

We Do Not Rely on Miracles: Faith in Judaism

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Introduction

- Is Judaism a faith?
 - What does one must believe to be Jewish?
 - Can one's Judaism be revoked for lack of belief?
- The Jewish concept of faith
 - Emunah – אֱמוּנָה - Trust
 - Amen – אָמֵן - Agreement
- The Watchword of our Faith

שִׁמְעֵ יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

Hear, O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai is one.

Deuteronomy 6:4

But Maimonides said...

- Moses Maimonides (Rambam) (1135-1204) wrote a Jewish “catechism”
- Tried to canonize Jewish belief versus other people’s ideas about God
- It was not universally accepted in his time, nor in ours, but it has been preserved as a model of one sage’s ideas about baseline beliefs
- Maimonides called non-believing Jewish people heretics, denying the very traditional Jewish practice of disagreement
- These are his Thirteen Principles of Faith

Maimonides' Catechism - Thirteen Principles of Faith

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.
2. God has absolute and unparalleled unity.
3. God is incorporeal—without a body.
4. God existed prior to all else.
5. God should be the only object of worship and praise. One should not appeal to intermediaries but should pray directly to God.
6. Prophets and prophecy exist.

7. Moses was the greatest prophet who ever lived. No prophet who lived or will live could comprehend God more than Moses.
8. The Torah is from heaven. The Torah we have today is the Torah that God gave to Moses at Sinai.
9. The Torah will never be abrogated (repealed or done away with), nothing will be added to it or subtracted from it; God will never give another Law.
10. God knows the actions of humans and is not neglectful of them.
11. God rewards those who obey the commands of the Torah and punishes those who violate its prohibitions.
12. The Messiah will come.
13. The dead will be resurrected.

Faith as Comfort

- Much of Jewish history has been lived in exile, completely powerless, with only faith and hope sustaining us
- We should not minimize the significance of faith in something larger than ourselves as more than a means for coping – it is an entire worldview
- Ani Ma'amin – I Believe



Faith as a Basis for Action

- Jewish faith may be assumed, but it does not permit recklessness
- Faith alone is not enough – action is required
- A story from the Talmud illustrates this point
 - Faith in doing the commandments and the reward that will come
 - A father tells a boy to climb to the roof to gather the eggs and dispatch the mother – following two commandments
 - The boy falls and dies – the question of faith comes in – how can the reward for fulfilling the mitzvah be so cruelly denied?

והא אמר רבי אלעזר שלוחי מצוה אינן נזוקין לא בהליכתן ולא בחזירתן סולם
רעוע הוה דקביע היזיקא וכל היכא דקביע היזיקא לא סמכינן אניסא דכתיב
(שמואל א טז, ב) ויאמר שמואל איך אלך ושמע שאול והרגני

The Gemara asks: But didn't Rabbi Elazar say that those on the path to perform a mitzvah are not susceptible to harm, neither when they are on their way to perform the mitzva nor when they are returning from performing the mitzvah? The Gemara answers: In that case it was a rickety ladder, and therefore the danger was established; and anywhere that the danger is established **one may not rely on a miracle**, as it is written with regard to God's command to Samuel to anoint David as king in place of Saul: "And Samuel said: How will I go, and Saul will hear and kill me; and God said: Take in your hand a calf and say: I have come to sacrifice an offering to God" (I Samuel 16:2). Although God issued the command, there was concern with regard to the established dangers. (Kiddushin 39b)

Conclusion

- Faith matters – but be responsible
- Belief and faith are part of Judaism, but not requirements
- Belief is assumed, but not explicit
- Emunah is an affirmation of trust in the Jewish trinity of God, Torah, Israel