

Foundations of Torah, Principles of Faith, and Moshiach (the Messiah)

LESSON #1 of 8

Contents: Part A. The Foundations of Torah Faith
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Part A. The Foundations of Torah Faith

The following is a translation of the full text of the thirteen foundations of Jewish {i.e. Torah} Faith compiled by **Rabbi Moses ben Maimon** (1135-1204 C.E.; also known as Maimonides). He is referred to by the acronym for his name, which is **Rambam**. Rambam wrote the thirteen foundations in his Commentary on the Mishnah, in the tenth chapter of Tractate *Sanhedrin*. He wrote this in Arabic while he was living in Egypt. It was later translated into Hebrew, and the text here is an English translation from the Hebrew version. Nevertheless, it conveys Rambam's original intent and meaning.

Notes:

- This text was selected, with permission from Rabbi Lazar Brody, from:
<http://members.aol.com/LazerA/13yesodos.html> (no longer available on-line)
- Rabbi Brody's inserted comments are noted in square brackets [...].
- The Hebrew name for G-d in conversational speech, "HaShem," has been replaced with the name "G-d."
- Any text appearing in curly brackets {...}, and some of the text in square brackets [...], has been added by Dr. Michael Schulman, the Executive Director of Ask Noah International.

The Thirteen Foundations, Compiled by Rambam

The First Foundation is to believe in the existence of the Creator, blessed be He. This means that there exists a Being that is complete in all ways and He is the cause of all else that exists. He is what sustains their existence and the existence of all that sustains them. It is inconceivable that He would not exist, for if He would not exist then all else would cease to exist as well, nothing would remain. And if we would imagine that everything other than He would cease to exist, this would not cause His, G-d's, blessed be He, existence to cease or be diminished. Independence and mastery is to Him alone, G-d, blessed be His Name, for He needs nothing else and is sufficient unto Himself. He does not need the existence of anything else. All that exists apart from Him, the angels, the universe and all that is within it, all these things are dependent on Him for their existence.

This first foundation is taught to us in the statement, "I am G-d your G-d..." (Exodus 20:2, Deut. 5:6).

The Second Foundation is the unity of G-d, Blessed be His Name. In other words, to believe that this being, which is the cause of all, is one. This does not mean one as in one of a pair nor one like a species [which encompasses many individuals] nor one as in one object that is made up of many elements nor as a single simple object which is infinitely divisible. Rather, He, G-d Blessed be His Name, is a unity unlike any other possible unity.

This second foundation is referred to when [the Torah] says, "Hear Israel! G-d is our G-d, G-d is one." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

The Third Foundation is that He is not physical. This means to believe that the One whom we have mentioned is not a body and His powers are not physical. The concepts of physical bodies such as movement, rest, or existence in a particular place cannot be applied to Him. Such things cannot be part of His nature nor can they happen to Him. Therefore the Sages of blessed memory stated that the concepts of combination and separation do not apply to Him and they said, "Above there is no sitting nor standing, no separation nor combination." [The Rambam here goes into an explanation of certain Hebrew words... this would be meaningless in translation – Lazer Brody] The prophet says, "To whom can you compare Me? To what am I equal? Says the Holy One." (Isaiah 40:25) If He would be a physical body He would be comparable to physical bodies.

In all places where the Holy Scriptures speak of Him in physical terms, as walking, standing, sitting, speaking and anything similar, it is always metaphorical, as our Sages of blessed memory said, "The Torah speaks in the language of men". Our sages have discussed this issue at length. This third foundation is referred to when [the Torah] says, "For you did not see any form" (Deuteronomy 4:15), in other words, you did not perceive him as being an entity with a form because, as we mentioned, He is not physical and His power is not physical.

The Fourth Foundation is that He is first. This means to believe that the One was the absolute first and everything else in existence is not first relative to Him. There are many proofs to this in the Holy Scriptures.

This fourth foundation is referred to in the verse, "That is the abode of G-d the first" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

The Fifth Foundation is that it is proper to serve Him, blessed be He, to ascribe to Him greatness, to make known His greatness, and to fulfill His commandments. We may not do this to any lesser being, whether it be one of the angels, the stars, the celestial spheres, the elements, or anything formed from them. For all these things have predetermined natures and have no authority or control over their actions. Rather, such authority and control is G-d's. Similarly, it is not proper to serve them as intermediaries in order that they should bring us closer to G-d. Rather, to G-d Himself we must direct our thoughts, and abandon anything else.

This fifth foundation is based in the prohibition against idolatry about which much of the Torah deals.

The Sixth Foundation is prophecy. That is, that a person must know that there exists amongst mankind individuals who have very lofty qualities and great perfection; whose souls are prepared until their minds receive perfect intellect. After this, their human intellect can then become attached to the Active Intellect [i.e. the "mind", so to speak, of G-d] and have bestowed upon them an exalted state. These are the prophets and this is prophecy.

A full explanation of this foundation would be very lengthy and it is not our intent to bring proofs for every foundation or to explain how we know them, for that is the sum of all knowledge. Rather, we are simply mentioning them in an informal manner.

There are numerous verses in the Torah that attest to the prophecy of the prophets.

[For more on this subject, see Part B which follows.]

The Seventh Foundation is the prophecy of Moses our Teacher, may he rest in peace. This means to believe that he is the father of all the prophets, both those that preceded him and those who arose after him; all of them were below his level. He was the chosen one from all of mankind, for he attained a greater knowledge of the Blessed One, more than any other man ever attained or ever will attain. For he, may he rest in peace, rose up from the level of man to the level of the angels and gained the exalted status of an angel. There did not remain any screen that he did not tear and penetrate; nothing physical held him back. He was devoid of any flaw, big or small. His powers of imagination, the senses, and the perceptions were nullified; the power of desire was separated from him leaving him with pure intellect. It is for this reason that it is said on him that he could speak to G-d, blessed be He, without the intermediary of angels.

It is my desire to clarify this wondrous topic, and to open the sealed verses of the Torah; to explain the idea of the verse "mouth to mouth" (Numbers 12:8) and similar verses. However, as I see it, this subject would require many proofs and great length, involving numerous presentations, introductions and illustrative examples. We would first have to clarify the existence of the angels and the distinction between their greatness and the Creator, G-d, blessed be He. We would also have to clarify the subject of the soul and its powers. The discussion would then have to be widened to speak of the forms which the prophets see representing the Creator and the angels, and this would bring us into the subject of the Divine Stature [a kabalistic concept involving the anthropomorphic metaphor – Lazer Brody]. Even this would not suffice, even if the discussion would be kept as short as possible it would still be an essay of a hundred pages. Therefore I will leave this discussion for another place, either in a book of discourses which I plan to write, or for a book on prophecy which I am working on, or for a book in which I will explain these foundations.

So, I now return to the subject of the seventh foundation. The prophecy of Moses our Teacher is distinguished from the prophecies of all other prophets in four regards:

- First, every other prophet received the word of G-d through an intermediary, Moses did not have an intermediary, as it says, "Mouth to mouth I speak to him." (Numbers 12:8)
- Second, all other prophets only receive their prophecy either when they are sleeping, as we find in numerous places "in a dream at night" (Genesis 20:3) and "in a vision at night" (Job 33:15) and many other examples. Or by day when a trance has fallen over them which removes all their senses and leaves their mind open as in a dream. Such a state [of prophecy] is called a vision or seeing and is referred to as "Divine visions" (Ezekiel 8:3). Moses received his prophecy by day as he stood before the *kruvim* (cherubs), as is testified to by G-d, blessed be He, "and I will commune with you there" (Exodus 25:22). And as G-d, blessed be He, states, "If prophets are among you then I, G-d, make Myself known to them through a vision, in a dream I speak to him. It is not so with My servant Moses, he is trusted in all My house. I speak to him mouth to mouth, in a vision without puzzlement. He gazes at the image of G-d." (Numbers 12:6-8)
- Third, when a prophet receives prophecy, even though it was only a vision and by means of an angel, he would nevertheless be weakened by it and his body would shudder.

He would be stricken with a very great fear almost to the point that his spirit would leave his body, as Daniel said when [the angel] Gabriel spoke to him, "No strength remained in me; my robustness changed to pallor, and I could retain no strength... and I was in a deep sleep upon my face, and my face was to the ground". And as he says later, "during the vision my joints shuddered and I could retain no strength". (Daniel 10:8-9, 16). But Moses, may he rest in peace, was not so, rather, the word came to him, and he did not experience trembling and shivering in any way, as it says, "And G-d spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). In other words, just as a man does not experience trembling from the speech of his fellow, Moses did not tremble from the word even though it was face to face. This was due to his total attachment to the intellect, as we said earlier.

- Fourth, all the [other] prophets were unable to receive prophecy when they willed it but only when G-d, blessed be He, wished it. The prophet could wait days or years and prophecy would not come. He could beseech G-d, blessed be He, to make known to him a matter through prophecy, and then he could wait for days or months for the prophecy, sometimes it would never come at all. There were groups which would prepare themselves and purify their thoughts, as Elisha did, as it is written, "Now bring me a musician", and prophecy came upon him. But it was not certain that prophecy would come at the time a person prepared himself. Moses, may he rest in peace, [could prophesize] at any time he wished. As he said, "Wait and I will hear what G-d has commanded you," (Numbers 9:8) and as it says, "Speak to Aaron your brother, he shall not come at all times in the holy place" on which our Sages of blessed memory said, "Aaron could not enter, but this did not apply to Moses".

The Eighth Foundation is that the Torah is from Heaven. This means that we must believe that this entire Torah, which was given to us from Moses our Teacher, may he rest in peace, is entirely from the mouth of the Al-mighty. In other words, that it all was conveyed to him from G-d, blessed Be He, in the manner which is called [in Hebrew], for lack of a better term, "*dibur*" - "speech" [since G-d does not actually "speak" in a literal sense – Lazer Brody]. It is not known how it was conveyed to him, except to Moses, may he rest in peace, to whom it was given, and he was like a scribe writing from dictation, and he wrote all the incidents, the stories, and the commandments. Therefore [Moses] is called "*mechokek*" - "scribe" (Numbers 21:18).

There is no difference between [verses such as] "And the children of Cham were Kush and Mitzrayim" (Genesis 10:6), "And the name of his wife was Meheitaveil" (ibid. 36:39), and "And Simnah was a concubine" (ibid. 36:12) and [verses such as] "I am G-d your G-d" (Exodus 20:2) and "Hear O Israel" (Deuteronomy 6:4), for all of the Torah is from the mouth of the Al-mighty and it is all the Teaching of G-d, perfect, pure, holy, and true.

One who says that verses and stories like these [in the first group] were written by Moses out of his own mind, behold! He is considered by our Sages and Prophets as a heretic and a perverter of the Torah more than all other heretics, for he believes that the Torah has a "heart" and a "shell" [i.e. a meaningful part and a meaningless part] and that these historical accounts and stories have no benefit and are from Moses our Teacher, may he rest in peace. This is the meaning of [the category of heretic who believes that] "The Torah is not from Heaven". Our Sages, may their memory be a blessing, explain that this is [even] someone who says that the entire Torah is from the Al-mighty except for a particular verse which was written by Moses alone. And on this [person, the Torah writes], "For he has scorned the word of G-d... [his soul shall be absolutely cut off, his sin is upon him]" (Numbers 15:31).

May G-d, blessed be He, forgive the statements of the heretics.

In truth, however, every word of the Torah has within it wisdom and wonders for one who can understand them, and the full depth of their wisdom can never be attained. "Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:9). A man has option but to follow in the footsteps of King David, the anointed of the G-d of Jacob, who prayed, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things in Your Torah" (Psalms 119:18). All this is also true for the explanation of the Torah, which was also received from the mouth of the Al-mighty [the Oral Torah]. The manner in which we today make the [items for Jewish commandments, e.g.] *sukkah*, *lulav*, *shofar*, *tzitzis*, *tefillin*, and other items is precisely the manner that G-d, blessed be He, instructed Moses, who then instructed us and Moses was reliable in relating [G-d's word].

The verse which teaches this foundation is, "And Moses said, "Through this you shall know that G-d has sent me to do all these things, for they are not from my heart." (Numbers 16:28)

The Ninth Foundation is the transcription, meaning that this Torah, and no other, was transcribed from the Creator and we may not add to it or remove from it, not in the Written Torah or in the Oral Torah, as it says, "...you shall not add to it, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 13:1). We have already fully clarified this foundation in the introduction to this work [the Commentary on the Mishnah].

The Tenth Foundation is that G-d, blessed be He, knows the actions of mankind and does not turn His eyes from them. Not like the opinion of those who say, "...[The L-rd does not see us;] the L-rd has forsaken the land" (Ezekiel 8:12). But rather like it says, "Great in counsel, and mighty in work; for Your eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men; to give to every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 32:19), "And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth..." (Genesis 6:5), and "And the L-rd said, 'Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great...'" (*ibid.* 18:20). These verses teach us this tenth foundation.

The Eleventh Foundation is that G-d, blessed be He, gives reward to one who obeys the commandments of the Torah [i.e., the particular commandments which are commanded or obligatory for a particular person, depending on his or her circumstances] and punishes one who violates its prohibitions [i.e., the particular prohibitions which are prohibited or not proper for a particular person, depending on his or her circumstances]. The greatest reward is the World to Come, and the greatest punishment is *kareis* (spiritual excision, "cutting off"). We have already said enough on this topic [earlier in the Commentary]. The verse which teaches this foundation is [when Moses says to G-d], "And now, if You will forgive their sin; and if not, please remove me [from Your Book which You have written]" to which G-d responds, "...Whoever has sinned against Me, him will I blot from My Book" (Exodus 32:32-33). This indicates that He knows the servant and the [unrepentant] sinner, to give reward to this one and punishment to the other.

The Twelfth Foundation is the time of the Moshiach (literally, the anointed [king]). This means to believe and be certain that he will come, and not to think that he is late in coming; "if it seems slow, wait for it; [because it will surely come, it will not come late]" (Habakuk 2:3). You should not set a time for him, and you should not make calculations in Scripture to determine the time of his coming. The Sages say, "Let despair come upon those who calculate endtimes." [This foundation further includes] to believe that he (Moshiach) will possess advantages, superiority, and honor to a greater degree than all the kings that have ever existed, as was prophesied regarding him by all the prophets, from Moses, peace be upon him, till Malachi, peace be upon him. One who doubts this or who minimizes his greatness denies the Torah that testifies explicitly to [the coming of Moshiach] in the account of Balaam (Numbers 24) and in the portion of Netzavim (Deuteronomy 30:3-5). Included in this principle is that there is no king to the Jewish people except from the House of David and the seed of Solomon alone. Anyone who disagrees with [the status of] this family denies G-d and His prophets.

The Thirteenth Foundation is the resurrection of the dead. This has already been explained [earlier in Rambam's commentary on Tractate *Sanhedrin*, where he writes, "The resurrection of the dead is a foundation from the foundations of Moses our Teacher, may peace be upon him"].

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Recommended book for further study: *Maimonides' Principles: The Fundamentals of Jewish Faith*, by Aryeh Kaplan. Pub. OU/NCSY Publications. ISBN-13: 978-1879016040

Part B. Prophets and Prophecy

Notes:

- This text was selected, with permission from Rabbi Lazar Brody, from "Prophets and Prophecy" at <http://members.aol.com/LazerA/prophecy.htm> (no longer available on-line).
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What is Prophecy?

It is a basic concept in Judaism {i.e. Torah} that G-d can communicate with certain human beings and has done so on numerous occasions in the past. This communication is called prophecy. This concept is so fundamental that it is one of the thirteen principles of Judaism compiled by Rambam (Maimonides).

A prophet receives his prophecy when he is sleeping or in a trance. The prophecy is conveyed in a symbolic form but the explanation is implanted into the mind of the prophet simultaneously.

The Special Status of Moses

Moses our Teacher has a unique status among all the prophets. Indeed, his stature is so important that Rambam included it as one of the thirteen principles of Judaism by itself. He is referred to as "the chief of all prophets". The higher status of Moses' prophecy is due to the mass revelation which occurred at Mount Sinai, an event unparalleled in history, which firmly established the authority of Moses and his prophecies. As we shall soon see, the prophecy of Moses is the basis upon which the validity of all other prophecy rests. Any prophet who contradicts the prophecy of Moses is inherently false. Moses was an exception to many of the rules regarding prophecy. Unlike all other prophets, Moses received prophecy while awake and in full control of his faculties. The prophecies of Moses were explicit, not couched in symbolism. And Moses was capable of experiencing prophecy whenever he chose to.

Who can be a Prophet?

In order for a person to receive prophecy he {normally} must be great in righteousness and {Torah-based} wisdom and completely self-disciplined.

{When such a person} prepares himself..., he can bring his mind to a higher spiritual state in which he becomes capable of receiving prophecy. {A proper preparation for a righteous Gentile could be through devout prayer, and observance and study of the Seven Noahide Commandments. However, if it suits G-d's purposes, He can grant a degree of prophecy to any person He chooses.}

A prophet has no control over whether and when he will receive prophecy. He can only ready himself by meditating and focusing his mind in a joyous state. (Prophecy can only come when a person is happy.) There is no guarantee that a person who has prepared himself will ever receive prophecy.

Prophetesses

Prophecy is not restricted to men. There have been many holy women who have attained the level of prophecy, many to an even higher degree than most men. According to at least one source the number of women who reached the level of prophecy is equal to the number of men. Some of the more famous prophetesses are: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, and Esther. There are many others.

The Obligation to Obey a Prophet

We are obligated to obey a prophet as it says in the Torah (Deuteronomy 18:15), "In your midst, G-d will set up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among your brethren, and it is to him you must listen."

How Do We Identify a Prophet?

When G-d sends a prophet, He gives the prophet a sign to show that he is a true prophet. However, not every person who shows such a sign is automatically accepted. The prophet must be known to be a great, wise, and righteous person. If he is such a person, then we are commanded to accept and obey him if he comes with a sign.

The sign that a prophet must give to prove he is genuine need not be a miracle. He must predict a future event, if his prophecy is fulfilled with perfect accuracy then we believe him, if, however, even the smallest detail is inaccurate then he is a false prophet. We must test a prophet in this manner several times but we are not permitted to overly test him.

It is always possible that even a person who successfully passes the required tests is not a true prophet. Still we are commanded to obey him. This is similar to the law that we must accept the testimony of two witnesses. Even though there is always the possibility that they are lying, nevertheless, we are required to believe them if they meet all of the requirements.

We can only test a prophet in prophecies which are [promising] good; the failure of a [threatened] bad prophecy to be fulfilled does not mean that the prophet is false. This is because G-d is merciful and accepts repentance. It is possible that the people have repented and G-d has removed the punishment which the prophet had predicted. {This occurred for the Gentiles of Nineveh, as written in the Book of Jonah. They repented of their evil ways, and G-d relented from His prophecy to Jonah that warned of their destruction.}

If an established prophet testifies that another person is a legitimate prophet we do not have to test the second [person]. {Therefore the people did not test Elisha, because he was appointed by the prophet Elijah.}

The Torah lays out the basic method for testing a prophet quite clearly in Deuteronomy 18:21-22 - "You may ask yourselves, 'How shall we recognize that a declaration was not spoken by G-d?' If the prophet predicts something in G-d's Name, and the prediction does not materialize or come true, then the message was not spoken by G-d. That prophet spoke deceitfully, and you must not fear him."

Even if a prophet passes all of these tests, if he attempts to contradict the Torah in any way he is automatically shown to be false. This requirement can disqualify any prophet at any time. A prophet may not add or detract from the Torah in any way; this applies to both **the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.**

Therefore, any prophet who claims that a certain commandment [of the 613 Jewish Commandments or the 7 Noahide Commandments] is no longer required, or that a new commandment has been added to the Torah, shows himself to be a false prophet and is judged accordingly. This is true even if he performs miracles.

However, an established prophet may declare a *temporary* suspension of a Torah Law [in the case of some temporary dire need], and we are required to obey him [e.g., when Elijah made a sacrifice to G-d on Mt. Carmel]. The only exception to this rule is idolatry, which can never be permitted under any circumstances.

False Prophets

A prophet who is shown to be false is liable for the death penalty [when there is a valid Sanhedrin court], as it says in Deut. 18:20, "But the prophet who shall willfully speak a word in My Name which I have not commanded him to speak, or one who speaks in the name of the gods of others - that prophet shall die."

The Authority of the Prophet

The task of the prophet is to admonish the people from sin and guide them in serving G-d. The prophet warns of coming punishments which will occur if the people do not repent and guides them in a general sense in their lives. The prophet is often a source of information which would be unobtainable otherwise. Despite the great stature of the prophets, no matter of Jewish [i.e. Torah] law can be decided by the means of prophecy or any other form of Divine inspiration [in Hebrew, *ruakh ha'kodesh*]. When a question of Jewish law is concerned, a prophet is no better than any other sage. [The Biblical Prophets were also sages.]

Prophets in the Torah

Although there were many [thousands of] prophets in the history of the Jewish people, the Hebrew Bible only preserves those prophecies which have a message for all generations.

Prophecy Today

Prophecy is a difficult state to obtain because, in addition to the demands it makes on the individual, it also requires a very high state of holiness in the general environment. When the Jewish people lived in the land of Israel and the Holy Ark was kept in the Holy Temple, this state of holiness existed in the land of Israel. Since the time of the destruction of the first Holy Temple, prophecy and other forms of Divine Inspiration have become progressively more difficult to obtain. It will return to the Jewish people {as a whole} in the time of Moshiach.

Sources

While this essay represents a serious effort to concisely state the basic concept and rules of prophecy in Judaism, it is, by no means, comprehensive. The amount of literature which deals with this subject is immense. I have based the bulk of this essay on the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* [*Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*], chapters 7-10 ...

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For further study: see also *The Divine Code*, Vol. I (2nd Ed.), Part I, Chapter 2, “Proselytizers and False Prophets,” by Rabbi Moshe Weiner: <http://asknoah.org/books/the-divine-code>

Class #2: Foundations of Torah, Principals of Faith, and Moshiach (the Messiah)

Quiz for Lesson #1

Some of the following questions may seem very open ended and philosophical. But they are taken from the text of the lesson, and the intention is to be sure that you have read and understood the material. This is intended for short answers only, and not long or in-depth answers.

1. (a) Is there any created entity that does not depend on G-d for its continuing existence?

(b) Why?
2. (a) It is taught that G-d has "attributes" - Wisdom, Kindness, Mercy, Kingship, etc. Does this mean that G-d might be a synthesis of different qualities?

(b) Why?
3. If G-d is All-powerful and can do anything, then why can't He have some aspect of a physical existence?
4. (a) If we say that G-d is the first, does this mean that He had a beginning?

(b) Why?
5. Why would it be a mistake to engage in some service or worship of an angel or a soul in Heaven, for example?
6. (a) If a person receives prophecy, does this mean that he or she must have already been shown something that will happen in the future?

(b) Why?
7. (a) If someone arises who passes all the tests to determine that he is a prophet, and then he tells us that he has received a prophecy that is supposed to now replace a prophecy that Moses received, under what circumstances should this person's statements be followed?

(b) Why?
8. Why are observant Jews so particular that there should not be even one mistake in the 304,805 letters of a Torah scroll that is to be read in a synagogue service (i.e. one incorrect letter disqualifies the entire scroll)?
9. There was a great Jewish Sage who used to tell his students, "May the fear of Heaven be upon you like your fear of human beings." What was the message he was teaching?
10. Why do you think that Rambam gave the 12th Principle of Faith the title "the *TIME* of the Moshiach"?