thinking

will "devise" a personal philosophy or even a *"Weltanschauung,"* to fit his conduct, which will not only "justify" it, but even turn vice into virtue.

A Living Example

THE SANCTITY OF EVERY SINGLE VERSE

The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shne'ur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), was the regular Torah-reader in his Synagogue in Liozna. Once he was away on the *Shabbos* of *Parshas Ki Savo*, and his son R' Dov Ber—later to become the Mitteler Rebbe—heard the Torah being read by another person. At the time, R' Dov Ber was not yet *Bar Mitzvah*.

When he heard the part of the Torah reading which recounts numerous ominous curses (which G–d threatens to bring upon the Jewish people if they fail to observe the Torah), he became emotionally and physically distraught, to the extent that the Alter Rebbe doubted whether his son would be able to fast on Yom Kippur, a few weeks later.

"But don't you hear this very same reading every year?" the Mitteler Rebbe was asked.

"When father reads it," he replied, "you don't hear any curses."

The existence of the Torah predates that of the world (*Shabbos* 88b). So even when Torah appears to touch upon very "worldly" phenomena such as acts of fraud and corruption, it nevertheless does so from a pristine, pre-creation perspective where no evil exists. From this sublime viewpoint even the most base of acts is seen in light of their ultimate rectification, and the harshest of punishments are understood to be for a person's benefit.

When the Alter Rebbe read from the Torah, he managed to bring to the surface—for those who were able to discern it—the Torah's primordial message, at which level only good exists. Thus, on the one occasion when the Mitteler Rebbe heard from another reader, the literal, worldly implications of the Torah's "curses," he was quite disturbed.

This sheds light on *Rambam's* statement that *"verses such as 'And the children of Cham were Kush and Mitzrayim'* (*Bereishis* 10:6), *'His wife's name was Mehaytavail"* (ibid. 36:39), *and 'Timnah was a concubine'* (ibid. 36:12), ***are no different*** *from* [*overtly significant*] *verses such as, "I am G–d your G–d"* (*Shemos* 20:2), *and "Hear O Israel"* (*Devarim* 6:4), *since they are all from the Almighty's mouth."* At first glance this assertion is difficult to understand. How can the sanctity of a verse such as *"I am G–d your G–d,"* the opening of the Ten Commandments, be equated to the sanctity of *"Timnah was a concubine,"* which speaks of a woman who was born through an adulterous union (see *Rashi* ibid.)?

However, the key point here is that they are both verses *in the Torah* which preceded the world. And from this inner perspective, even parts of Torah that express themselves negatively in this world are essentially good and holy.

(Based on *Sichas Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan* 5746)

The Significance of Every Detail

Why does Rambam state that even the denial of one tiny, apparently insignificant detail of the Torah violates a principle of Judaism?

Our Torah is called *"Toras Emes"* ["Torah of Truth"] because it is eternal and immutable. When the Truth is modified or altered by compromise, whether to the extent of 99% or less, it ceases to be the Truth. And the Truth remains the same for all people, and at all times. If one accepts the eternity of the Torah, and this can be only on the basis of *Torah min ha-Shamayim* [Divine authorship of Torah], then it would be absurd to say that while it is true that Torah was given by G–d, times have changed—as if the Creator and Governor of the Universe could not have foreseen that there would be a 20th century with certain groups of people, such as scientists or "modernists," who would be inclined to accept only a compromised Torah, not the Torah of Truth.

Even without the ruling of Maimonides, this would be self-evident and logical. For one has to be consistent: Either one accepts that the Torah is Divine, in which case a human being with his limited intellect, inasmuch as all creation is limited, cannot possibly fathom the Divine Wisdom that is in the Torah, and cannot, therefore, select passages from it which appeal to his intellect and discard others which do not.

On the other hand, if a human being is so presumptuous as to use his own discretion with regard to the Torah, and accept or reject accordingly, this means that he regards the Torah as some-

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The Torah: G–d's Name

Our Sages taught that *"the entire Torah is the name of G–d"* (*Ramban*, introduction to commentary on *Bereishis*). This sheds light on *Rambam's* ruling that even apparently insignificant verses such as *"Timnah was a concubine"* (*Bereishis* 36:12), are equally important to the rest of the Torah, for every word is, quite literally, the name of G–d.

(Based on *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Re'eh* 5748, par 18)

thing which does not go deeper or beyond his human understanding. Consequently also, the Torah in his opinion has no greater binding force than that dictated by human reason, which in effect means no binding force at all, since no human being can impose his views on any other human being.

Where truth is concerned, there can be no compromise or accommodation, for even 99% of truth is not the whole truth, and therefore not truth at all.

Needless to say, 99% is better than 98%, but one must not delude oneself in believing that it is the whole truth. Indeed, the Rambam rules that if a Jew *accepts* the whole Torah except for one letter, he is deemed as if he denied the whole Torah. And one of the explanations of it is, as mentioned above, that truth and compromise are contradictory.

The above does not mean that unless a Jew observes all the 613 *mitzvos*, he is not an observant Jew. Indeed, the Torah declares, *"A Jew, though he has sinned, remains a Jew"* (*Sanhedrin* 44a). It states further than no sinner is rejected, and eventually everyone who had strayed will return to the fold (II Sam.14:14). What is emphasized above is that any thought that the Torah is in any way "outdated" and needs to be "modernized" is heresy and a denial of the Divine origin and eternal nature of the Torah and *mitzvos*.

Non-Traditional Movements

How then are we to perceive movements that do not accept the entire Written and Oral tradition?

It is necessary to have a clear understanding where certain movements stand in relation to authentic Judaism. As to which movements and ideologies are opposed to the Torah, this is easy to determine in light of the *psak* [ruling] of the *Rambam* to the effect that to deny even one letter of the Torah is tantamount to denying the whole Divine authorship of the Torah (*Laws of Teshuvah* 3:9).

Once one begins making concessions, holding no more to the principle of the inviolability of the pure faith and Divine Law, there is no telling how far one will go. Human nature is such that

once he accepts the principle of compromise in matters of faith, there is bound to be a steady erosion, every time with a lighter mind and less qualms. Secondly, it is bound to undermine one's respect for one's religion, knowing that anyone can "do business" with it; trim it a bit here, a bit there; and whatever is left—what real value can be attached to it, and what binding force can it have? Moreover, one, at the same time, loses also one's self respect, recognizing one's lack of courage and personal weakness to hold on to one's own belief, or the beliefs of his people, and taking instead the line of least resistance.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to make a distinction between individuals and movements. While movements and ideologies which are against the Torah must be opposed and exposed, an individual Jew, even if he sins, is a Jew, and it is necessary to do everything *be'ahavah* [with love] to help him back on the right path (see *Tanya,* Chapter 32, *"Lev"**).

Thus, at the personal level, the classification of Jews into so-called orthodox, reform and conservative denominations is a

*In Hebrew, the number 32 spells the word "lev" meaning "heart," alluding to the topic of Chapter 32 of Tanya, which explains the importance of brotherly love for one's fellow Jew.

Sparks of Chasidus

United by Our Essence

The word **ישראל**, Israel, is an acronym for **יש ששים ריבוא אותיות לתורה**, "there are 600,000 letters in the Torah" (*Megaleh Amukos* par. 186), alluding to the fact that each individual Jew is connected specifically with a letter in the Torah.

With the Torah, every verse and every letter is crucial to the integrity of the whole. Thus *Rambam* writes that a person who denies just one verse denies the whole Torah, and according to Jewish Law, if one letter of a Torah scroll is defective the entire scroll is invalid.

Likewise, in the case of the Jewish people, each individual is crucial to the nation as a whole. Superficially some people may appear to be more important than others, especially those that enjoy a leadership role. But as far as the *essence* of a Jew is concerned, at the core of our Jewish identity, all are equal and all constitute an indispensable part of the Jewish nation.

(*Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayigash* 5747, par. 18)

purely superficial one which has no basis in the *essence* of a Jew which is bound up with his Divine soul. For, all Jewish souls were present at Sinai, including those to be born on this earth, and to each one of them G–d addressed himself in the second person singular, "I am the L-rd *thy* G–d" (*Shemos* 20:2), when He gave the Torah and *mitzvos* to our people. To be sure, there are fully observant Jews and less observant Jews, but all this has to do only with external manifestations and influences, whereas essentially all Jews are *fully* committed to Torah and *mitzvos*. It is, therefore, necessary only to shed the external "garments" or "layers" to reveal the inner Jewish essence, and this is something which every Jew has the capacity to do, where there is a firm will and determination.

(Excerpted from letters written by the Rebbe on 23rd of Adar I 5717, *Rosh Chodesh* Adar II, 5738; 4th of Adar II, 5738, 12th of Shevat 5744 and on various other occasions; *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Matos-Masei* 5742, par. 43)

Points to Remember...

- Unlike other religions which are based on the testimony of a *single* individual or a small group, the Revelation at Sinai was an event witnessed by the *entire Jewish nation* and could therefore not be fabricated.

- The Written Law must have been given with an oral interpretation, otherwise it would have no objective meaning.

- The Oral Tradition we have today must be what was revealed to Moshe at Sinai because people would naturally have rejected a new interpretation to the Torah which was in conflict with the accepted traditions of the past.

- To deny just one part of the Torah, even one verse, or one detail of the Oral Law is tantamount to denying it all, because where truth is concerned there can be no compromise or accommodation.

- The word "Torah" means "instruction," indicating that every part of the Torah conveys practical instruction for a person's day-to-day life.

- While *movements* which are against the Torah should be rejected, an *individual* Jew, even if he sins, is a Jew, and we must to do everything to help him back on the right path with love.