

Section 10

The Ten Principles of Faith

Rav Bashyatzki's Ten Principles of Faith set forth his view of Karaite Judaism's most essential tenets. Different Sages, however, adopted slightly different versions of the Principles of Faith.

Although primarily a matter of theology, the principles of faith are also relevant to *halakha*. Firstly, in establishing that the Torah is the word of an omnipotent God, they provide a justification for why it behooves Jews to follow *halacha*. Secondly, they provide insight as to the reason for certain commandments and are thus conducive to *hekeish* ("Notes on §1.5).

The sages do not merely assume the principles of faith to be true. Rather, *Adderet Eliyahu* brings logical and textual arguments to support their veracity. *Mikdash Me'at* does not discuss these arguments in depth, however.

Mikdash Me'at does elaborate on the Sixth Principle of faith. This principle establishes the requirement for the faithful to know the language and proper interpretation of the Torah. A translation of part of the Sixth Principle of faith can be found in Prof. Leon Nemoy's *Karaite Anthology*.

I will also summarize *Adderet Eliyahu's* discussion of the commandment not to add or detract from the Torah (Deuteronomy 4:2). Although this discussion is found in the "Sanctification of God's Name" section of the 1966 Ramla Edition, I have moved it to the present section because it is relevant to the Sixth Principle's statement that the proper interpretation of Scripture is "according to its *peshat* without addition or subtraction"¹.

The topics I will cover in this section are:

1. The Ten Principles of Faith
2. The Sixth Principle: The Proper Interpretation of the Torah
3. The Prohibition on Adding and Subtracting to the Torah

"It is one of the principles of the faith to know the interpretation of our divine Torah using the methods that we have expounded but this cannot be accomplished without knowledge of all academic disciplines since the Torah incorporates them all " -*Adderet Eliyahu* Sixth Principle of Faith, Part II

§10.1 The Ten Principles of Faith

The *Adderet* affirms the following ten principles of faith, supporting their veracity with textual and philosophical arguments:

1. That the entirety of the physical universe was created and has not forever existed.
2. That all things have an eternal Creator who was not himself created.
3. That this Creator has no physical form and is single and unified in every sense.
4. That this Creator sent Moshe Rabbeinu peace be upon him.

¹ *Adderet Eliyahu* Sixth Principle of Faith, Part II

5. That He gave His perfect Torah to Moshe.
6. That every believer should know the language and interpretations of the Torah.
7. That God sent the prophets other than Moshe.
8. That God will resurrect men in the Day of Judgment.
9. That God gives to every man each according his deeds and according to what he earns.
10. That God has not abandoned the people of the exile to the nations. Rather, Israel's present tribulations are His will. It is fitting for Israel to yearn for its salvation at the hand of the Mashiach from the line of David.

Notes on §10.1:

Rav Yehudah Hadassi's 10 Principles of Faith:

Different Karaite sages published slightly different versions of the ten principles of faith. One of the earliest compiled lists is by Rav Yehudah Hadassi. He set forth his 10 Principles of Faith in his *magnum opus Eshkol HaKofer* ("Cluster of Henna"), written about three centuries prior to *Adderet Eliyahu*. Rav Yehudah's list predates even Maimonides' now famous 13 principles.

Rav Yehudah tells us that his principles of faith drew on the works of his Karaite predecessors, and the principles set forth in the *Adderet* are similar in many respects to Rav Yehudah's. For example, Rav Yehudah also includes as his Sixth Principle the importance of knowing the language of the Torah. His Ninth Principle, like the *Adderet's*, is that there will be a day of judgment. As one of the last Karaite Mourners of Zion, Rav Yehudah placed special emphasis on the destruction of Jerusalem and God's Temple. Accordingly, his Seventh Principle states that the Jerusalem Temple is God's Palace, a principle which has no corollary in the *Adderet's* list.

For more background on Rav Yehudah's Principles of Faith, I recommend reading Professor Daniel Lasker's *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi*.

§10.2 The Sixth Principle: The Proper Interpretation of the Torah

§10.2a The Hebrew Language

It is the duty of every believer to know the Hebrew language. Although one may understand the general meaning of Scripture through translation, one must read Scripture in its original Hebrew to perfectly understand its specific intent. Thus, every Jew must learn Hebrew and teach it to his children.

§10.2b The Peshat

It is the duty of every believer to know the proper interpretation of the Torah. In general, one should interpret Scripture according to its *peshat* (or "plain meaning"). There are, however, two major exceptions to this rule. *First*, if reading a phrase according to its plain meaning does not allow for a rational interpretation, the expression or phrase should be read metaphorically. For example, when Scripture says that "God descended," Scripture does not mean that God physically descended; it is not logical that God would be limited to a physical form. Likewise, when Scripture says "at the hand of the Jordan" (Numbers 13:29), it does not refer to literal hands. Rather, it means "next to the Jordan".

Second, there are cases where entire passages are to be read outside their *peshat*. This occurs when the passage is in the form of a prophetic vision. For example, the passage about the three angels who appeared to Avraham is a prophetic vision since it is written, “And Hashem appeared to him (Avraham) by the terebinths of Mamre.... And he lifted his eyes and behold there were three men standing before him” (Genesis 18:1-2). This entire passage, including its seemingly mundane details such as Avraham baking a calf for his guests (Genesis 18:7), is to be understood as a prophetic vision. Another example is the story of Job which according to some sages is purely a parable. In the view of these sages, Job never actually existed².

Furthermore, Applying *hekeish* to the *peshat* is sometimes necessary to properly interpret Scripture (§1.5). This is because single passages in the Torah may apply to many matters and in other cases many passages may be relevant to a single matter. Logic and reason also necessitate the use of *hekeish*.

Notes on §10.2b:

The Adderet's Choice of Example Visions

Adderet Eliyahu offers Job and the story of Abraham's three guests as examples of prophetic visions that must be read outside their *peshat*. These are not, however, straightforward examples of non-*peshat* passages because they could conceivably be read as plain narrative. By contrast, the Book of Daniel contains many fantastical passages that definitely cannot be understood according to their *peshat*. Daniel explicitly introduces one such passage as a vision: “I Daniel alone saw the vision; for the men that were with me saw not the vision” (Daniel 10:7). Furthermore, Daniel states that he himself is confused about the meaning of his vision: “I heard but I did not understand” (Daniel 12:8). If Daniel could not understand the meaning of his own vision, this passage is clearly not to be understood according to its *peshat*. Perhaps then the *Adderet's* use of less obvious examples is intended to demonstrate that even seemingly plain narrative can be interpreted metaphorically³.

This being said, I would argue that the *halakhic* portions of the *Tanach* are always to be read according to their plain meaning. Whereas a good narrative may be metaphorical, allegorical, or open ended, a good legal code is unambiguously expressed. Indeed, the Torah explicitly states that its laws are plainly expounded: “The Mitzvah that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven....but the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your mind that you may do it” (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

Parables and Allegories

The *Adderet* states that entire passages are to be read metaphorically only when they are a prophetic vision. It further states that Job's story may be a parable. I believe it would be more precise, however, to list parables as a category of non-*peshat* texts distinct from prophetic visions. This is because parables can stem from the human imagination and are not necessarily prophetic vision. For example, Nathan's parable of the poor man's ewe could be a purely human rhetorical technique (2 Samuel 12:1-4).

² *The Adderet* may be citing a uniquely Rabbanite opinion regarding Job. This opinion is one of many regarding Job expressed in the Talmud (Baba Batra 15b). It is also possible that this opinion was also shared by Karaites, however.

³ Interestingly, this might allow for a metaphorical reading of the creation story that is consistent with scientific theories regarding evolution.

§10.2c Rav Bashyatzi's Suggested Curriculum

One cannot understand the proper interpretation of the Torah without knowledge of all academic disciplines. Rav Bashyatzi elaborates on the subjects he believes a faithful man should study in order to understand the Torah's proper interpretation. Namely, he suggests students study the following in chronological order⁴:

1. The Torah of Moses and the words of the other prophets along with their interpretations.
2. Hebrew Grammar.
3. Legal Exegesis and *Hekeish*. (Rav Bashyatzi recommends that this be done either with the help *Gan Eden* or *Adderet Eliyahu*.)
4. Formal logic.
5. Mathematics in particular geometry and Nicomedes' work.
6. Mathematics in particular arithmetic and the Rabbanite Rav Avraham Ibn Ezra's *Sefer Hamispar*
7. Music.
8. Astronomy.
9. Natural sciences.
10. The Karaite theological work *Etz Chayim*.

Upon completion of these studies, the student should then revisit the *Tanakh* and compare its contents to his secular knowledge. Wherever possible, he should synthesize the two, because there is no doubt that the Israelites had knowledge of the secular matters found in these non-Jewish books. Indeed, it is written that "Shlomo's wisdom surpassed that of all the peoples of the East and the wisdom of Egypt" (I Kings 5:10). Furthermore, Isaiah already hinted at the applicability of this modern knowledge when he stated "And the faith of your time will be a stronghold of salvation: wisdom and knowledge and fear of *Hashem*, this is his treasure" (Isaiah 33:6). Nevertheless, if parts of this secular knowledge cannot be synthesized with the faith or with Scripture, the student should seek to disprove these secular teachings.

Notes on §10.2:

The Sixth Principle makes clear the Karaite reverence for reason. This is most evident in the Sixth Principle's affirmation that the text is read according to its *peshat* only if consistent with reason. The statement that "Human reason" is sufficient to justify the use of *Hekeish* further demonstrates the Karaite reverence for reason. Finally, Rav Bashyatzi's largely secular recommended curriculum demonstrates that Karaite Judaism's attachment to reason was practically implemented. The Karaite reverence for reason is further discussed in "Notes on §1.5, External Assumptions".

§10.3 The Prohibition on Adding or Subtracting to the Torah*§10.3a Adding or Subtracting to the Torah*

The Torah prohibits adding or subtracting to its contents: "for every matter that I have commanded you to do you will make sure to do it, you will not add to it and you will not subtract from it" (Deuteronomy

⁴ Unfortunately, the list I provide here is not complete. There are several disciplines (I believe within mathematics) and suggested secular books in Rav Bashyatzi's curriculum that I could not identify.

13:1). Thus, we are forbidden to heed a prophet who attempts to add or take away from the Torah even if he should perform miracles⁵. The injunction to obey the Israelite prophets (Deuteronomy 18:15), applies only to those prophets who encourage the people to obey the Torah and who explain its meaning. This is clear because none of the prophets recorded in *Tanakh* contradict the words of the Torah. Even Malachi, the last prophet, tells the people to “remember the Torah of Moshe” (Malachi 3:22).

As with prophets, Sages are forbidden from adding or subtracting from the Torah. It is permitted, however, for Sages and prophets to explain and interpret the Torah. If one provides a plausible interpretation of a biblical commandment he is not guilty of adding to the Torah. Similarly, if he shows that some act is permitted based on Scripture, he is not guilty of subtracting from it. The use of *hekeish* is also permitted because it is required by the nature of the written text and by reason (§10.2b). Relying on *sevel hayerusha* is permitted as well because it has a basis in Scripture (§1.6).

The prohibition on altering the Torah is one against false prophecy. Only those who say “thus says Hashem!” when Hashem has not spoken” (Ezekiel 22:28) are guilty of violating this command. The Rabbanite Oral Torah is thus a violation of this commandment, because the Oral Torah purports to be part of the word of God given at Sinai that was not recorded in the written Torah. In other words, the Rabbanites are saying that God said something he never said. This is particularly clear in the case of the commandments the Rabbanites call *halacha lemoshe misinai*. They assert that these commandments were given to Moshe, but by their own admission they have no basis in Scripture.

Notes on §10.3:

The Prohibition and Its Application to Man Made Laws

According to *Adderet Eliyahu*, only those statements that add to God’s words are a violation of the prohibition on altering the Torah. For example, the Oral Torah falls under the scope of this prohibition because it adds to the written record of God’s words at Sinai. The *Adderet* does not, however, forbid man-made laws under this prohibition. The Rabbanite requirement to ritually wash one’s hands before eating is an example of a man made law. This law is not God-given even according to the Rabbanites. Rather, it is a law created by the rabbis. Thus, according to *Adderet Eliyahu*, it is not an illegal addition to the Torah because it does not claim to be an addition to God’s words. Rav Bashyatzi does, however, forbid the traditional blessing accompanying this Rabbanite practice because the blessing erroneously states that God “has commanded us regarding the washing of hands”⁶⁷.

This does not mean, however, that such man-made ‘laws’ are legitimate even if one does not recite such a blessing. We are presently only discussing the scope of the prohibition on altering the Torah. It is possible that a man made law would fall under the scope of another prohibition. It is even more likely that there is no *halakhic* basis for its validity. Thus someone who enacts such a law would not be transgressing, but neither would he have

⁵ This statement is supported by the verses immediately following this commandment, which state that we are not to heed a prophet who urges us to follow other Gods even should he perform miracles (Deuteronomy 13:2-6). The *Adderet* does not, however, directly cite these verses and so I do not use them in my summary.

⁶ See *Adderet Eliyahu Inyan Tefilah* Ch. 8 for Rav Bashyatzi’s discussion of the Rabbanite blessing.

⁷ Although the Rabbanites believe that the requirement to wash one’s hands is a Rabbinic enactment, they justify the statement in the blessing by claiming that we were commanded by God to follow the Rabbis. Thus they claim that indirectly God has commanded us to wash the hands.

accomplished anything. His "law" would merely be a suggestion. I will not discuss the larger question of man-made laws here.

There are many reasons to think that the *Adderet* is correct and that the prohibition on adding to the Torah applies only to claims regarding what God actually said but does not include man made laws. For starters, the prohibition is given in the context of a prohibition false prophecy (Deuteronomy 13:1-6). However, there are also many good reasons to think that this prohibition actually includes man made laws. For instance, it elsewhere appears outside the context of false prophecy (Deuteronomy 4:2). Discussing in detail the correct interpretation of the prohibition against altering the Torah cannot be done without an extensive digression into the validity of man-made laws.