

The HINDA Institute

Helping Individuals Ascend
Monthly Newsletter



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For Real

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
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In his famed introduction to the Talmudic chapter of Chelek, Maimonides enumerates the thirteen basic principles of the Jewish faith.

The first four principles deal with the belief in G-d: that G-d is the Original Cause upon which every creation is utterly dependent for its existence; that He is absolutely one and singular; that He is non-corporeal and timeless. The fifth principle establishes man's duty to serve Him and fulfill the purpose for which he was created. Principles six to eleven establish that G-d relates to humanity: that He communicates His will to man; that every word of the Torah was transmitted by G-d to Moses; that G-d observes and is concerned with the behavior of man; that He punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous.

The final two principles deal with the era of Moshiach: the belief that there will arise a leader who will bring the entire world to recognize and serve the Creator, ushering in an era of universal peace and Divine perfection.

What does it mean when we say that something is a "basic principle" in Judaism? A simple definition would be that in order to qualify as a "believing Jew" one must accept the truth of these thirteen precepts. But the Torah clearly makes no such distinctions. As Maimonides himself writes in his eighth principle:

"... This entire Torah, given to us by Moses, is from the mouth of the Almighty - namely, that it was communicated to him by G-d.... In this, there is no difference between the verses, 'The sons of Ham were Kush and Mitzrayim,' 'The name of his wife was Meithavel' and 'Timna was a concubine,' and the verses, 'I Am the L-rd your G-d' and 'Hear O Israel, [the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One]': all are from the mouth of the Almighty, all is the Torah of G-d, perfect, pure, holy and true.... Our sages have said: Anyone who believes that the entire Torah is from the mouth of the Almighty ex-

cept for a single verse, is a heretic...."

So a "basic principle" is more than a required set of beliefs; that would apply to each and every word in the Torah. Rather, these are thirteen principles upon which everything else rests. The Hebrew word Maimonides uses is *yesodot*, "foundations": different parts of an edifice could conceivably exist independently of each other, but without the foundation, the entire building would collapse. So, too, each of these thirteen principles is a "foundation" to the entire Torah.

In other words, while every word in the Torah is equally important to the believer as a person, these principles are crucial to the faith itself. To deny that "Do not steal" is a divine commandment is no less heretical than to deny the existence of G-d; but belief in the rest of the Torah is not dependent upon the fact that G-d said not to steal. On the other hand, things like the existence of G-d, His absolute and exclusive power, His involvement in human affairs, and His communication of the Torah to man, obviously prerequisite the whole of Judaism. Without these "foundations" the rest is virtually meaningless.

One difficulty, however, remains with this explanation: Why is the belief in Moshiach included among the foundations of the Jewish faith? Obviously, the concept of Moshiach is an important part of Judaism. The Torah speaks of it (in Deuteronomy 30 and Numbers 24, among others), the prophets are full of it. But could one not conceivably believe in the rest of the Torah without accepting its vision of a future perfect world?

Not In Heaven

The Torah details a most exacting and demanding code of behavior, governing every hour of the day, every phase of life, and every aspect of the human experience. It takes a lifetime of committed labor, tremendous self-discipline, and every iota of man's intellectual, emotional and spiritual prowess to bring one's life into utter conformity with the Torah's edicts and ideals.

Thus, there are two possible ways in which to view the Torah's vision of life.

One may conceivably argue that the level of perfection expected by Torah is beyond feasible reach for a majority of people. From this perspective, Torah is an ideal to strive towards, a vision of absolute goodness designed to serve as a point of reference for imperfect man. A person ought to seek attaining this ideal - says this view - although he will probably never reach it, for he will much improve himself in the process.

The second view takes the Torah at its word: each and every individual is capable of, and expected to attain, the perfectly righteous and harmonious life it mandates. Torah is not an abstract ideal, but a practical and implementable blueprint for life.

The Torah itself leave no room for doubt on its own view of the matter: "For the mitzvah which I command you this day," it states, "it is not beyond you nor is it remote from you. It is not in heaven... nor is it across the sea.... Rather, it is something that is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it." (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

Underlying Perspectives

These two views reflect two different ways of looking at the essence of G-d's creation. If man is inherently or even partially evil, then obviously he can go either way. There is no reason to assume that he will, or even can, attain a state of perfect righteousness. A world community that is utterly committed to goodness, in which every single individual acts in concert with the purpose for which he was created, can only be the dream of a chronic optimist, or of one who is hopelessly out of touch with "reality."

Yet if one believes that the world is intrinsically good; that G-d has imbued His every creation with the potential to reflect His absolute goodness and perfection; then, one's concept of reality is completely different. Then, our currently harsh reality is the anomalous state, while the reality of Moshiach is the most natural thing in the world.

In other words, where a person stands on Moshiach expresses his attitude vis-a-vis the entire Torah. Is Torah's formula for life a pipe dream, or is it a description of the true nature of creation? If the Torah is nothing more than a theoretical utopia, then one does not expect a world free of

greed, jealousy and hate any time in the near future. But if the Torah mirrors the essence of man, then one not only believes in a "future" Moshiach, but understands that the world is capable of instantaneously responding to his call.

This explains why belief in Moshiach entails not only the conviction that he will "eventually" arrive, but the anticipation of his imminent coming. In the words of Maimonides: "The Twelfth Principle concerns the era of Moshiach: to believe and to validate his coming; not to think that it is something of the future - even if he tarries, one should await him...." And in his Mishneh Torah, Maimonides states: "One who does not believe in him, or one who does not anticipate his coming, not only denies the prophets, he denies the Torah itself" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings, 11:1).

When Moshiach is that very realistic possibility, for another moment to go by without the Redemption taking place is far, far more "unrealistic" (that is, less in keeping with the true nature of things) than the prospect of its immediate realization.

The Nature and Definition of Truth

Of course, man has been granted freedom of choice. But the choice between good and evil is not a choice of what to be - he cannot change his quintessential self- but the choice of how to act. Man can choose to express his true essence in his behavior, or choose to suppress it.

Ultimately, the truth, by nature and definition, always comes to light. So, while man can choose how to act in any given moment, the very nature of humanity, and of G-d's creation as a whole, mandates that it not only can, but will attain the perfection of the era of Moshiach.

Moshiach means that the true nature of creation will ultimately come to light. That "evil" is but the shallow distortion of this truth, and has no enduring reality. That man will free himself of hate and ignorance. That every human being will fulfill his divinely ordained role as outlined in the Torah, transforming the world into a place suffused with the wisdom, goodness and perfection of its Creator.

Moshiach means that the Torah is for real.

Continued from page 3 The clerk, contemplating all that had happened, told Mulik: "You know what your father would do with the food once your mother left?"

Mulik thought to himself, "That's simple, father would eat the food, and quickly. Since he would not touch any other food, he was very hungry."

"He would split the food with me," said the clerk, answering his own question. "So that I would also eat kosher food."

He asked Mulik exactly what it was that he needed. Mulik told him that he needed five signatures to guarantee his loan. The clerk told him to stay seated while he went to another room.

Ten minutes later he came back with all the signatures Mulik needed. He left that day with the paper that would secure him his mortgage... and a lesson in love for one's fellow.

Jewish Story

War broke out in Russia, the Germans advanced, and the Russians scrambled to prepare for a fight and many casualties.

Basia Gurewicz took her own steps to secure her family's well-being during the war. She immediately went to the store and purchased many loaves of stale bread. She toasted the loaves, making them crisp and giving them a longer shelf life—thus she would have the bread when food became scarce during what was expected to be a prolonged war.

As the war continued, the Russians evacuated women and children, including the Gurewiczes, from Moscow to the mountainous area of Ivanovka, Russia.

Supplies in the stores slowly dwindled, but the Gurewicz family had their backup bread to break some of their hunger.

When war had broken out, the patriarch of the family, Nachum, had been enlisted into the Russian army. He was stationed for a time at the entrance of Moscow, a city that the Germans bombarded for eighteen months straight. Later he received a job as a supply officer in the employ of one of the higher-ranking officers.

Being stationed near a large city gave him the opportunity to continue his kosher diet and to keep Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. To Nachum, being in Moscow was also an opportunity to assist other Jews who were in desperate need.

At one point, Nachum suffered from an ulcer and was placed in a military hospital. The family considered that a good period of time, as they at least knew where their father was. Nachum shared a hospital room with another Jewish soldier.

Even though Basia was occupied with supporting her family, three times a week, she would make the long trip to visit her husband. In the army, he had been able to fend for himself with regard to finding and preparing kosher food, but he would not be able to while lying in pain on a hospital bed, so she brought him kosher food.

Later, their son Mulik would recall the one time that his mother took him along to visit his father during those few weeks that he was in the hospital.

Following the war, the Gurewitz family escaped the Soviet Union using forged Polish passports. The family remained in Europe for a time, but later they moved to Australia, where they were one of the founders of the Chabad-Lubavitch community.

Mulik married Chava, and in 1964, they moved with their two children to Israel.

The Wait for the Clerk

At first they lived at a relative's house in Jerusalem, where Mulik found a job which gave them financial stability. A

short while later, they found an apartment that they wanted to purchase. However, to purchase it they would need a loan guarantee from the Jewish Agency.

Mulik made the trip several times to the office of the Jewish Agency. Every one of Mulik's trips turned out to be futile. He would have to wait many hours to reach a clerk, who would tell him that the people he needed to see were not there.

Mulik learned about Israeli bureaucracy the hard way. It was not as if he could just take any day off to go to the agency and wait in line. But he learned that many had to do this for months on end, until they actually received their signed paper with a guarantee for a loan. The long, hot days and the difficulty of traveling from his home in Jerusalem to Tel Aviv did not ease his frustration.

One such morning, Mulik, after two weeks of coming every day, anticipated the same speech from the clerk. This time, however, there was a new clerk, so the excuse would at least come from a different voice...

While he waited his turn, he noticed that this new person seemed a little nicer, though who knew if that would actually make any difference?

In less than half an hour he was sitting in front of the clerk. Mulik handed him his Australian passport.

"So where were you born?" the clerk asks.

"Russia."

"In your passport it says Poland," the clerk said.

So Mulik explained to him the story of his family's escape from Russia in 1946.

"So the passport is forged?"

Mulik explained to him that the information in the passport was true, just the nationality was not the correct one.

It seemed that the clerk understood the situation, and he began examining the other details of the passport.

"I was also in Russia during World War II," the clerk began to relate to him. "I was a soldier in the Soviet forces, and I was lying in the hospital next to a man who had the same family name as you. His wife would bring him food every few days, because he adhered to the kosher dietary laws."

Shivers went down Mulik's back as he remembered that day he went to go visit his father in the hospital. As the clerk continued to describe his time in the hospital, he could not hold himself back any longer.

"That man was my father, and that was my mother bringing the food," Mulik said. Mulik told him that, in fact, he himself once went with his mother to the hospital.

The clerk looked at Mulik in silence, stunned at the Divine Providence involved in this meeting. In disbelief, he inquired about his roommate's family, and Mulik answered his questions.

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HINDAHELPS.COM

In loving memory of
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Please make a request to your Chaplain that you would like a visit from a Rabbi in FEBRUARY.

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IMPORTANT NOTICE: All mail sent to the Hinda Institute should be addressed to our Inmate Advocate. Letters should NOT

be addressed to Rabbi Scheiman. Please use this mailing address to contact us by mail:

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Grace After Meals

No free lunch

"You will eat and be sated, and you shall bless G-d"—Deuteronomy.

Enjoyed the meal? Don't forget to thank the host. You are the host? No, no...you are the guest—in G-d's world. So when you're finished eating, don't forget your Grace after Meals, a.k.a. Birkat Hamazon—and commonly called bentching.

Now what constitutes a meal? For Birkat Hamazon purposes, anything that includes bread is a meal. How much bread? The size of a large olive. Generally, bread that size weighs 0.9 ounces.

Didn't eat bread? Dined on meat and potatoes instead? Just grabbed a granola bar and energy drink? We've got shorter blessings for all those cases.

The Procedure:

Stay seated where you ate. Ideally, some bread remains on the table.

Open your Siddur to find the text of the Birkat Hamazon. Before the actual blessings come some warm-up verses. Then wash your

fingertips (some pass the wetted fingers over their lips).

Now say the actual Birkat Hamazon, loud and clear. You're happy you ate, right? Say it in Hebrew or any language you understand. There are actually four blessings: The first was composed by Moses, the second by Joshua, the third by Kings David and Solomon, the fourth by the Council of Yavneh after the Bar Kochba revolt. We sign off with a series of brief prayers and a collection of verses.

More Details:

- If three or more adult men ate together, one formally invites the others to join him in Birkat Hamazon. This is known as zimun. Often the leader will hold a cup of wine.
- Watch out for the special inserts for special days.
- You can say Birkat Hamazon as long as the meal is still digesting—approximately 72 minutes after you finish eating.
- For small children, there's a real short version: "Blessed is G-d, our G-d, King of the universe, Master of this bread."

Jewish Joke

Hette was talking to her friend Sadie.

"My son Moishe," said Hette proudly, "has first class degrees in psychology, economics and politics."

"You must be proud of him," said Sadie.

"Yes I am," replied Hette. "He can't get a job but at least he knows why."