



# Carnegie Shul Chatter

## December 31, 2020



## Zoom in for Services

We invite you to join in our abbreviated Shabbos service via Zoom, beginning at 10 am and lasting for approximately an hour.

We use our Birnbaum siddur, which you may find on line.

Join Zoom Meeting by clicking this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6444674407?pwd=ZnRYalNiVjhJYWZRRkdtN2E4NUVadz09>

Meeting ID: 644 467 4407

Passcode: 9UHMsr

**This weeks parsha: Vayechi**

## Come One and All

And so, as the pandemic continues, we continue to conduct Sabbath services via Zoom every Saturday morning at 10 am. And we do manage to get a minyan almost every week. The services last a little more than an hour, include all of the essentials that can be included without having physical access to the Shul and Torahs, and allow for some discussion led by Dr. Block about the weekly Torah portion.

Thus far, our services have been attended solely by our Sabbath regulars. But that doesn't have to be the case.

With on-line Zoom services there is an opportunity for our members who live out of town or out of state to attend services at the Little Shul That Could in Carnegie.

Take an hour of your time on Saturday morning. Log into our services. Come back home to Carnegie. We'd love to have you join us.

# Vayechi in a Nutshell

**Genesis 47:28-50:26**

Jacob lives the final 17 years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children, but is prevented from doing so. Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators and kings; priests will come from Levi, scholars from Issachar, seafarers from Zebulun, schoolteachers from Shimon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive growers from Asher, and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage"; Shimon and Levi for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naphtali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benjamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.



A large funeral procession consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy Land, where he is buried in the Machpeilah Cave in Hebron.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "G-d will surely remember you, and bring you up out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

## Maimonides, Yigdal, and the Apostles' Creed

What? The Apostles' Creed in the Carnegie Shul Chatter? What is happening here? The Carnegie Shul Chatter is usually about Jewish things. It never talks about Christian things. What's this all about?

Okay, back when I was a kid those many, many years ago, I grew up in a neighborhood that had lots of Catholic kids, and I was always amazed at how much they seemed to know about their religion. And how much I didn't know about mine.

The Catholic kids went to Catechism classes and learned the Mass in Latin and, more

importantly, learned the Church's position on all sorts of things, ranging from the role of the Pope to the Church's position on things such as birth control, divorce, and abortion.

Me, at Hebrew school? I learned to read Hebrew (but very little of how to translate what I read), in preparation for my Bar Mitzvah. We learned a little Jewish history from Torah, but little or nothing about the Jewish religion's stance on the kinds of things that the Catholic kids were learning about.

We didn't have a Chief Rabbi in the good old US of A, but other countries, including England, did. What did a Chief Rabbi do? How did we feel about birth control, etc.? Why did Reform Jews do things differently from Conservative, and where did Orthodoxy fit in? What was Chassidism all about? And what were Reconstructionists?

And why did the Catholics have the Apostles' Creed that told them what the basic principles of their faith were when we had nothing similar?

Or did we?

Well, it turns out that we did have something and it was right there under our noses.

When we were kids, our congregation did not conclude Friday evening and Saturday morning services with Adon Olam, as we do in Carnegie. Instead, we concluded with Yigdal (page 11 in your Birnbaum siddur), and Yigdal was always led by a pre-Bar Mitzvah kid as part of his training to lead services.

And, lo and behold, if we had read the commentary at the bottom of page 11 (which none of us did, and which the Rabbi did not teach us), we would have found out that Yigdal, "is a summary of the thirteen principles of faith formulated by Maimonides in his commentary on the Mishnah (Sanhedrin10:1)."

Who knew? For that matter, who knew who Maimonides was, and who knew what the Mishnah or Sanhedrin were? Such was the training we received in Hebrew school. But we were great at davening the service in Hebrew and learning our Haftarah and Bar Mitzvah speech, weren't we?

So what are Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith? What is every Jew supposed to believe? And are the Thirteen Principles universally accepted by all Jews? (Is anything universally accepted by all Jews?)

Below is an article from [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com) that includes Maimonides' principles and some objections to the principles.



# The Thirteen Principles of Faith

**Maimonides' theological principles were never unanimously embraced.**

By Daniel Septimus

The following is largely based on Marc Shapiro's "Maimonides' Thirteen Principles: The Last Word in Jewish Theology?" published in *The U-Madda Journal*, volume 4 (1993).

Maimonides wrote his Thirteen Principles of Faith in his introduction to the tenth chapter of Talmud Sanhedrin.

According to Maimonides, anyone who denies — or even doubts — any of these principles is a heretic with no place in the World to Come. Yet, these principles were hardly undisputed. Many scholars who preceded and succeeded Maimonides held contrary beliefs.



Below is a list of the Thirteen Principles with references to some of these divergent beliefs. Unless otherwise noted, all the scholars mentioned are medieval authorities.

## The Principles

### Principle 1

God exists; God is perfect in every way, eternal, and the cause of all that exists. All other beings depend upon God for their existence.

#### Objections

Some medieval authorities believed that God created the world from eternal matter (see Principle 4). Thus, according to these scholars, it would not be true to say that God is the cause of all that exists.

### Principle 2

God has absolute and unparalleled unity.

### Principle 3

God is incorporeal — without a body.

#### Objections

In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides asserts that anyone who believes that God is corporeal is a heretic. In reference to this, Abraham ben David Posquieres (also known as Rabad) comments that people greater than Maimonides have believed that God has a physical form. Rabad himself does not subscribe to this view, but objects to the claim that those who do are heretics.

In addition, Moses ben Hasdai Taku, a tosafist (medieval commentator on the Talmud), believed that God could take a physical form. Finally, Samuel David Luzzatto, a 19th-century scholar, defended the idea that God has a body, claiming that an embodied God was the only God conceivable to most people.

Ironically, Maimonides himself seemed to share this view. In the Guide of the Perplexed (I, 46) he writes: “For the multitude perceive nothing other than bodies as having a firmly established existence and as being indubitably true.”

## **Principle 4**

God existed prior to all else. (In a later version of the Thirteen Principles, Maimonides included the notion that God created the world from nothing [creation ex nihilo].)

### **Objections**

In his commentary to Genesis 1:1, Abraham Ibn Ezra suggests that the word *bara* (created) implies cutting or setting a boundary. Scholars such as Joseph Tov Elem and David Arama understood this to mean that Ibn Ezra believed that God sculpted the world from eternal matter. Gersonides also believed that the world was created from eternal matter.

## **Principle 5**

God should be the only object of worship and praise. One should not appeal to intermediaries, but should pray directly to God.

### **Objections**

Some of the selihot prayers — prayers of repentance recited on fast days and during the High Holy Days — and the third paragraph of the Shalom Aleichem hymn, sung prior to the Shabbat kiddush, are directed to angels. In addition, one of the Geonim — the leaders of Babylonian Jewry from the 7th to 11th centuries — defended the use of angels to intercede with God (Ozar ha-Geonim, Shabbat 4-6). He added that angels could sometimes fulfill the petitions of a prayer without consulting God.

Jacob Emden (1697-1776) is among some of the others who have approved of petitioning angels to intercede on one’s behalf. Nissim Gerondi (Ran) maintained that there is one specific angel whom one may pray to.

## **Principle 6**

Prophets and prophecy exist.

## **Principle 7**

Moses was the greatest prophet who ever lived. No prophet who lived or will live could comprehend God more than Moses.

### **Objections**

Nahmanides and Gersonides believed that the Messiah would gain more knowledge of God than Moses. Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745-1813), the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, in his Likutei

Amarim, notes that Moses' prophetic abilities weren't as great as those of Isaac Luria, the renowned medieval kabbalist.

## **Principle 8**

The Torah is from heaven. The Torah we have today is the Torah that God gave to Moses at Sinai.

### **Comment**

This principle assumes that there is and has always been one text of the Torah and that the Masoretic text — the text established by ben Asher in 930 CE — is this text.

### **Objections**

The Talmud (Baba Batra 14b-15a; Makot 11a) relates that Joshua wrote the last 8 verses of the Torah. Abraham Ibn Ezra believed that Joshua wrote the last 12 verses. The Midrash Tanhuma, a rabbinic text, cites cases of tikkun soferim, instances where the scribes of the Great Assembly (the leaders of the Jews during the Persian exile) emended the Bible — including the Torah.

Menahem ben Solomon ha-Meiri mentions the “Masoretic works” instead of a singular “Masoretic text.”

Solomon ben Aderet (Rashba) discussed when we should change our Torah to accord with the Talmud's version (which differs from the Masoretic text). Aryeh Loeb Guenzberg (18th century) opined that the commandment that every Jew write a Torah scroll no longer applies because of our doubts about how certain words are to be written. Similarly, Moses Sofer (1762-1839) believed that there's no need to say a blessing before writing a Torah because, perhaps, the Talmud's version is correct and the Torah being written is invalid.

## **Principle 9**

The Torah will never be abrogated, nothing will be added to it or subtracted from it; God will never give another Law.

### **Objections**

Joseph Albo suggested that, in theory, if a prophet came whose mission could be verified in the same way Moses' could, then commandments — except for the Ten Commandments — could be abolished.

## **Principle 10**

God knows the actions of humans and is not neglectful of them.

### **Objections**

According to Ibn Ezra, “The Whole [God] knows the individual in a general manner rather than in a detailed manner.” Some interpreted this to mean that God knows the general actions



of humans, but not the particular details. Gersonides developed this idea fully: God knows universals, but not particulars.

### **Principle 11**

God rewards those who obey the commands of the Torah and punishes those who violate its prohibitions.

### **Principle 12**

The days of the Messiah will come.

### **Objections**

The talmudic Rabbi Hillel (not to be confused with the earlier Hillel) stated that: “There shall be no Messiah for Israel, because they have already enjoyed him in the days of Hezekiah (Sanhedrin 99a).”

### **Principle 13**

The dead will be resurrected.

## **Conclusion**

In Judaism, disagreement is not anomalous. However, whereas in the legal tradition we can speak of a *mahloket l’shem shamayim*—a debate in the name of heaven (God) — according to Maimonides, debate is not possible when it comes to dogmatic principles. The consequences of diverging from Maimonides’ principles are severe.

After listing and describing his Thirteen Principles, Maimonides states: “When all these foundations are perfectly understood and believed in by a person he enters the community of Israel and one is obligated to love and pity him... But if a man doubts any of these foundations, he leaves the community [of Israel], denies the fundamentals, and is called a sectarian, *apikores*, and one who ‘cuts among the plantings’ [a reference to the talmudic heretic Elisha ben Abuyah]. One is required to hate him and destroy him.”

According to this assessment, revered authorities — such as Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, Rabad, ha-Meiri — whose works are studied to this day, would fall into the latter category. They would be considered heretics who not only have no redemption in the afterlife, but who are not true members of Israel and who deserve nothing but our scorn.

What are we to conclude from this?

Probably not that these scholars were heretics, nor that Maimonides’ principles were incorrect or untrue (for in most cases, even the divergences from Maimonides were relatively minor). If we can conclude anything from this analysis, it is that the Thirteen Principles of Faith — as articulated — were never normative, never as defining and consequential as Maimonides believed them to be.