8th PRINCIPLE: Is our Sefer Tora reliable?

The eighth of the thirteen principles of the Jewish faith says that the Tora we have today is the same as the one given to Moshe Rabbenu (Moses) in Sinai.
Today we will explore the meticulous method used by the Sages of Israel to transmit the text of the Tora in a way that unintentional errors would be avoided.
We know that mistakes in the transmission of texts was something quite common, especially before the invention of printing. We believe that the Sefer Tora (a Tora scroll), as we have it today, contains exactly the same words that God transmitted to Moses. The biblical text has been preserved for centuries with great care. Our sages were well aware they were transmitting a unique text: the word of God. Therefore they did not allow the possibility of having inadvertent errors in the transmission or in the process of copying from one text to another.
What did the Sages do to avoid copyists' mistakes?

Our Scribes were called in Hebrew "Soferim". They were the Sages responsible for copying the Biblical text from one Tora scroll to another, keeping intact the text. To understand the transmission system that our sages have used to preserve the integrity of the text, we need to learn first why were they called "Soferim". The word "Sofer" or plural "Soferim" is a term used in reference to the individual who writes Tefillin, Mezuzot and scrolls of the Tora. But it is curious that the word "sofer" literally means "counter" (=accountant) not "writer" or "scribe" … So, why would the rabbis who copied the Sefer Tora be called Soferim? Our sages explain that they were called Soferim because "they counted all the letters of the Tora", that is, they knew exactly how many letters the Tora has, how many letters had each Parasha has, and even how many times each of the 22 letters of the hebrew Alphabet appears in each Parasha or in the Sefer Tora. And every time they copied the text, they did not just wrote and read the words: they

also counted the words and the letters they wrote, to verify the accuracy of the text and ensured that there were no more or less letters.

For example: It was known from time immemorial that the Sefer Tora, the five books of Moses, contains exactly 79,847 words and a total of 304,805 letters. The Soferim also knew, for example, how many letters each of the five books of the Tora contains: Bereishit: 78,064, Shemot: 63,529, Vayqra: 44,790, Bamidbar: 63,530, Debarim: 54,892. Thus, when a Sofer wrote a new Sefer Tora he counted the letters to make sure that nothing was missing.

A simple personal example to demonstrate how knowledge of the number of letters ensures the accuracy of the transmission of a word. My personal email is "rabbibitton@yahoo.com". When I dictate someone the first part of my email address I always clarify that "rabbibitton" is one word, with 11 letters. Many times people tell me that they were able to realize my last name is spelled with double "T" because I told them "11 letters". If I had not given them the number 11, many would have written "biton", or "rabi" if they don't know English.
The number of letters guarantees an accurate transmission > copying of a word or a text.

The eighth principle of our faith says that the Torah we have today is the same exact Tora we received at Sinai. This principle of faith is essentially about the faith we have in our ancestors. We are completely confident that they copied and transmitted us each letter of our holy Tora with absolute fidelity and accuracy. They developed a method, counting letters, which ensures that the "chain of custody" of the world's most important text was and is absolutely reliable.

B'H Tomorrow we will see that this eighth principle also includes our belief that the oral Tora we have today is the one transmitted by HaShem to Moshe Rabbenu.

.