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**PhD Thesis**

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**INTER-RELIGIOUS AND COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE  
THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES OF THE JEWISH BELIEF BY  
MAIMONIDES**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study tries to focus on the way in which Maimonides might have thought before writing his thirteen principles. It shows how historical and socio-political changes have influenced transformations in Jewish identities, and how Jews responded to the changes in their religious-social milieu. The study rests on the premise that identity cannot arise in isolation, but its emergence and development can only be achieved through social interactions. Embedded in a historical and social context, identity is treated as a product of the interaction of the individual and his environment, in which an individual is an active participant.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study is a socio-religious research dealing with data about the social world. The present study is about how religious identities are constructed in the social context. It aims to investigate how Jews construct their identities, how they think about and communicate the meanings of their identities in comparison with other socio-religious societies. The purpose is to understand the world of the Jews, to relate it to the particular social relations, and to interpret it within the given social context. Based on Maimonides manuscripts and its socio-religious surrounding. Considering the complexity, intensity and sensitivity of the issues involved, qualitative methods seem the most appropriate methods of investigation, data collection and analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is trying to analyze one of Maimonides<sup>1</sup> important works, which he wrote in his commentary on the Mishnah (tractate Sanhedrin, chapter 10), compiles what he refers to as the Shloshah-Asar Ikkarim, the Thirteen Articles of Faith, compiled from Judaism's 613 commandments found in the Torah. Maimonides refers to these thirteen principles of faith as "the fundamental truths of our religion and its very foundations."

We start with general introduction to the beginning of Jewish philosophy, the leaders of the Jewish philosophy and its roots. Followed by a background to Maimonides decision to write these principles and the reasons he gave them a dogmatic weight.

The 13 principles of faith dealing with the following issues: The existence of God, God's unity, God's spirituality and incorporeality, God's eternity, God and intermediations, Revelation through God's prophets, The preeminence of Moses among the prophets, God's law given on Mount Sinai, The immutability of the Torah as God's Law, God's foreknowledge of human actions, Reward of good and retribution of evil, The coming of the Jewish Messiah and The resurrection of the dead.

These principles were controversial when first proposed, evoking criticism by Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo. They evoked criticism as minimizing acceptance of the entire Torah (Rabbi S. of Montpellier, Yad Rama, Y. Alfacher, Rosh Amanah), and were effectively ignored by much of the Jewish community for the next few centuries. ("Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought", Menachem Kellner). However, these principles became widely-held; today, Orthodox Judaism holds these beliefs to be obligatory, and that anyone who does not fully accept each one of them as potentially heretical. Two poetic restatements of these principles (Ani Ma'amin and Yigdal) eventually became canonized in the "siddur" (Jewish prayer book).

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<sup>1</sup> Maimonides (1135–1204) was a Jewish rabbi, physician, and philosopher in Spain and Egypt during the Middle Ages. He was one of the various medieval Jewish philosophers who also influenced the non-Jewish world. Although his copious works on Jewish law and ethics were initially met with opposition during his lifetime, he was posthumously acknowledged to be one of the foremost rabbinical arbiters and philosophers in Jewish history. Today, his works and his views are considered a cornerstone of Orthodox Jewish thought and study. Maimonides' full name was Moshe ben Maimon (Hebrew: מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מִיָּמּוֹן). However, he is most commonly known by his Greek name, Moses Maimonides. More Jewish works refer to him by the Hebrew acronym of his title and name — Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon — calling him the RaMBaM or the Rambam.

The main task of this work is to emphasize, through the 13 principles of faith, the theological differences between Judaism and other religions, mainly Christianity and Islam, which we claim was definitely among other of Maimonides intentions while decided to write them, as he saw great danger to Judaism, from outside by Islam a true monotheistic religion, and from the inside by the Karaites Jews.

### **THE 13 PRINCIPLES OF FAITH BY MAIMONIDES**

1. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is the Creator and Guide of everything that has been created; He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.
2. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is One, and that there is no unity in any manner like His, and that He alone is our God, who was, and is, and will be.
3. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is not a body, and that He is free from all the properties of matter, and that there can be no (physical) comparison to Him whatsoever.
4. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is the first and the last.
5. I believe with perfect faith that to the Creator, blessed be His Name, and to Him alone, it is right to pray, and that it is not right to pray to any being besides Him.
6. I believe with perfect faith that all the works of the prophets are true.
7. I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him, was true, and that he was the chief of the prophets, both of those who preceded him and of those who followed him.
8. I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that is now in our possession is the same that was given to Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him.
9. I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will not be changed, and that there will never be any other Law from the Creator, blessed be His name.

10. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, knows all the deeds of human beings, and all their thoughts, as it is said: “[He] that fashioned the hearts of them all, [He] that comprehends all their actions.”
11. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, rewards those that keep His commandments and punishes those that transgress them.
12. I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and even though he may tarry, with all this I wait every day for his coming.
13. I believe with perfect faith that there will be a revival of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, blessed be His name, and exalted be His Name for ever and ever.

### Short review of the main issues discussed in this work on the 13 principles

#### **The first theological Principle: “The existence of God”**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: Can the existence be proved? We try to see that through: Internal-ethical research, the human physical dimension, spiritual immaterial research, cosmological research, the Laws and the order of the nature as prove for God existence and “The physico-theological argument” Kant vs. Maimonides.*

#### **The second theological Principle: “The unity and the exclusivity of God”**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: The monotheism and its source, Monotheism and polytheism, The Jewish Monotheism and the Monotheism of Plato, The Jewish Monotheism and the holy trinity in Christianity, The Jewish Monotheism and the Islam.*

Judaism is based on a strict Unitarian monotheism, the belief in one God. The prayer par excellence in terms of defining God is the Shema Yisrael, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One", also translated as "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is **unique/alone**." Maimonides write: "[God], the Cause of all, is one. This does

*not mean one as in one of a pair, nor one like a species (which encompasses many individuals), nor one as in an object that is made up of many elements, nor as a single simple object that is infinitely divisible. Rather, God is a unity unlike any other possible unity. This is referred to in the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4): "Hear Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one."*

The idea of God as a duality or trinity is heretical - it is considered akin to polytheism. The Jewish idea of the exclusivity of God is rejecting Plato Monotheism that assumed the existence of an ancient material parallel to God, as well rejecting Aristotle Monotheism that assumed the unity of the sky in the same level of the unity of God.

Islam is a fully monotheistic religion. This monotheism is absolute, not relative or pluralistic in any sense of the word. The Islamic creed, is the declaration of belief in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad. It goes as follows *"I testify that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is Allah's prophet"*.

**The third theological Principle: "The transcendentalism of God, He is not physical"**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: Transcendentalism versus Pantheism, The Transcendentalism of God versus the idea of Pantheism, The house of worshiping in Judaism in Christianity and Islam, The Pantheism of Spinoza - DUES SIVE NATURA the mono-panteism, Transcendentalism and Pantheism in Christianity and Islam.*

God is non-physical, non-corporeal, and eternal. A corollary belief is that God is utterly unlike man, and can in no way be considered anthropomorphic. All statements in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature which use anthropomorphism are held to be linguistic conceits or metaphors, as it would otherwise be impossible to talk about God at all. In two words G-d is incorporeal. G-d is infinite; we are finite; it is physically impossible for a finite construction such as the human mind to contain a concept of the infinite like G-d's essence. Judaism is different from Aristotle's concept that relating some independent power and influence to the powers of the Nature. Judaism is different not only from Aristotle's view but from all form of Pantheism; the material Pantheism of

Spinoza that see G-d as the Nature DUES SIVE NATURA. Judaism rejects as well the spiritual Pantheism of Plato that sees all the cosmos existence as a metaphysic expression of the divine activity. Pantheism by Judaism is simply another form of paganism.

### **The forth-theological Principle: “God is the first”**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: God and the creation - Maimonides and the Greeks philosophy (Aristotle and Plato), Order in the Nature!?, The Sinai Revelation and the Creation of the world, What was before the Nature? Christianity and Islam on the Creation*

Judaism says that God is eternally existent. Related to the notion of eternal existence is the concept of God as Creator, as a being completely independent of "everything else" that exists because he created everything else. Maimonides reject the Greeks philosophy that claim that the world is ancient. It is common to observe that finite human beings cannot fully understand eternity, since it is either an infinite amount of the time we know or something other than the time and space we know. If this premise is true, then it follows that God is independent of both space and time, since these are properties of the universe. So according to this notion, God exists before time began, exists during all moments in time, and would continue to exist if somehow the universe and time itself were to cease to exist. The laws and order in the Nature is something that appears in the bible while it is only confirmed recently in since. Maimonides is claiming against Aristotle idea that if indeed the laws are deterministic the revelation on Mount Sinai, that was a big change in these laws, couldn't take place?

What was before the Nature? Science can't help us it can only analyze what exist and not before existence. Christianity and Islam like Judaism say that the universe was created in "days" or "steps".

### **The fifth-theological Principle: “Serving God without any intermediates”**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: Intermediations in Judaism and Moses grave, Intermediations in Christianity mainly in the Roman-catholic Church, Intermediations in Islam*

Any belief that an intermediary between man and God could be used, whether necessary or even optional, has traditionally been considered heretical. Maimonides writes that *"God is the only one we may serve and praise....We may not act in this way toward anything beneath God, whether it be an angel, a star, or one of the elements.....There are no intermediaries between us and God. All our prayers should be directed towards God; nothing else should even be considered."*

In Judaism the disappearance of Moses' grave location was explained because of the danger that people might make out of him an Idol or intermediate. This view has been shared by Islam as well, while Christianity sees it much differently, especially Roman Catholicism. Catholics believe that no priest, as an individual man, however pious or learned, has power to forgive sins. This power belongs to God alone; however, God can and does exercise it through the Catholic priesthood. Catholics believe God exercises the power of forgiveness by means of the sacrament of Penance.

**The sixth theological Principle: "The prophecy"**

*The issues raised in this principle are: The source of prophecy, Prophecy in Judaism and the Sinai Revelation, The importance of prophecy as a foundation of the Jewish belief, who is the prophet? And what's his role?, The prophet and the Jewish Law, Metaphysical intervention vs. the Jewish law, Prophets and prophecy in Christianity and in Islam, The prophecy and its period in Judaism and in other religions.*

Judaism is the only religion in the world that started with a revelation of God to a whole nation, this is important because it is proving the existence of prophecy and the truth of the Torah that was given in prophecy.

Maimonides agrees with "the philosophers" in teaching that, man's intelligence being one in the series of intelligences emanating from God, the prophet must, by study and meditation, lift himself up to the degree of perfection required in the prophetic state. But here, he invokes the authority of "the Law", which teaches that, after that perfection is reached, there is required the "free act of God", before the man actually becomes a prophet. The prophet is bringing the word of God but he has no advantage on the sages of



the Jewish law. Any Metaphysic intervention made by him cannot bring him advantage on the sages.

According to the Torah, at a minimum the criteria for a person to be considered a prophet in Judaism are that they must follow the God of Israel (and no other God), they mustn't describe God differently than He is known to be from Scripture, they mustn't advocate change to God's word or things that contradict His already-stated eternal word, and the things they do speak of must come to pass (Deuteronomy 13:1-5;18:18-22). As Judaism believes that God's word is true eternally, one who claims to speak in God's name but diverges in any way from what God himself has said, logically cannot be inspired by divine authority.

**The seventh theological Principle: “The quality of Moses prophecy”**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: Legal quality of Moses prophecy, the quality of Moses prophecy, Islam and Christianity on Moses and his prophecy.*

Moses is held to be the chief of all prophets, even of those who came before and after him. This belief was expressed by Maimonides, who wrote that "Moses was superior to all prophets, whether they preceded him or arose afterwards. Moses attained the highest possible human level. Moses is distinguished from the prophecies of all other prophets in four regards: First, every other prophet received prophecy through an intermediary. Second, all other prophets only receive their prophecy when they are sleeping, Moshe received his prophecy by day. Third, when a prophet receives prophecy, he would be weakened by it and his body would shudder, but Moshe, was not so, rather, the word came to him and he did not experience trembling and shivering in any way. Fourth, all the prophets were unable to receive prophecy when they willed it but only when HaShem, blessed be He, wished it. Moshe, could prophesize at any time he wished. This Principe is rejecting both the standpoint of Christianity and Islam as they see Jesus and Muhammad as the greatest one.

### **The Eighth theological Principle: “Torah is from Heaven”**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: Sinai Revelation and the Torah, A revelation to a nation, The content of the Torah as a witness to its divine source research on the ethical, theological and the scientific dimensions of the Torah, The written Torah and the oral Torah, The Sadducees and the Pharisaic, The Karaism.*

Rabbinic Judaism holds that the Torah extant today is the same one that was given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai. Judaism view the Written and Oral Torah as the same as Moses taught, for all practical purposes. The revelation on Sinai in front of the whole nation is proving the authenticity of the Torah. Moses personality and the way it is described in the Torah, is proving its authenticity. The content of the Torah is proving its authenticity; the ethical level of the Torah is far above the ethical level of the surrounding civilization at the time it was given and still so today. So is the situation regarding the theological level monotheism vs. polytheism. As well the source of the scientific knowledge appears in the Torah (zoology, astronomy...) is simply derive from the Devine.

The oral Torah was rejected not only by other religouns but by internal fractions and sects in Judaism that did not accept it, the most famous were the Sadducees during the second temple and the Karaitic from the 8<sup>th</sup> century till the Middle Ages.

### **The Ninth theological Principle: “The Torah was transcribed from the Creator and we may not add to it or remove from it, neither in the Written Torah nor in the Oral Torah”**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: The perfection of the Torah, its completeness and its eternity, The authenticity of the Torah- Judaism, Christianity and Islam, The Transcription - Tradition and the Mesora*

This Principe speaks of the perfection of the Torah, its completeness, its eternity and its authenticity. The authenticity was kept through very strict rolls known as the “Mesora”. Maimonides wrote that people who deny the Godly source of the teaching of the mouth

are to be considered among the heretics, However, at the same time Maimonides holds (Hilchot Mamrim 3:3) that most of the Karaites and others who claim to deny the "teaching of the mouth" are not to be held accountable for their errors in the law because they are led into error by their parents and are thus referred to as a tinok she'nishba. There are big differences in the practice between the rabbinic and the Karaites among them: Karaites have different Calendar as they rely on observations of the Moon only. During the Jewish Shabbat Karaites refrain from sexual relations on the day. Karaites extinguish all household lighting, both natural and artificial, until the Sabbath ends. Contrary to the beliefs of some, Karaites do not wear tefillin in any form. They don't put Mezuzah etc. This principal excluding few groups: The Karaitic sect that rejected the Oral Torah, Christians and Islam that rejected the perfectness of the Torah while adding the New Testament and the Quran rejected the eternity of the Torah while canceling the commandments of the Torah.

**The Tenth theological Principle: "God knows the actions of mankind"**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: God's providence in the Jewish belief, in the tradition and in biblical literature, The ways of God providence, The free choice between good and bad in Jewish philosophical literature, God's Providence vs. Human free choice, Judaism and other religions on God's Providence and Human free choice, God's Providence and Human free choice in the period of the 2nd temple the Sadducees and the Pharisaic , Human free choice in modern psychology*

Divine providence is discussed throughout Rabbinic literature, and in particular by the classical Jewish philosophers. The discussion brings into consideration the Jewish understanding of nature, and its reciprocal, the miraculous. The rationalist view which Maimonides is its representative does not deny the occurrence of miracles, but attempts to limit it, and will rationalize the numerous miraculous events related in the Bible and bring them within the sphere of the natural order. Providence is, in fact, a function of intellectual and spiritual activity: it is the activity, not the person that merits providence.

Humans are born morally pure; Judaism affirms that people are born with a yetzer ha-tov (יצר הטוב), a tendency to do good, and with a yetzer hara (יצר הרע), a tendency to do evil. Thus, human beings have free will and can choose the path in life that they will take. The belief in Free will is axiomatic in Jewish thought, and is closely linked with the concept of reward and punishment, based on the Torah itself. The idea of Free will is important also in regard with understanding God's purpose in the creation. Free will is required by God's justice, it is further understood that in order for Man to have true free choice, he must not only have inner free will, but also an environment in which a choice between obedience and disobedience exists.

If God know everything (Providence) where is then our Human free choice? The paradox is explained by observing that God exists outside of time, and therefore, His knowledge of the future is exactly the same as His knowledge of the past and present. Just as His knowledge of the past does not interfere with man's free will, neither does His knowledge of the future. Good expression of this issue is: "Everything is foreseen; yet freewill is given" (Rabbi Akiva, Pirkei Avoth 3:15). This issue of the providence and the free choice was controversial inside of the nation between the Sadducees and the Pharisaic during the second temple; it was documented by Josephus Plavious.

Islam thinkers such as Abu Hanifa and al-Ash'ari searched for ways to explain this question how both human capacity to do right or wrong, and divine total power could be asserted at the same time? Ash'ari develops an account of free will in which every human action has two distinct agents. God creates the act with his divine power, but then the human "acquires" the act, making it theirs and taking responsibility for it using their human free choice.

While in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the school of determinism was most popular, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we see a major change, today the vast majority of philosophers believe in free choice.

### **The Eleventh theological Principle: “God gives reward and punishments”**

The Jewish view is that God will reward those who observe His commandments and punish those who intentionally transgress them. Examples of rewards and punishments

are described throughout the Bible, and throughout classical rabbinic literature. The nature of the reward is that if a person perfected his intellect to the highest degree, then the part of his intellect that connected to God - the active intellect - would be immortalized and eternally enjoying the "Glory of the Presence" for all eternity. The punishment would simply be that this would not happen; no part of one's intellect would be immortalized with God. Maimonides, relatedly, views "reward and punishment" as manifesting in the World to Come as opposed to in this world (see Talmud, Kiddushin 39b) — he therefore defines Divine providence as that which facilitates intellectual attainment as opposed to as an instrument of reward and punishment. The history is showing that the existence of the Jewish people is simply a miracle. While other nations disappeared and left in the museum as an archeological exhibitions the Jewish people stayed alive. It is proving that the Principle of Reward and Punishment work very much alive among the Jewish people.

One of the main questions asked in this issue is “The righteous suffer-the wicked thrive”!? The book of Job is focused on this question. Judaism is distinguishing between the Individual and the Nation, while we can’t understand how God treat the individual, we can understand God relationship with the Jewish nation as we see it through history. We cannot understand why did the Holocaust happened? but when we see the establishment of the state of Israel, a miracle in a biblical proportion, that put some light.

### **The Twelfth theological Principle: “The Mashiach will come”**

*The issues been raised in this principle are: The messianic period in the biblical eschatology, The source in Judaism, The messianic days, a universal repentance, The messianic days, Maimonides approach, Who is the Messiah? What’s his role in Judaism and in other religions, Maimonides opinion on the role of other religions and their Messiahs toward the arrival of the Messiah.*

The messianic period is the first part of the biblical eschatology, after that will come the resurrection followed by the next world to come. Believing in The messianic days, is a belief in a universal repentance, time when The God of Israel will overthrow the tyrannical nations who are oppressing Israel, war and famine will end, and an era of peace and prosperity will come upon the Earth.

Who is the Messiah? He is a human being, the messiah is non-supernatural. He is called “Ben David” as he is a descendent of King David from his father side. In the days of the Messiah a large company of Jews from all 12 tribes will return to the Land of Israel, all of the people of Israel will come back to, or follow, Torah, The holy Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt, Israel will live free among the nations, and will have no need to defend itself.

The Jewish vision of Messianic times has little to do with the Christian definition of this term. Judaism's view of Jesus reflects Jewish views of eschatology, the characteristics of the Messiah, the gift of prophecy, and the cosmological nature of God, which are derived from the Torah and Biblical prophecies expressed by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others. According to these criteria, Jesus did not fulfill the qualifications of the Messiah or Messianic prophecies, he was not a prophet, and it is heresy to believe that he was divine, part of a Trinity, or an intermediary between mankind and God. Very few texts in Judaism directly refer to or take note of Jesus.

### **The Thirteenth theological Principle: “The resurrection of the dead”**

*The resurrection of the dead in Jewish literature, The controversy that was raised against Maimonides, Maimonides approach, The relationship between the resurrection of the dead and the world to come*

Most of the Tanakh makes no mention of any resurrection of the dead. Thaw Elijah’s raising of a young boy from death and similar case by Elisha, were viewed within the scope of Jewish worldview and theology more as resuscitations. And there is Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones being restored as a living army. The actual doctrine of a bodily resurrection is found in the book of Daniel.

In the First Century B.C.E, there were debates between the Pharisees who believed in the future Resurrection, and the Sadducees who did not, over whether or not there was an afterlife. Formalized in the First Century C.E., the second blessing of the central daily Jewish prayer is called Techiyat ha-Metim ("the resurrection of the dead") and closes with the words m'chayei hameitim ("who gives life to the dead") i.e., resurrection.

For the public and for clearing his name from suspicious Maimonides wrote a special article known as "*Igeret tchiyat hametim*" in which he explained this issue in details. He stressed that resurrection had nothing to do neither with the messianic era nor with Olam Haba. Rather, he considered resurrection to be a miracle that the book of Daniel predicted.

Since Christianity was born out of Jewish praxis and worldview, it is worthwhile to point out that Christianity's doctrine of resurrection is an outgrowth of the Jewish beliefs. Early Christianity is closest to the Pharisaic view of the resurrection, rather than that of the Sadducees who believed in no afterlife.

According to Islamic beliefs, all humans are resurrected three times simultaneously. Those who believe in Allah and did good deeds in their lives will go to heaven and live there for eternity. Those who did not believe in Allah and did bad deeds in their lives will burn in hell for eternity.