9th PRINCIPLE: Can the Tora be changed or replaced?

We are exploring the 13 principles of Jewish faith. These were first formulated by Maimonides, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, or Maimonides (1135-1204) in his Pirush haMishanyot, Sanhedrin Chapter 10.

The 9th principle says that "the Tora will never be changed or replaced. God will never give another Tora or a new religion to the people of Israel or to any other people."

In Mishne Tora Yesode haTora 9:1, Maimonides also says: "If a prophet comes to change any law of the Tora of Moshe, we would immediately know that he is a false prophet. Whether this prophet is or is not Jewish, and regardless of whether he offers evidence of his divine mission through miracles he can perform… if the prophet says that God sent him to add or subtract a Tora commandment … we know that he is a false prophet. The mission of the true prophets is to inspire the people of Israel to fulfill the Tora and warn the people when they are transgressing it. "

The 9th principle aims primarily to warn us about "Biblical religions", particularly Christianity and Islam. Both religions are based on a replacement theology which states that the commandments of the Torah must be replaced by a New Testament (Christianity) or a new revelation (Islam).

In last week's Parasha we read about the most important event in Jewish history, in Hebrew Ma'amad Har Sinai, the event at Mount Sinai. What happened at Mount Sinai? The usual answer is: we received the Tora. But the broader response should be: on Mount Sinai, God chose us and offered us to make a covenant with Him, which we accepted. This covenant or "berit" is known in Judaism as "berit 'olam", an everlasting covenant that will

last □□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□ “while the heavens are above earth.” And the main part of that “covenant” or “berit” is that we received the Tora. Without going into the details of that covenant, it is interesting to know that in the Christian jargon the covenant is called “testament” (as “testimony”). And the basis of Christian theology is that God replaced □”□ the Old covenant/Testament for a new one (the intent of this replacement becomes clear when we explore this concept in Hebrew, where the the New Testament it is called “Berit Hadasha ” the new pact). The first reason why Jews reject Christianity is precisely the idea that, contrary to this principle, the Tora can be modified or replaced.

Probably alluding to another dogma of the Christian religion, Maimonides explains that in messianic times, no commandment of the Tora will be modified. Unlike Yeshu, the true Messiah will come to ensure compliance with all the laws of the Tora, not their abolition or replacement.

The 9th principle also implies that no commandments may be added to, or removed from the Tora, as it is said in Debarim 13: 1 “These words that I command you, you shall keep and observe them, you shall not add to them, nor subtract from them.”

Certainly, there are many commandments of the Tora that we do not fulfill today. But that is because today we do not have the right conditions for doing so. For example, there are dozens of commandments which deal with the religious services at the Bet-haMiqdash, the Temple of Jerusalem, which we have not rebuilt yet.

Are there commandments that are out of fashion? Back in the days of the Greeks many commandments of the Tora were criticized for being “outdated”. For example, The Greeks believed that the weekly Sabbath rest was only relevant to the ancient Judeo-Egyptian slaves, but in the era of “modernity” (250-300 years before Common Era) the Shabbat was outdated,

not relevant any more …. this past Shabbat my son David Bitton, visiting New York, addressed the issue of Shabbat in our days. He said that it looks like Shabbat has never been so necessary as today, in the history of humankind. Because today Shabbat is not just about resting or refraining from work. In our days, Shabbat also helps us to disconnect from the electronic world, from the media-addiction, from cell phones, electronic games, gadgets, etc. All this digital universe around us that, which not only does not allow us to think, but also prevents communication between us and our loved ones. Today, the only people in the world who possess the formula to make their children leaving the phone in order to communicate with their parents around a table, is the Jewish people. And that Divine formula is the “old” Shabbat.

The 9th principle declares that the Tora is not modern. Is eternal.