THE 13 PRINCIPLES: # 9. The Tora will not be changed or replaced

The ninth principle asserts that our God given Law, the Tora (see **this**), could never be changed or replaced by another set of Laws.

Rabbi Pereira-Mendes explains: "Our Tora was given us by God. He does not change. And His word stands for ever….It is because we believe that our Law never was and never is to be changed, that we reject Christianity." Christianity and Islam share with Judaism the Eight Principle, i.e., the belief in the divine origin of the Tora. But the Christian faith claims that God changed His mind and annulled the Pact with Israel (=*ma'amad har Sinai*, when God made Israel His chosen people) and now He made a new pact (*berit chadasha*) or a new testament with the Church, annulling the Biblical commandments and replacing them with a new set of laws.

Similarly, Islam accepts the divinity of the Tora, but their claim is that Mohammed's prophecies were greater than Moshe Rabbenu (whom they also venerate) and the Qoran, therefore, replaces the Hebrew Bible.

The ninth principle conveys our categorical rejection of all these theories of replacement. Every prophet in the Hebrew Bible came to teach and uphold the Tora and to encourage the People of Israel to be faithful to its commandments, not to change them. The Tora establishes clearly and explicitly (Deut. 13:2-6) that if a prophet comes and claims that we should modify *even one* Mitzva of the Tora, we know that he is a false prophet. Even though this prophet shows that he is capable of performing miracles, something which apparently would give credibility to his prophecy, we are commanded explicitly to reject his message and consider him a false prophet. "In all these cases", Maimonides says "we know that such a prophet is speaking presumptuously in God's name, making up something not told him by God. For God Himself told

Moses that these commandments (=The Tora) is for us and our descendants forever".

Tonight is the 15 of the month of Ab, a happy day in the Jewish Calendar.
Click here to read: "Six events occurred on Tu B'Ab, the 15th of Av, making it a festive day in the Jewish calendar" *by Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, from Aish*

THE 13 PRINCIPLES: # 8: The divine origin of the Tora

In the commentary to the Mishna, where Maimonides formulated for the first time the Thirteen Principles of Judaism, he included within the Eighth principle –the one that asserts that the Tora is from Divine origin (see **here**)– our belief that the Oral Tora is Divine as well. In other words, the "accepted explanations" of the Mitzvot were also transmitted to Moses by God.
For example, Lulab, Tefilin, Shofar none of these Mitzvot are explicitly *described* in the written Tora. Regarding Tefilin, for instance, the Tora just says (Deuteronomy 6:8) that "You should bind [the words of the Shema Israel] as a sign on your hand and as frontals on your forehead".

The Oral Tora instructs us the way of *binding these words in our hand* , i.e., writing the words of the Shema Israel in parchment; introducing these parchments into squared black boxes made of hard leather; the hand Tefilin having one compartment and the head Tefilin four; etc, etc. All these instructions, we believe, were not made up by Moses or by the rabbis. They were received by Moses from God. Moses said: *'Through this you shall know that God sent me to do all these*

things, and I did not do it on my own accord' (Numbers 16:28)
In the introduction to Mishne Tora Maimonides elaborates more on this principle: "Every commandment given to Moses on Mount Sinai was given together with its explanation. (*pirush*). God told Moshe (Exodus 24:12): 'I'm giving you the tablets of stone, the Tora and the instruction'. 'Tora', refers to the Written Tora, while 'instructions' means its explanation. We are thus commanded to perform and keep the 'Tora' according to these 'instructions'. These instructions is what we call the Oral Tora (Tora shebe'al pe)… These instruction were not written down [by Moshe] but were orally taught to the elders, to Joshua and to the rest of the People of Israel".
*Click **here** to see a great book where you can read more about the basic Principles of Judaism*

***"Maimonides Principles: The Fundamentals of Jewish Faith"**, written by a distinguished Rabbi of our time **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan z'l**.*

THE EIGHTH PRINCIPLE: The Tora is from Heaven

Last week we explained that the Eighth of the 13 Principles of Judaism asserts that the Tora that we now have is the same that was give to Moshe (see **here**).

Our belief is that the Tora was written by Moshe but authored by God Himself. In other words, we Jews believe that there is nothing that Moshe added from himself. No passages, words or even letters were added or written by Moshe's own mind.

There are three categories of Sacred Books in our Tanakh (Hebrew Bible). To the third category belong the books (Ketubim) which were written and authored by men who were inspired by God. This is what we call in Hebrew *Ruach haKodesh* or "by Divine Inspiration". Tehilim (the Psalms of King David) or Mishle (Proverbs of King Solomon), etc. belong to this category.

In the second and higher category we have the books of the Prophets. These books were written by *nebu-a* or prophecy, i.e., a vision, a message or a dream coming from God. Sometimes the Prophets wrote the God-given visions in their own words and according to their own personal perception, and sometimes they quoted verbatim the Divine words that they heard in those visions (such words are usually introduced by the terms: *ne-um haShem,* i.e., "that says God").
The Tora or Pentateuch is *unique* and belongs to the first and highest category. The Tora contains the words of God Himself. In the words of Maimonides "Moshe wrote the entire Tora with his own hand shortly before he passed away. He gave a copy to each tribe and another Tora was placed in the Ark of Testimony…. When the Tora was transmitted to Moshe, Moshe merely wrote it down, *like a secretary taking dictation*".

MUST WATCH

The History of the Middle East Conflict in 11 Minutes

THE 13 PRINCIPLES: #8. The accuracy of the Biblical Text

The Eighth of the Thirteen principles of Jewish faith asserts that the Tora which at present time is in our possession is the same that was given to Moshe Rabbenu (Moses) in Sinai.

The Tora, as we have it today, contains the words which God gave to Moses. These words have been preserved all these centuries by the care of our scribes or writers (Soferim), our rabbis and other learned and pious men. The scribes were called Soferim, a term related to “counting”, not “writing”, because they counted the letters of the Tora. From a very early time we know by actual count how many sentences, words and letters are in each of the five books of the Tora. We know also how many times each letter is used. We reproduce in every copy the exceptional letters, those enlarged or reduced letters, etc. A scroll of the Tora found incorrect or missing one single letter is not used in public worship until corrected. These are all precautions adopted to secure the accuracy of the text and that no alterations whatsoever take place.

I have a personal simple example to show how knowing the number of letters reassures the accuracy of the transmission of a word. My email is “rabbibitton@yahoo…”. When I dictate the first part of my email address to someone over the phone I always clarify and say: “one word, 11 letters”. Many times they tell me that they counted the letters and then they realize that they have to write a double “t”. Knowing the exact number of letters prevents mistakes which could be made in such areas. Bear in mind that in Biblical Hebrew you can write the VAV or the YOD, or omit them (*chaserot veyeterot*) without altering the meaning of the word. That is why it was so critical to know the exact number of the letters in order to preserve the precise text during centuries of exiles, persecutions, etc.

Adapted from the book: Jewish Religion Ethically Presented, by Rabbi Hayim Pereira Mendes.

(To be continued…)

	Words	**Letters**
Bereshit	20,512	78,064
Shemot	16,723	63,529
Vayqra	11,950	44,790
Bamidbar	16,398	63,530
Debarim	14,294	54,892
TOTAL	**79,847**	**304,805**

THE 13 PRINCIPLES. # 7. Moshe reached the highest level of Prophecy

Previously, we explained that we Jews believe that Moshe attained the highest level of prophecy (see **here**).
One of the differences between Moshe and all other prophets was that Moshe could receive Prophecy whenever he wished. He did not need to bring himself to a state of prophetic concentration since he was in a permanent state of prophetic concentration (See, Rambam, Yesode haTora 7:6).
I will explain this concept with an example.
Prophecy is a phone-call from God. Now, you can only get a phone call, any phone call, if you have a functioning phone. To be a prophet, one had to reach the highest level of huan perfection (remember: "wealth, wisdom and strength"? See **here**). In this sense, "to have a phone" means to have reached this high level of human perfection. Many people might*imagine* that they receive (or deserve to receive) a message from God. Which in light of what I just explained, it might be considered a bit arrogant, unless one feels that he or she have actually achieved that level of human perfection. Without that "phone" you can not receive God's message!
Now, once an individual possesses 'an active phone', he will not *necessarily* get a call from HaShem! Being a prophet means "achieving a level which deserves prophecy", not necessarily the actual reception of a prophetic message. Calling or not calling the prophet is God's prerogative: "All prophets (except Moshe) could not receive prophecy whenever they desired. It all depended on God's will. A prophet might wait

days and years, and still not receive prophecy" (Rambam, commentary to the Mishna).
Moshe Rabbenu, however, could receive a call from God at will. "Whenever he wished, he could be enveloped by divine inspiration, and prophecy will descend upon him" (Yesode haTora 7:6) enabling him to be in constant contact with God.

Preparing ourselves for Yom Yerushalaim ***(Sunday May 20, 28 of Iyar)***

WATCH: **The heart of the Jewish People**
READ: **LOVING AND LOSING JERUSALEM, by Sarah Y Riegler**

THE 13 PRINCIPLES: Moshe was the greatest Prophet.

Previously, we analyzed the Sixth principle of the Jewish faith which describes the nature of prophecy and the character of the prophets of Israel (see **here**).
The Seventh principle is also about prophecy. But it discusses the particulars of one Prophet: Moshe Rabbenu, the greatest prophet, before and after him.
Our Rabbis explained that the level of prophecy of Moshe Rabbenu was higher than the level of all others.

All other prophets received their prophetic message by the means of a vision in a sort of trance, or in a dream.

Moshe Rabbenu, however, was able to receive God's message*directly*, while conscious and awake, not in a prophetic trance. This is what the Tora calls: *panim el panim*, literally: "face to face", which means that Moshe Rabbenu could listen to God's words in the same way that a man listens to another man. "in full possession of his faculties, not in

visions and not by parables" (R. Hayim Pereira Mendes)

The possibility of being conscious allowed Moshe Rabbenu to 'talk back' to God. Once, for example, Moshe even asked God a "*personal*" question. After the sin of the golden calf, an intense encounter took place between God and Moshe. Moshe prayed to HaShem to forgive the Jewish people. At one point, Moshe Rabbenu said to God: *"Show me Your glory"*. Our Chakhamim explained that Moshe was asking God a poignant question: "Why do You allow bad things to happen to good people?" Perhaps on behalf of all humankind, Moshe expressed to God *the* question that so often troubles the mind of many believers.

God's answer to Moshe is a matter for a long analysis. But as it refers to our subject, God taught Moshe (and us) that the answer to that question was beyond man's understanding (*ki lo yrani ha-adam vachai*), a living human being cannot perceive/understand God, i.e., there are matters which are even beyond Moshe's understanding. Moshe Rabbenu, the greatest prophet, was still a man, not a human-god.
WATCH
Questions from God, by Aish

The 13 principles of Jewish faith: # 6: the mission of the Prophets (3 of 3)

Many people think of a prophet as any person who sees the future. While the gift of prophecy certainly includes the ability to see the future, a prophet is far more than just a person with that ability (see **here**). A prophet was basically

a spokesman for God. A person chosen by God to speak to people on God's behalf and convey a message or teaching.
Moshe, Yirmiyiahu (Jeremiah) and others, when they were appointed by God Almighty to talk to the people of Israel, were not eager to accept that mission. On the contrary, at the beginning they refused to accept God's mission. However, as Rabbi Hayim Pereira-Mendes said: "Once the divine message was received, it was irresistible. The inspired Prophet cannot help but speak."
Being a Prophet of Israel was not a very popular position. The difficult task consisted in admonishing the people, the dignitaries and even the King. The Prophets often became the target of persecution and opposition. The prophet Yirmiyiahu, for example, warned of the imminent destruction of Yerushalaim lest the people keep disobeying the Laws of HaShem. In return for his message Jeremiah was attacked by his own brothers, beaten and put into the stocks by a priest, imprisoned by the King, threatened with death and thrown into a cistern. Eliyahu haNabi had to flee for his life, and so did Yesha'ayahu, who at the end was killed by the wicked King Menashe.
Among the ideals of our prophets are: 1. The Fatherhood of God. That is: that God loves us and cares about us like parents love their children. 2. The brotherhood of Man, equality, righteousness, kindness, charity. 3. The Kingdom of God on earth. That God is our King, and as such we should faithfully obey His Laws. 4. The universal ideals: all nations should know and serve the one and only God; the establishment of righteousness on Earth and universal Peace or arbitration instead of War.

PRINCIPLE 6: The Prophets of Israel (2 of 3)

Last week we explained what were the three prerequisites for a person to be a candidate for prophecy (see **here**). Besides

being a God fearing Jew, the prophet had to adjust his mind to God's reality, leaving aside his worldly reality. Being "behaviorally" wealthy, for example, meant that a person had to reach a level of complete lack of interest for material possessions. Obviously, a mind that expects to absorb God's words could not be distracted with material pursuits.

Paraphrasing rabbi Hayim Pereira-Mendes: *The prophets were prayerful men. It was the habit of this spiritual communication with God, and constant meditation upon His words and ways, combined with right conduct, that qualified the inspired men and women of the Bible to receive Divine inspiration or Divine messages. Just as physical and mental exercise result in greater physical and mental development, and consequently greater physical and mental possibilities, so spiritual exercises result in greater spiritual development, and consequently greater spiritual possibilities.*

According to our tradition there were schools for the training of prophets, like the one established by Shemuel the prophet. The students were called *bene hanebi-im.* In that school they would train to attain behavioral wealth, strength and wisdom and, according to some *ge-onim*, they will also train themselves in the meditation techniques which would mentally prepare them to cope with the overwhelming experience of getting a vision coming directly from haShem.

(If the reader is interested in the fascinating subject of prophecy, I would recommend Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, z'l, marvelous books. Among them: "Innerspace")

If a person attained such a perfection of character, he will be considered *a Prophet*, but not necessarily receive prophecy. From this point of view prophecy could be compared with getting a phone call from God. Having attained perfection of character is like having a cell phone on. It enables you to be a potential receiver of God's phone call. But still, God might or might not call you. That is God's prerogative.

Read **"Surplus Jews"** an excellent article from Jerusalem Post, by Daniel Gordis.

PRINCIPLE 6: The prophets of Israel were true (1 of 3)

The Prophets of Israel were exceptional human beings, called by God to rebuke the Jewish people. In order to be credible preachers, the Prophets had to be role models individuals, possessing an extremely refined character.
Maimonides explains that not every person could become a prophet. There were three key character-traits which were a prerequisite to become a candidate to prophecy and eventually, if God's so wished, to be called by Him (=prophecy).
An individual had to be strong, wealthy and wise.
"Strong" is a person with the ability to control himself, his body, his appetites and the words he utters form his mouth. The highest level of strength is achieved when an individual is also able to control his emotions and thoughts. 'Strength' is not measured by the ability to control other people, but by the ability to overcome our own impulses and appetites.
"Wealthy" is the one who is content with his material possessions, whatever they are. He does not need more and he is not greedy to have more than what he possesses. In Judaism, wealth is not about *quantity* but *appreciation*. One person could be wealthy with 100 dollars, while other person could be considered poor even if he has 1 billion . Richness is not measured by what one *has* but by what one *needs.* The correct formula is not: the more you have the richer you are, but the less you need (regardless of how much or little you have) the richer you are.
"Wise", is not the person who knows everything, for that is impossible, but the one that is constantly growing in his or her thirst to know and learn. Usually, we think we know something, but as our life's experience become richer, we get to new levels of understanding on the matters we thought we know. Jewish wisdom is the opposite of intellectual stagnation.
(To be continued…)

The 13 principles of Judaism: #5. Praying to God, the right way (2 of 2)

Previously, we've explained that we should pray exclusively and directly to God (see **here**) and communicate with Him only by means of prayer. Sometimes, in their desperation to have their prayers answered, people would use tricks, amulets or formulas which, they think, will help to fulfill their needs and desires. The Tora, however, is not a book of magic written to teach us how to make God do what we want. The ultimate objective of prayer is not forcing God to accept our will, but training us to accept His.
What is the proper way to pray to haShem?
I'm quoting the invaluable words of rabbi Hayim Pereira-Mendes on prayer:
"Prayer means speaking to God. It may be Praise, Supplication or Thanksgiving. We should speak to God about what is most in our hearts, as a child speaks to its father. That is true prayer. We should place before God all our private wants, our sorrows and our perplexities. Nothing that troubles us in our daily lives is so unimportant that we need hesitate to speak to God about it in prayer."
"Prayer is of little use unless we are conscious of what we say and feel that we are actually speaking to God. After true prayer we feel that we have been near to God. The object of prayer is to bring us near to God."
"Prayer without proper conduct is worse than useless. It is an insult to God. Our prophets condemn prayer, sacrifices, the observance of Sabbath and other Holy Days, and all religious ceremonies, unless our conduct is acceptable to God. Right conduct is everything. Religious forms without right conduct are useless. Unless prayer, Sabbath, Holy Days and all

religious ceremonies or forms build up right character, they fail in their purpose. We cannot expect that God will answer our prayers, unless we "do justly, love kindness and walk modestly before Him."

Not everything is lost in Great Britain **WATCH** **Douglas Murray discussing Israel and Iran**