

The Millie Arbesfeld
Midreshet Yom Rishon

Sunday Morning Learning Program for Women

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***Are There
Obligatory Beliefs
in Judaism?***



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1. Are we obligated exclusively in our actions or are there obligatory beliefs, as well?
2. If so, what are they?
3. Are they universally accepted?
4. If such beliefs have obligatory status and are denied, is one punished?
5. If one is well-intended, however, holds a mistaken conception of an obligatory belief, is such an individual a heretic?

1. Duties of the Heart, Introduction, Bahya Ibn Paquda

The science of the Torah, falls into two parts: The first aims at the knowledge of practical duties and is the science of external conduct. The second deals with the duties of the heart, namely, its sentiments and thoughts, and is the science of the inward life... I examined these writings but failed to find among them a treatise specially devoted to Inward Duties. This department of knowledge, the science of the Duties of the Heart, had, I saw, been entirely neglected. No work had been composed, systematically setting forth its principles and divisions. I was so greatly surprised that I said to myself, 'Possibly this class of duties is not positively enjoined by the Torah, but is only an ethical obligation, the aim of which is to teach us the right and proper way. Possibly it belongs to the class of supererogatory practices that are optional, for which we will not be called to account nor be punished if we disregard them. And therefore our predecessors omitted to treat of it in a special work.' A careful examination, however, by the light of Reason, Scripture and Tradition, of the question whether the Duties of the Heart are obligatory or not, convinced me that they indeed form the foundation of all the Precepts, and that if there is any shortcoming in their observance, no external duties whatever can be properly fulfilled.

2. Faith and Doubt, N. Lamm

One is a state of acknowledgement, in which I accept certain propositions as true. The other is a relationship of trust where I commit my confidence in another. The first, that of acknowledgement, is a cognitive type of faith, in which I intellectually accept certain propositions as true- such as the existence and unity of God- whether or not I can offer convincing logical proof for my conviction. This is a "belief that" type of faith. The second type, that of trust, is not "belief- that", but "belief in." Regardless of the thoughts I entertain about God, regardless of my theology and the dogmas I affirm, I believe *in* Him: I trust and esteem Him. This is the area not of propositions, but of relationship... Now this second category of trust and "belief- in," can be expressed as an emotional investment in another and in action, in the willingness to pursue a certain course of conduct at the behest of the one in whom I have faith-trust.

3. Shemot 14:31

וַיִּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה, אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בְּמִצְרַיִם, וַיִּירָאוּ הָעָם, אֶת-ה'; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, בְּה, וּבְמִשְׁחָה, עֲבָדוּ.

4. Bamidbar 20:12

וַיִּאמֶר ה', אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן, יַעַן לֹא-הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי, לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל--לִכְן, לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת-הַקֶּהֶל הַזֶּה, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר-נָתַתִּי לָהֶם.

5. Sefer HaKuzari, Y. HaLevi

I was asked to state what arguments I could bring to bear against the attacks of philosophers and followers of other religions which differ from ours and against the sectaries who differ from ours and against the sectaries who differ from the majority of Israel. And I remembered the arguments I had heard of a Rabbi who sojourned with the King of the Khazars, who, as we know from historical records, became a convert to Judaism about four hundred years ago: to him there appeared repeatedly a dream, in which it seemed as if an angel addressed him saying: 'Your (intention) is indeed pleasing to the Creator, but your way of acting is not pleasing'... This induced him to ponder over the different beliefs and religions, and finally he became a convert to Judaism.

The Rabbi: I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the Israelites out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the (Holy) Land, after having made them traverse the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way; who sent Moses with His Law and subsequently

thousands of prophets, who confirmed His law by promises to those who observed, and threats to the disobedient. We believe in what is contained in the Torah- a very large domain.

The Rabbi: If you were told that the King of India was an excellent man, commanding admiration and deserving reputation, only because his actions were reflected in the justice which rules his country and the virtuous ways of his subjects, would this compel you to revere him?

The Khazari: How could this compel me, while I am not sure if the justice of the Indian people is natural and not dependent on their king, or due to the king, or both?

The Rabbi: But if his messenger came to you bringing presents which you knew to be only procurable in India, and in the royal palace, accompanied by a letter in which it is distinctly stated from whom it comes, and to which are added drugs to cure your diseases, to preserve your health, poisons for your enemies, and other means to fight and kill them without battle, would this make you beholden to him?

The Khazari: Certainly, for this would remove my former doubt that the Indians have a king, I should also acknowledge that his dominion and his word had touched me.

The Rabbi: In this way I answered your question. In the same strain Moses spoke to Pharaoh, when he told him 'The God of the Hebrews sent me to you'- the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For the story of their life was well known to the nations, who also knew that the Divine power was in contact with the Patriarchs, caring for them and performing miracles for them. He did not say: 'The God of heaven and earth' nor 'my Creator and yours sent me'. In the same way God commenced His speech to the assembled people of Israel: 'I am the God whom you worship, who has led you out of the land of Egypt'; He did not say 'I am the Creator of the world and your Creator'. In the same style I spoke to you, O Prince of the Khazars, when you asked me about my creed. I made mention to you of what is convincing for me and for the whole of Israel, who knew these things, first through personal experience, and afterward through an uninterrupted tradition, which is equal to experience...

‘And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou **the God of thy father**, and serve Him (I Chron. 28:9).

וְאַתָּה שְׂלֵמֶה בְּנֵי דַע אֵת אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ וְעַבְדֵהוּ בְּלֵב שְׁלֵם
וּבְנִפְשׁ חֲפִצָּה כִּי כָל לְבָבוֹת דּוֹרְשׁ ה' וְכָל יֵצֵר מִחֲשָׁבוֹת
מִבְּיִן אִם תִּדְרָשׁוּ יִמְצָא לְךָ וְאִם תִּעְזָבוּ יִזְנִיחַךְ לְעַד:

In David's last will to Solomon, he reminded his son to imitate his father and ancestors in their **belief in** the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose solicitude was with them, and who fulfilled His promises in multiplying their descendants, gave them Palestine, and caused His Shekhinah to dwell among them.

6. Faith and Doubt. N. Lamm

If the relational belief-in rather than the propositional belief-that is the essential core of Jewish faith, such that cognitive doubts in the former can be overcome by reverting to a state of relation, does this mean that the whole elaborate enterprise of Jewish medieval rationalism is an aberration, a foreign graft on the body of essential Judaism?...

The medieval Jewish rationalists were men of profound faith who understood that true faith must mean complete faith, *emunah shelemah*, a faith that will grasp and engage man in his totality and not only in selected aspects of his personality and his being. They knew full well that the central core of Jewish *emunah* is the relation of trust, belief-in. But they realized, probably in response to the new currents of the cultures in which they lived, that with the development of man's rational sophistication, this particular area of human personality had been neglected in Judaism. They therefore saw it as their religious duty to include within the faith-commitment the Jew's philosophical drives and cognitive yearnings as well as his sense of trust and unmediated emotional or affective relation, his belief-that as well as his belief-in...

The medieval Jewish philosophers, then undertook to explicate the relational belief-in, in the idiom of propositional belief-that.

7. משנה מסכת סנהדרין פרק י משנה א

All Jews have a share in the world to come, as it is said, "Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of My hands wherein I glory" (Is. 60:21). But these have no share in the

כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא שנאמר
(ישעיה ס') ועמך כולם צדיקים לעולם יירשו
ארץ נצר מטעי מעשי ידי להתפאר ואלו שאין

world to come: one who says that the resurrection of the dead is not taught in the Torah; one who says that the Torah is not from heaven; and the atheist. Rabbi Akiva adds: one who reads the apocryphal books or who utters charms over a wound saying, "I will put none of the diseases upon you which I have put upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord that heals you" (Ex. 15:26). Abba Saul adds: the one who pronounces the letters of the Tetragrammaton.

להם חלק לעולם הבא האומר אין תחיית המתים מן התורה ואין תורה מן השמים ואפיקורס רבי עקיבא אומר אף הקורא בספרים החיצונים והלוהש על המכה ואומר (שמות ט"ו) כל המחלה אשר שמתני במצרים לא אשים עליך כי אני ה' רפאך אבא שאול אומר אף ההוגה את השם באותיותיו:

8. Commentary on the Mishneh, M. Maimonides

Our religion is based on the following thirteen principles:

1. To believe that the Creator exists
2. To believe that God is one
3. To believe that God is incorporeal
4. To believe that God is absolutely eternal; no thing existed before Him
5. To believe that only God is rightfully worshipped
6. To believe that among men are found prophets
7. To believe that Moses was the chief of all other prophets
8. To believe that the Torah came from God
9. To believe that the Torah is authentic
10. To believe that God knows all that men do
11. To believe that God rewards the obedient and punishes sinners
12. To believe that the Messiah will come
13. To believe that the dead will be resurrected

When a man believes in all these fundamental principles, and his faith is thus clarified, he is then part of that "Israel" whom we are to love, pity and treat, as God commanded, with love and fellowship. Even if a Jew should commit every possible sin, out of lust or mastery by his lower nature, he will be punished for his sins but will still have a share in the world to come. He is one of the "sinners in Israel." But if a man gives up any one of these fundamental principles, he has removed himself from the Jewish community. He is an atheist, a heretic, an unbeliever who "cuts among the plantings." We are commanded to hate him and to destroy him. Of him it is said: "Shall I not hate those who hate You, O Lord?" (Ps. 139:21)

9. Guide of the Perplexed III:51, M. Maimonides

As for someone who thinks and frequently mentions God, without knowledge, following a mere imagining or following a belief adopted because of his reliance on the authority of someone else, he is to my mind outside the habitation and far away from it and does not in true reality mention or think about God. If, however, you have apprehended God and His acts in accordance with what is required by the intellect, you should afterwards engage in totally devoting yourself to Him, endeavor to come closer to Him- that is, the intellect. In my opinion it consists of setting thought to work on the first intelligible and in devoting oneself exclusively to this as far as this is within one's capacity. Therefore you will find that David exhorted Solomon and fortified him in these two things, I mean his endeavor to apprehend Him and his endeavor to worship Him after apprehension has been achieved. He said:

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father and serve Him, and so on. If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee, and so on. (I Chron. 28:9)

וְאַתָּה שֶׁל מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי דָעַ אֵת אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ וְעָבְדֵהוּ בְּלֵב שָׁלֵם
וּבְנֶפֶשׁ חֲפִצָּה כִּי כָל לְבָבוֹת דּוֹרֵשׁ ה' וְכָל יֶצֶר מִחֻשְׁבוֹת
מִבֵּין אֵם תִּדְרָשׁוּ יִמְצָא לְךָ וְאֵם תִּעְזָבֶנּוּ יִזְנִיחֶךָ לְעַד:

Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at.

10. Guide of the Perplexed III:27, M. Maimonides

The Law as a whole aims at two things: the welfare of the soul and the welfare of the body. As for the welfare of the soul, it consists in the multitude's acquiring correct opinions corresponding to their respective capacity. As for the welfare of the body, it comes about by the improvement of their ways of

living one with another. Know that as between these two aims, one is indubitably greater in nobility, namely, the welfare of the soul- I mean the procuring of correct opinions- while the second aim- I mean the welfare of the body- is prior in nature and time.

11. Commentary on Mishneh Torah, RABaD

Why has he (Maimonides) called such a person a sectarian? There are many people greater than, and superior to him, who adhere to such a belief on the basis of what they have seen in verses of Scripture, and even more in the words of the aggadot which corrupt right opinion about religious matters.

12. Derekh Emunah, A. Bibago

RABaD's statement is really amazing to me, since if it were correct everyone who denied a principle without meaning to do so would have an excuse and a portion in the world to come. [Even] the belief of the Christians would not be inconsistent with true felicity, since they understand Scripture literally and think that the intention of the verse is as they believe it. [On this basis] they would not be called heretics and sectarians. It would be possible to find a man who does not believe in any one of the principles or beliefs of the Torah because of his failure to understand the meaning of the Torah. [On this position] such a one could be called neither a sectarian nor a heretic. All this opposes reason and faith.

13. Rosh Amanah, I. Abravanel

These things are intolerable according to both the faith of Torah and correct reason. For a false doctrine about any one of the principles of faith turns the soul from its true felicity and will not bring [one] to life in the world to come, even if the opinion is held without intention to rebel. It is like poison which consumes the spirit of him who eats it, even if he ate it thinking that it was good and healthy food. Similarly, heresy and false belief in the matter of principles of religion will expel the soul of man and without a doubt make it impossible for him to inherit the world to come.

14. Oheb Mishpat, S. Duran

You also ought to know that one who has properly accepted the roots of the Torah but was moved to deviate from them by the depths of his speculation, and who thereby came to believe concerning one of the branches of the faith the opposite of what has been accepted as what one ought to believe, and tried to explain the verses of Scripture according to his belief- even though he errs, he is no denier. For he was not brought to this deviation by heresy at all, and if he found a tradition from the Sages to the effect that he ought to turn from the position he had adopted, he would do so. He only holds that belief because he thinks it is the intention of the Torah. Therefore, even though he errs, he is not a denier and sectarian according to what is agreed upon by our people, since he had accepted the roots of the Torah as he should.

15. Sefer HaIkkarim, I:2, J. Albo

Every Israelite is obliged to believe that everything that is found in the Torah is absolutely true, and anyone who denies anything that is found in the Torah, knowing that it is the opinion of the Torah, is a heretic... But a person who upholds the Torah of Moses and believes in its principles, but when he undertakes to investigate these matters with his reason and scrutinizes the texts, is misled by his speculation and interprets a given principle otherwise than it is taken to mean at first sight; or denies the principle because he thinks that it does not represent a sound theory which the Torah obliges us to believe; or erroneously denies that a given belief is a fundamental principle, which however he believes as he believes the other dogmas of the Torah which are not fundamental principles, or entertains a certain notion in relation to one of the miracles of the Torah because he thinks that he is not hereby denying any of the doctrines which it is obligatory upon us to believe by the authority of the Torah- a person of this sort is not a heretic. He is, rather, classed with the sages and pious men of Israel, although he holds erroneous theories. His sin is due to error and requires atonement.

16. Sefer Emunot v'Deot, Saadia Gaon

It may be objected: 'How can we undertake to pursue knowledge by means of speculation and inquiry with the object of attaining mathematical certainty seeing that our people reject this manner of speculation

as leading to unbelief and the adoption of heretical views? Our answer is that only the ignorant speak thus... What, however, our Sages did try to prevent us from doing was to brush aside the prophetic Scriptures and to rely on our own personal judgments. For one who speculates after this manner may sometimes find the truth and sometimes go astray; until he has found the truth, he will be without religion, and even if he finds the truth of religion and clings to it, he is never sure that he will not depart from it should doubts arise in his mind and weaken his belief. All of us agree that one who acts in this way is a sinner, even though he may be a genuine philosopher.

We, the Children of Israel, inquire and speculate in matters of our religion for two reasons: (1) in order that we may find out for ourselves what we know in the way of imparted knowledge from the Prophet of God; (2) in order that we may be able to refute those who attack us on matters connected with our religion.

If the doctrines of religion can be discovered by rational inquiry and speculation, how can it be reconciled with His wisdom that He announced them to us by way of prophetic Revelation and verified them by proofs and signs of a visible character, and not by rational arguments? God knew that the final propositions which result from the labour of speculation can only be attained in a certain measure of time. Had He, therefore, made us depend on speculation for religious knowledge, we should have existed without religion for some time until the work of speculation was completed. Perhaps many of us would never have completed the work because of our inability or lack of patience, or doubts may have come upon us and confused our minds. From all of these troubles God saved us quickly by sending us His Messenger, announcing through him the Tradition, and allowing us to see with our own eyes signs in support of it. He spoke to His Messenger in our presence, and He based on this fact our obligation to believe Him for ever. He then commanded us to inquire patiently until the truth of Tradition was brought out by speculation.

To make the matter clearer, let us suppose that someone who possesses 1000 dinar distributes 500 of it to various recipients. He wishes to show his friends without delay how much of the money is left in his hands. He, therefore, tells them that the balance left amounts to 500 dinar and proves it by weighing the gold that is left in his hands. After he has weighed it in their presence, and the amount of 500 dinar has been established, his friends are obliged to believe what he told them. They are now at leisure to arrive at the same knowledge by a different method, namely, by working it out arithmetically, each according to his capacity and understanding...

It behooves us to explain what is meant by *i'tiqad* (belief). We say that it is a notion that arises in the soul in regard to the actual character of anything that is apprehended. When the cream of investigation emerges [and] is embraced and enfolded by the minds, and through them acquired and digested by the souls, then the person becomes convinced of the truth of the notions he has thus acquired...

He (God) made it obligatory upon us to learn to know Him, to worship Him, and to dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to Him, as the saint has said:

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a whole heart and with a willing mind. (I Chron. 28:9)

וְאַתָּה שְׂלֵמֵהּ בְּנֵי דַע אֶת אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ וְעִבְדֵהוּ בְּלֵב שְׂלֵם
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