



Page from the Mishneh Torah

(Page from the Mishneh Torah, c.1351 (vellum), Jewish School, (14th century) / National Library, Jerusalem, Israel / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library International)

“Every Israelite has a duty to study whether he is poor or rich, whether healthy or suffering, whether young or very old.”

Overview



The Spanish-born Jewish philosopher Moses ben Maimon, usually called Maimonides, is best known for composing two texts: *The Guide for the Perplexed*, a philosophical work, and the *Mishneh Torah*, also known as the Maimonidean Code. The fourteen-volume *Mishneh Torah* established Maimonides as the leading rabbinic authority of his generation and, many believe, of all time. Maimonides aimed to compose a work from which the entire Oral Law governing Jewish life might be studied systematically. He hoped that his *Mishneh Torah* would provide Jews with a text that could reinvigorate religious study in a time of cultural decline and religious apathy. Maimonides composed this work between 1170 and 1180. The title *Mishneh Torah*, which means “repetition and summary of the Torah,” indicates its intent. The subtitle *Sefer Yad ha-Chazaka* (“Book of the Strong Hand”) is a play on the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word “hand,” which comes out to 14—the number of volumes in the *Mishneh Torah*.

Maimonides wrote that he intended the *Mishneh Torah* to be a comprehensive explanation of the Jewish oral tradition. A person who had mastered the written Torah and then his *Mishneh Torah* would have no need for any other religious reference work. Maimonides’ intent to create a single guidebook has some similarities to the motivation of Rabbi Judah the Prince, who compiled the Mishnah around the year 200 CE, almost a thousand years earlier. As Maimonides saw it, Judah made the controversial decision to reduce the oral tradition to writing because the increasing difficulties of the times made it necessary. In Judah’s time, the Roman Empire was strengthening, and increasing numbers of Jews were leaving the land of Israel, propelled by social instability and economic crisis; likewise, Maimonides saw his code as providing a comparable pedagogical tool that would serve a similar function.

Context

Muslims won a decisive military victory in 711 CE, bringing Visigoth rule to an end on the Iberian Peninsula. The Catholic Visigoths had persecuted the Jews, and

so the Jews of Spain welcomed the Muslim conquerors. Non-Muslims of monotheistic faiths were regarded as *dhimmi*, the plural of *dhimmi*—an Islamic term meaning the “people of the pact of protection” and used in reference to People of the Book, namely, Jews and Christians. *Diman* had fewer legal rights than Muslims but were allowed to live in Muslim-ruled areas. Even though Jews were subjected to discriminatory legislation, their status improved dramatically over the next few centuries of Islamic rule in Spain. The period of stability in the region helped usher in what was seen as the golden age of Spain, a time of cultural diversity and intellectual openness; however, the tolerance that characterized the golden age came to an end with the arrival of the Almohads in the middle of the twelfth century, which coincided with the Christian reconquest of northern Spain. Maimonides was born in the late 1130s, about ten years before the beginning of Almohad rule. Such unfortunate timing had a tremendous impact on his entire life.

In his introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides explains that severe vicissitudes prevailed in his time, causing Jews to lose the ability to comprehend Talmudic literature properly. He bemoans the disappearance of the wisdom of wise men, quoting from the book of Isaiah, “And the wisdom of its wise shall fail /And the prudence of its prudent shall vanish” (29:14). Maimonides explains that because the current generation had low scholarly attainments, they were unable to understand the commentaries of the Geonim, the rabbinic scholars of the earlier generations who had written commentaries on various facets of the Talmud. Their writings, which they had taken care to present in a clear format, were now so difficult to understand that only a few could properly comprehend them.

If the current generation was unable to understand the commentaries, they were even less able to understand the Talmud itself. The Talmud is the written form of the Oral Law, which tradition explains was given to Moses by God at Mount Sinai, along with the Written Law. The Talmud consists of the Mishnah, brief statements compiling legal opinions, and the Gemara, transcripts of discussion on the Mishnah. The Mishnah organizes its material on the basis of subject matter rather than biblical context. It puts these subjects into six orders, each of which is divided into a number of subcategories. The Mishnah was redacted

| Time Line | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1137 OR 1138 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 30 Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, is born in Córdoba, Spain. |
| 1148 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Almohads conquer Córdoba, resulting in the exodus of most of the Jewish community, including Maimonides' family. Maimonides begins his wanderings around southern Spain and North Africa, having difficulty finding a secure Jewish community in which to settle. |
| 1160 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maimonides settles in Fez, Morocco, where he remains for about five years. |
| 1165 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> April 18 Maimonides and his family sail to the port of Acco (Acre) in the land of Israel before traveling on to Egypt. |
| 1166 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maimonides and his family finally settle in Fustat (now part of Old Cairo), Egypt, where they remain. |
| 1169 OR 1170 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maimonides' younger brother David dies in a shipwreck on the way to India, forcing Maimonides to begin working as a physician in order to support David's family, as well as his own. |
| 1170 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maimonides starts the fourteen-volume <i>Mishneh Torah</i>. |
| 1171 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maimonides is appointed <i>nagid</i>, the prince or leader of the Egyptian Jewish community. |
| 1180 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maimonides completes the <i>Mishneh Torah</i>. |
| 1204 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> December Maimonides dies in Fustat, Egypt. |

around the year 200 CE by Rabbi Judah the Prince, a controversial decision due to the fact that the Oral Law was intended to be transmitted verbally. In the three or four centuries following the redaction of the Oral Law into the Mishnah, sages working in both Babylonia and the land of Israel continued to discuss the issues presented in the Mishnah. The Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds had the same Mishnah but different Gemara.

About the Author

Moses ben Maimon, known as Maimonides, was the most distinguished of all medieval Jewish philosophers and is considered one of the greatest Torah scholars in history. Maimonides is his Greek name, the suffix “-ides” meaning “son of.” His Hebrew name was Rabbi Moses ben Maimon; therefore, in rabbinic literature, he was known by the acronym Rambam. Maimonides’ unmatched rabbinic learning earned him the title “the Great Eagle.” He was also called the Mordecai of his generation because of his selfless involvement in the local Jewish community. Many praised him by citing the popular adage “from Moses to Moses, there arose no one like Moses.”

Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain, in 1137 or 1138. Córdoba at the time was under enlightened Muslim rule, a cultural Mecca for Jews and Christians as well as Muslims. But the Almohads, an intolerant Muslim group that gave non-Muslims the choice of conversion or expulsion, conquered the area in 1148. Jews were attacked by rioters, and synagogues were destroyed. It is possible that Maimonides’ family had to pretend to convert in order to avoid death. They fled from Córdoba, traveling around through southern Spain and North Africa for about ten years, settling for a time in Fez, Morocco.

Maimonides and his family continued their travels in search of a permanent home. In 1165 the Maimon family left Morocco for Acco in the land of Israel and the following year traveled overland to Fustat (now part of Old Cairo), Egypt. Trained as a medical doctor, Maimonides worked as physician to the sultan of Egypt and also tended to patients in his home. He wrote ten treatises on medicine, some of which were used as textbooks in medieval medical schools.

The Guide for the Perplexed, completed in 1190, was ostensibly a letter written to a student who was torn between his love of philosophy and the teachings of Judaism. In this Arabic work, Maimonides vigorously rejects a literal understanding of phrases that ascribe corporeality to God. Rather, he insists that the Torah spoke in the language of human beings and that the Torah did not intend to suggest that God has fingers, toes, or any other body parts. To argue otherwise, Maimonides stresses, is a material conception of God, which is idolatrous.

Maimonides became the most important rabbinic sage in the world after penning the *Mishneh Torah*. When he died in 1204, Egyptian Jews observed three full days of mourning, a sign of great respect. They ascribed the verse in the first book of Samuel to his life: “The ark of God has been taken” (I Samuel 4:11). Maimonides was buried in Tiberias, in the land of Israel.

Explanation and Analysis of the Document

The text from the *Mishneh Torah* is taken from *The Book of Knowledge*, the opening volume of Maimonides' fourteen-volume legal masterpiece. The initial chapters of each of the five treatises in the volume are reproduced here. Whereas much of the *Mishneh Torah* covers rather technical legal material, *The Book of Knowledge* explains the basic principles of the Jewish faith, proper behavior, the obligation to study Torah, the prohibition against idolatry, and the religious obligation to repent. These five treatises provide a window into the worldview of medieval Judaism.

Maimonides titled his book of religious law the *Mishneh Torah*, which means "repetition and summary of the Torah," because he intended to list all of the commandments in the Hebrew Bible. The commandments, called the *mitzvot* in Hebrew, are believed to have been given by God to Moses at Mount Sinai. The religious Jew is obligated to observe all 613 of them in their entirety. According to Talmudic tradition, 365 are negatives, and 248 are positives. A negative commandment is something one should not do, and a positive commandment is something one is obligated to do.

The *Mishneh Torah* includes an entire list of the commandments in the Torah, regardless of whether they could be observed at the time of the writing of the work. Because of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70 CE, many of the commandments relating to the functioning of the priests and the offering of sacrifices could no longer be observed. Maimonides nevertheless includes these commandments because his interest is not only in the practical observance of Jewish law in his day but also in a full understanding of Judaism in its entirety.

◆ Treatise 1: The Foundation of the Torah

Maimonides begins by listing the Ten Commandments, which are relevant to the category that he calls "The Foundation of the Torah." These are laws related to the belief in God and the proper relationship with Him. God is not a male figure, but Hebrew words are either masculine or feminine, and many of the references to God utilize the masculine form. Maimonides emphasized that God is incorporeal, meaning that God has no body.

Drawing heavily from Aristotle, Maimonides stresses that the foundation of wisdom is to understand that there is a primary reality that caused everything to be. That primary reality is God. If God did not exist, nothing else would have come into this world. On the other hand, God could exist even if nothing else did because God's existence is independent of the reality of any animate or inanimate objects. Maimonides then cites proof texts from various biblical sources, including "the Lord is the true God," from Jeremiah, and "there is no one like unto Him," from the book of Deuteronomy.

There are positive as well as negative commandments associated with the broad category of "The Foundation of the Torah." It is a positive to affirm that God exists, as it is written in the book of Exodus "I am the Lord thy God." It is a negative commandment to reject the belief that there are any other gods, as it is written in the book of Exodus "Thou



Maimonides

(Statue of Moses Maimonides (bronze), Spanish School / Plaza de Tiberiades, Cordoba, Spain / Ken Welsh / The Bridgeman Art Library International)

shalt have no other gods before me." God is an absolute single unity, unlike other unities in the universe that may be divided into parts.

Maimonides emphasizes that God has no bodily form. He points out, however, that certain biblical references can be misunderstood quite easily, leading readers to believe that God has bodily parts. For example, in the book of Exodus, the Torah speaks of "under His feet," "written with the finger of God," and "the hand of the Lord." Maimonides explains in great depth that the Torah uses these images because it speaks to people in language they can understand; that is, these expressions are intended to be metaphorical rather than literal. Maimonides expands on the metaphorical nature of such statements in his philosophic work, *A Guide for the Perplexed*.

◆ Treatise 2: Discernment

In the second treatise, Maimonides discusses eleven commandments that relate to the religious obligation to imitate the ways of God. Maimonides begins this treatise with a discussion of the different personality types. Writing in the medieval period and using a language that has masculine and feminine forms, he phrases everything in the male form; nevertheless, the text can apply to women as well



“The very foundation and firm support of all wisdom is to know that there is a primary reality which caused all to be; and that all that exists in heaven and earth and all between heaven and earth could not exist without the truth of this reality.”

“The right way is the middle path. It is found in all dispositions of man and is equally removed from both extremes and is not near to either. For this reason the ancient sages commanded that man should examine his inclinations continually, weigh them and direct them intentionally to the middle path in order to have a sound body.

“Every Israelite has a duty to study whether he is poor or rich, whether healthy or suffering, whether young or very old and in failing strength, even if he is poor and supported by charity or begs from door to door. Even if he is a married man with a wife and children, it is a duty to set aside time to study, day and night, as the verse says: ‘Thou shalt meditate therein day and night’.”

“[Abraham] broke the images and began to tell the people that it was proper to worship only the Lord of the Universe, to bow down to Him and to offer sacrifice and drink offerings so that all future creatures might recognise Him. It was proper to destroy and smash the idols so that the people should not err by them like those who think there is no god save images.”

“In these times when there is no Temple standing and we have no altar for atonement, there is nothing left but repentance. Repentance atones for all transgressions. Even one who has done evil all his days, if he repents, will have nothing of his wickedness held against him in the end.”

as men. Among the examples he gives is that of the hot-headed man, who is always agitated, while the calm man remains serene in even the most unpleasant circumstances. One type of person displays arrogance, while another shows humility; one type of person is obsessed by ever-increasing desires, while another is satisfied with his lot in life.

Following Aristotle's view, Maimonides urges his readers to avoid the extremes in terms of disposition. Instead of allowing oneself to move too far in any one direction, one should try to remain on the path of the good, which is the

middle path. As it is written in the book of Deuteronomy, “walk in His ways.” By this, Maimonides suggests that we should try to imitate God. Just as God is called gracious, we should try to be gracious. Just as God is called merciful, we should try to be merciful. As the prophets explained, God is “slow to anger,” “righteous,” “upright,” “perfect,” “mighty,” and “strong.” The pedagogical purpose in listing these divine attributes is to make it known to people that these are the good paths, which it is the duty of all religious people to follow in order to be like God. All people can



integrate these traits into their personalities by practicing them repeatedly until they become habitual and rooted in the soul. This is how Abraham had instructed his children to follow in the ways of God.

◆ **Treatise 3: The Study of the Torah**

There are only two commandments relating to the study of the Torah, both of them positive. Torah study was considered one of the most important religious acts that could be undertaken. Maimonides begins by stating that women, servants, and small children are excused from studying the Torah. This is a reference to the fact that these groups were exempt from performing positive, time-bound commandments because, owing to their domestic responsibilities, they might not be able to complete a specific religious act during a limited and specific time period. Anyone who might not be able to perform a given ritual act during the allotted interval would not be obliged to perform it. Furthermore, notes Maimonides, people are obligated to teach others only that which they are obligated to learn themselves; for this reason, women are not expected to teach the Torah to their children.

In contrast, a man is obligated to teach not only his child but also his grandchild, as it is written in the book of Deuteronomy “Teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.” It is also a commandment for every scholar in Israel to teach anyone who seeks to learn. Maimonides explains that when the book of Deuteronomy states “and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children,” the word *children* is understood to mean all students. Teachers are allowed to charge for their services. If a person has not been taught by his father and his father has not hired a tutor for him, then that person has the obligation to study the Torah on his own when he becomes an adult. Maimonides explains that learning is important not only for its own sake but also because study brings forth action. Nevertheless, the reverse is not the case—action does not lead to learning.

Maimonides states that one’s own study takes precedence over one’s child’s study, unless the child is smarter than the parent. Even so, the adult is not allowed to give up studying entirely, because there is a commandment that remains valid.

A man should first study Torah extensively and only then marry. If he marries first, he is likely to become so preoccupied with earning a living and other duties related to his wife and children that he is unlikely to be able to concentrate. However, if he is so obsessed with sex that he cannot concentrate on his studies, then he should marry before trying to study the Torah.

When a child begins to speak, he should be taught two verses from the book of Deuteronomy, “Moses commanded us a law” and “Hear, O Israel.” Subsequently, children should be taught additional verses according to their ability until they are six or seven years old, when they should be given over to a teacher.

Every Jew has the duty to study, whether they are rich or poor, healthy or sick. Every person has the duty to set aside time to study Torah, as it is written in the book of Joshua

“Thou shalt meditate therein day and night.” Maimonides reminds his readers that the ancient sages needed to work in order to support themselves and their families but even so studied day and night in order to pass on the oral tradition from Moses, the original teacher of the Jews.

Study time should be divided into three parts: one part for the written Torah, one part for the oral Torah, and a third part “to understand things completely.” This third part of Torah study is the study of the Talmud, the transcripts of debates between the sages in which “the Torah is expounded until one grasps the principle of the rules.” Maimonides gives an example of an artisan who works three hours each day and spends nine hours studying. Of these nine hours, he should study the written Torah for three and the oral Torah for three and “investigate his knowledge and understanding of matters one from another” for three.

A woman who studies the Torah receives a smaller reward than a man, because she is not under the obligation to study Torah. The sages did not require females to study Torah regularly because they understood that a woman might have to take care of her children or perform other vital household tasks that could not wait. Since women are not required to study Torah, they can do so on an optional basis rather than as a means of fulfilling a divine commandment.

A father should not teach his daughter the Torah because, according to Maimonides, most women do not have the capacity to apply themselves to learning. This statement must be understood in the context of Maimonides’ time—the Middle Ages. Men and women had clearly definable roles in society in the twelfth century, and any deviation from those norms could result in scandal and crisis. However, while Maimonides urges fathers not to teach their daughters the written Torah, if they do, “there is no impropriety in that.”

◆ **Treatise 4: Idolatry**

Maimonides lists no fewer than fifty-one commandments relating to idolatry, forty-nine of them negative. Judaism prohibits any form of idolatry, which is not limited to the worship of an idol itself but also could involve the worship of any artistic representation of God. The commandments listed in this treatise relate to the religious obligation to avoid following the ways of the worshippers of the stars who rejected the belief in one God. In *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides argues that the earliest idolaters did not believe that their idols were gods. Rather, they understood that their idols were only representations of God and that the idols were worshipped as an intermediary between God and humankind. Eventually, the existence of the one true God was forgotten, and people began to worship the idols as if they were actually gods.

Maimonides goes on to recount the history of idolatry. In the days of Enosh, Adam’s grandson, people began to believe that because God made the stars and the planets to rule the universe, these stars and planets should be worshipped. They did not say that there was no God, so they were not atheists; nevertheless, the belief in the stars and planets as entities worthy of praise, glory, and honor in order to reach the will

of the Creator is the basis of idolatry. Maimonides condemns this belief in the strongest possible terms.

Maimonides also explains that later, false prophets arose, who said that God had commanded them to serve a certain star or alternatively all of the stars. They brought offerings and built temples, making images to which people should bow down and worship. One prophet said that an image that he had invented was the form of a particular star that had been revealed to him by God. The idolaters made images in their temples coming together to worship these idols. The priests of the idolaters told people that by respecting and worshipping the idols they would prosper. Eventually, God was forgotten and people recognized only the idols that slowly took the place of the one God. Only a handful of individuals, such as Enosh, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, and Eber, continued to recognize the one true God. The vast majority of humankind went astray until the time of Abraham, who rediscovered the true God.

When Abraham was young, he pondered how it was possible for the universe to revolve without a driver to control it. He had no teacher who could help him understand monotheism because he was “sunk in Ur of the Chaldees among foolish idolaters.” Even his father and mother worshipped the stars along with everyone else. And so Abraham followed in their ways at first. But he struggled to realize the divine truth and came to the realization that there must be one God and that God had to have created everything. There could be no other God except the one true God. This realization hit Abraham when he was forty years old. As soon as he understood this basic religious truth, he began to tell people that it was important to worship the one God of the universe. Idols were false gods and should be destroyed. Because of this advocacy, the local king tried to have him executed, and he escaped from Ur to Haran. There he began to proselytize, going from city to city until he reached Canaan. In Israel, the book of Genesis recounts, “Abraham called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.” His sons Isaac and Jacob continued his mission.

After the children of Israel went to Egypt, they relapsed into idolatry because of local influences. Only the tribe of Levi remained faithful to the commandments of their fathers, never engaging in idolatry. In order to reinforce the true religion, God chose Moses to convey the message of monotheism to the people of Israel. As Maimonides explained, when Moses prophesied, God chose the people of Israel for His inheritance and crowned them with the Commandments.

◆ **Treatise 5: Repentance**

This treatise explains one commandment, which is the positive injunction to repent. Repentance is the only way to atone for sin in the absence of the Jerusalem Temple.

If a person transgresses, breaking any of the positive or negative commandments of the Torah, he or she must repent. It does not matter whether this transgression was unintentional or intentional, the book of Numbers states that when a man or woman commits a sin of any type they shall confess what they have done. In the times of the Temple in Jerusalem, the transgressor would bring a sacrifice as part of

this process. It is not enough to make restitution in money matters unless one has also confessed to one’s wrongdoing and promised not to repeat such actions. In the case of a capital crime or a crime in which the person has been sentenced to receive lashings, the punishment itself does not absolve the person in the absence of confession and repentance.

A scapegoat is sent away to atone for all of Israel. As the book of Leviticus explains, Aaron shall designate all of the inequities of the children of Israel onto the scapegoat. This scapegoat therefore atones for all of the transgressions committed by the children of Israel whether minor or major, deliberate or accidental. Nevertheless, the actual sinner must repent as well in the case of major offenses.

In Maimonides’ time, when there was no Temple left standing and “we have no altar for atonement,” the only vehicle for being forgiven for transgressions was repentance. Repentance can atone for transgression if done in completely sincerity. Even a person who has been evil for many years will not have his wickedness held against him if he sincerely repents. As is written in the book of Ezekiel, “As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness.”

The Day of Atonement atones for those who repent, as the book of Leviticus makes clear: “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you.” There are some transgressions that are atoned for immediately and others that are not forgiven until later. Maimonides concludes by listing specific circumstances that might have an impact on how and when the atonement process would be complete.

Audience

Maimonides was writing for rabbinic scholars as well as the average Jew. Since his *Mishneh Torah* was an explanation of the entire Torah, he envisioned it as an educational tool for all Jews throughout the world. Indeed, he hoped that any Jew who had mastered the written Torah and then the *Mishneh Torah* would never need to consult another work on religious law. While he aimed to explain the basic principles of Judaism, he wrote on a highly theoretical level that intended to transmit an esoteric doctrine not comprehensible to the common folk. He developed his philosophic approach to Judaism further in *The Guide for the Perplexed*.

Impact

The *Mishneh Torah* was a controversial work for a number of reasons. Some believed that Maimonides intended his work to supersede the Talmud, the authoritative collection of debates among the sages that recorded the Oral Law given by God to Moses at the same time as the Written Law. Since the *Mishneh Torah* included every decision rendered by the Talmud, it would therefore be theoretically unnecessary to continue to refer back to Talmudic literature. Critics felt this would undermine the entire culture of rabbinic study that had become the cornerstone of Jewish scholarship.



Maimonides was also attacked because he did not cite any of his sources. This made it impossible for other rabbis to check the validity of his decisions. Maimonides seemed to be telling other scholars they should accept his positions as authoritative simply because of his obvious brilliance. But those who opposed his positions on various issues wanted to be able to study his sources in order to potentially refute his arguments. Without sources, they were left in the dark. Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquières wrote a gloss on the entire *Mishneh Torah*, harshly criticizing many of the Maimonidean positions.

Despite substantial opposition, the *Mishneh Torah* was regarded as the masterly summary of the Talmud and rabbinic thought up until Maimonides' times. While it did not become a definitive code or supplant the classic works of ancient Judaism, it did transform the nature of Jewish legal study. Some Jewish legal authorities argued that no legal decision could be made that opposed a Maimonidean position, even in cases where Maimonides seemed to go against the most obvious understanding of a Talmudic discussion. Even eight hundred years after its compilation, the *Mishneh Torah* continues to be one of the basic sources for the study of the Jewish tradition.

Further Reading

■ Books

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—Dana Evan Kaplan

Questions for Further Study

1. What is the distinction between "written law" and "oral law" in Judaism? What is the source of each of these sets of laws? Why is the distinction important?

2. What historical and political events prompted Maimonides, in part, to write the *Mishneh Torah*?

3. What is the conception of God contained in the *Mishneh Torah*? Provide details. How does this conception of God differ from that contained in a document such as Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*.

4. Roughly a millennium earlier, the Sefer Yetzirah was an attempt to arrive at an understanding of the nature of God and creation. How does the conception of God and creation in that document contrast with that of the *Mishneh Torah*?

5. The entry states that the *Mishneh Torah* provides readers with a window into medieval Judaism. Explain what you "see through the window." How would you describe medieval Judaism based on your reading of the document?

MISHNEH TORAH

Treatise 1

THE FOUNDATION OF THE TORAH

The Laws concerning the foundations of the Torah are six positive and four negative, namely:

1. To know that there is a God.
2. Not to support that there is another.
3. To believe in His unity.
4. To love Him.
5. To fear Him.
6. To hallow His name.
7. Not to profane His name.
8. Not to destroy anything which bears His name.
9. To listen to a prophet who speaks in His name.
10. Not to test (tempt) Him.

◆ Chapter 1

1. The very foundation and firm support of all wisdom is to know that there is a primary reality which caused all to be; and that all that exists in heaven and earth and all between heaven and earth could not exist without the truth of this reality.
2. If He were not, nothing could have been called into existence.
3. On the other hand, if all other beings did not exist, He would remain; for His existence does not depend on theirs. He would not cease if they ceased—blessed be He! He is not dependent upon one of them. So the reality of His being is not comparable to the reality of any other existing thing.
4. This is what the prophet said, “the Lord is the true God” (Jeremiah 10:10), and the Torah states:

“there is no one like unto Him,” implying that He alone is the Truth and there is no other Truth like His Truth (Deuteronomy 4:39).

5. This reality is God of the universe and Lord of all the earth. He guides the celestial spheres with a might which is complete and unceasing, for the sphere turns continually which it could not do without a cause. The Blessed One turns it although He has no body or hand.
6. To understand this is the positive commandment which states: “I am the Lord thy God” (Exodus 20:2). Anyone who believes that there is another god violates the negative commandment which says: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3) for he denies the very principle upon which all depends.
7. God is one, neither two nor more, but a unity, unlike other unities in the universe which may have many parts or like a body which is divided into parts. So the unity of God is quite different from anything else in the world. If there were many deities it would mean that they had body and form because individuals only differ from one another in bodily form. If the Creator had a body and form He would have an end, a ceasing. It is impossible to imagine a body that does not end and whose strength does not wane. Our God—blessed be He!—has strength to which there is no end and does not falter because the sphere continues to revolve for ever by His force which is not a bodily force. Because He is incorporeal, none of the happenings which occur to parts of a body can be attributed to Him, so it is impossible that He should be but one. The understanding of monotheism is a positive commandment (Deuteronomy 6:4).
8. The Torah and the prophecies proclaim that the Holy One has no bodily form, for it is said: “He is Lord in heaven above and in earth beneath” (Deuteronomy 4:39) and a body cannot be in two places at once. Further on Sinai no bodily form was seen (Deuteronomy 4:15) and Isaiah said: “To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?” (Isaiah 40: 25).

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9. This being so, why were there allusions in the writings of the Torah to “under His feet” (Exodus 24:10); “written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18); “the hand of the Lord” (Exodus 9:3); “the eyes of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 11:12); “the ears of the Lord” (Numbers 11:18); and such like? All these expressions are related to the capacity of men who only understand material things, and the Torah spoke the language that men could understand. These sayings are all metaphorical. When it is said: “If I whet my glittering sword” (Deuteronomy 32:41), has He a sword and does He kill? All is allegorical. Elsewhere a prophet said that he saw the Holy One and that His “garment was white as snow” (Daniel 7:9); and another saw Him with dyed garments of Bozrah, (Isaiah 63:1). At the Red Sea, Moses our teacher saw the Lord as a “man of war” engaged in battle (Exodus 15:3); and upon Sinai clothed as a reader of the congregation (Exodus 19:19), meaning that He has no likeness or form. All these expressions are images and visions of the prophets. The truth is that the mind of man is not able to understand nor is he able to penetrate here, as the verse states: “Canst thou by searching find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (Job 11:7).

10. What did Moses our teacher want to understand when he asked: “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory” (Exodus 33: 18)? He sought to know in his heart the reality of the existence of the Holy One—blessed be He!—in the same way as he recognised individual persons whose appearance was engraved on his heart and distinguished from all others. So Moses our teacher wished to see in his mind the Holy One separated from all other creatures until he understood His reality as it is. The Blessed One answered that it is not in the power of living man, compounded of body and soul, to grasp that reality in its perfection. But the Holy One did make known to Moses what no one has known before or since; and he grasped the truth of a reality which was different from all other things, in the same way as one can recognise by body and clothes someone whom one sees from behind and can recognise as different from other men. The verse which suggests this states: “and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:23).

11. Since it is clear that the Holy One has neither body nor form, it is also clear that nothing that happens to bodies can happen to Him, no joining

or dividing, no position or measure, no ascent or descent, no right or left, no front or back, no sitting or standing. As He is not influenced by time, He has no beginning or end or any measure in years, nor does He change for there is nothing changeable in Him. There is no death or life in Him as in living bodies; no folly or wisdom such as are found in man. He neither sleeps nor wakens, is neither angry nor laughs, does not rejoice or grieve, has no silence or speech like the speech of man. The sages said also that in Heaven there was no sitting, no standing, no competition or weariness.

12. Because of this all the descriptions of the Holy One in the Torah, and those uttered by the prophets, are merely metaphorical and figurative. For example, it states: “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh” (Psalm 2:4), “they have provoked me to anger” (Deuteronomy 32:21), “the Lord rejoiced” (Deuteronomy 28:63), and the like. The sages said that the Torah is written in the speech of ordinary men. It is also written, “do they provoke me to anger?” (Jeremiah 7:19), and “I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). If the Holy One was sometimes angry and sometimes mirthful, he would be subject to change for such attributes are only found in dark and lowly bodies dwelling in houses of clay, made of dust. But the Holy One—blessed be He!—is exalted above all that.

Treatise 2**DISCERNMENT**

In this treatise, eleven commandments (five positive and six negative) are listed and explained.

1. To imitate the ways of the Lord.
2. To keep close to those who have knowledge of Him.
3. To love neighbours.
4. To love strangers.
5. Not to hate neighbours.
6. To rebuke a wrongdoer.
7. Not to put anyone to shame.

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8. Not to humiliate the unfortunate.
9. Not to be a tale bearer.
10. Not to take revenge.
11. Not to bear a grudge.

◆ Chapter 1

1. There are many widely different temperaments among the children of men. There is the hot tempered man who is always angry and the calm man, serene in disposition who is never angry, or if he shows anger, it is only a little anger in many years. One man is arrogant, another quite humble; one is obsessed by desire and never satisfied, another so pure in heart that he does not even long for the few needs of the body. There is the greedy man who would never be satisfied with all the wealth in the world, as the saying goes "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Another shortens his life because he is satisfied with the little which is insufficient for his needs and will not look for or try to get what he needs. One will mortify himself to starvation, hoard everything and will not eat a pennyworth without pain to himself, while another scatters his goods as he fancies. So it is with all the temperaments, for example, cheerfulness and gloom, miserliness and generosity, cruelty and kindness, timidity and courage, and so on.
2. Between all these extremes there are intermediate degrees which differ from each other. There are some dispositions which are inborn in man and depend upon the nature of his body and these predispose him to certain temperaments. Others are not inherited but are learned from other men or selected because of some ideas in the heart, or because a man has heard that this trend would be good for him, and he thinks it proper, and he conducts himself accordingly until it is fixed in his heart.
3. The two opposite extremes in all dispositions are not the good way, and it is not fitting for a man to follow them or to be instructed in them. If a man finds his nature tending towards one of them, or ready for one of them, or has already learned it, and conducts himself accordingly he turns himself towards goodness and goes along the path of the good which is the straight path.
4. The right way is the middle path. It is found in all dispositions of man and is equally removed from both extremes and is not near to either. For this reason the ancient sages commanded that man should examine his inclinations continually, weigh them and direct them intentionally to the middle path in order to have a sound body. For example, one ought not to be a hot tempered man and given to anger, nor without feeling like the dead, but between the two, not becoming enraged except in a great matter when anger is needed to prevent something happening again. So also he should only crave for what the body requires and cannot live without, as was said: "The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul" (Proverbs 13:25). Likewise he ought not to toil at his business but acquire what is necessary for life from day to day, as the saying goes: "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Psalm 37:16). He ought not to be too tight-fisted nor squander his money but give charity within his means and lend to one in need. He should not be always cheerful and laughing nor distressed and mournful, but should be glad all his days in moderation, and receive all men with a friendly countenance. So should it be with all the different dispositions for that is the path of wise men. Men of equanimity are called wise.
5. The man who is excessively critical of himself and leaves the middle path, tending towards one extreme or another, is called pious. For example, one who abandons arrogance and goes to the other extreme of humility is called pious, for that is the character of piety. If one keeps in the middle path and is also humble, one is called wise for that is the characteristic of wisdom. This applies in all dispositions. The ancient pious men turned from the mean towards the two extremes, some leaning towards piety others towards wisdom more than is demanded by the Law. We however are required to go in the middle paths for they are good and straight, as was said: "walk in His ways" (Deuteronomy 28:9).
6. Concerning this command the teaching was thus; even as God is called gracious, be thou gracious; even as He is called merciful, be thou merciful; even as He is called holy, be thou holy. In this way the prophets gave attributes to God such as "slow to anger," "of great mercy," "righteous," "upright," "perfect," "mighty," and "strong" and so on, in order to make known that these are



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the good and straight paths which it is the duty of a man to follow and so to be like the Lord, as far as he is able.

7. How does a man accustom himself to these dispositions until they are fixed in him? He should do once, twice and thrice the things that belong to the middle path and repeat them until they become easy for him and need no effort. Then they become rooted in his soul. Because these attributes are applied to the Creator and are the middle way which we must follow, they are called the Lord's way. This was how Abraham had instructed his children when the Lord said: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Genesis 18:19). He who follows this way brings well being and blessing to himself, so "that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19).

Treatise 3

THE STUDY OF THE TORAH

Two positive commandments are contained in this Treatise and they are:

- (a) To study the Torah.
- (b) To honour those who study and understand it.

◆ Chapter 1

1. Women, servants and small children are excused from studying but the father of a little boy is obliged to teach him the Torah, as the verse says: "And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them" (Deuteronomy 11:19). A woman is not obliged to teach her child, for only those whose duty it is to study have a duty to teach.
2. Just as a man has a duty to teach his child, he has a duty to teach his grandchild, as the verse says: "Teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deuteronomy 4:9), and not only his children and grandchildren. For it is a command that every scholar in Israel should teach those who seek learning, even although they are not his children. The verse says: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deuteronomy 6:7). By tradition pupils are also called children. The verse in 2 Kings 2:3

says: "And the sons of the prophets ... came forth" (meaning pupils). Why then is one commanded to teach children and grandchildren? In order to attend to one's children before grandchildren, and grandchildren before the children of one's friends.

3. It is a duty to hire a teacher to teach one's child but it is not a duty to teach a friend's child for nothing. Anyone not taught by his father must educate himself when he becomes mature. The verse in Deuteronomy 5:1 says: "That ye may learn them, and keep, and do them." Generally speaking, one finds that learning leads to action, for study brings forth action, but action does not lead to learning.
4. If one is anxious to study Torah and has a son studying, one's own study comes before the son's. If the son is the cleverer and the more able to understand what he learns, the son comes first. However, although the son comes first, one may not give up study because the same command to teach the son applies to teaching oneself.
5. A man should study first and then marry. If he marries first, his mind is not free to study, but if he finds his desire overcomes him and his mind is not free, he should marry and study Torah afterwards.
6. At what age is it a father's duty to teach the Torah? When the child begins to speak, he should be taught two verses: "Moses commanded us a law" (Deuteronomy 33:4) and "Hear, O Israel" (Deuteronomy 6:4). After that the child should be taught little by little, verse by verse, according to his development, until he is six or seven years old, and then he should be put under a children's teacher.
7. If it is the custom in the region to hire a children's teacher, this must be done, and it is a duty to pay until the child can read the whole written law. In a place where it is customary to teach the written Torah for reward, it is permitted to take pay, but it is forbidden to teach the oral tradition for pay. The verse says: "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me" (Deuteronomy 4:5), meaning, "what I learned for nothing so you must teach for nothing what came from me," likewise, "when you teach the next generations, teach them for nothing as you were taught by me." If no man can be found to teach without payment, teaching must be paid for, as the verse says: "Buy the truth" (Proverbs

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23:23). Can he therefore teach for nothing? The same verse says: "sell it not." Learn from this that it is forbidden to teach the oral law for hire although your teacher did so.

8. Every Israelite has a duty to study whether he is poor or rich, whether healthy or suffering, whether young or very old and in failing strength, even if he is poor and supported by charity or begs from door to door. Even if he is a married man with a wife and children, it is a duty to set aside time to study, day and night, as the verse says: "Thou shalt meditate therein day and night" (Joshua 1:8).
9. Among the great scholars of Israel some were hewers of wood and drawers of water, and some were blind, but in spite of that they studied by day and night. They were of those who passed on the verbal tradition from mouth to mouth from Moses our teacher.
10. For how long is it a duty to study the Law? To the day of death. The verse says: "Lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life" (Deuteronomy 4:9). When one does not study one forgets.
11. It is a duty to divide the time for study into three parts, one third for the written word, one third for the oral tradition and one third to understand things completely, and deduce one from another, and to compare one thing with another, and to know the rules by which the Torah is expounded until one grasps the principle of the rules and knows which things are forbidden, which are permitted and which are learned by tradition. This study is known as Gemara.
12. To give an example, an artisan busies himself with his work for three hours each day and spends nine hours in study. Of the nine hours, for three he ought to study the written law, for three the oral law and for three investigate his knowledge and understanding of matters one from another. Traditional matters are included in the Holy Writ and their explanations are in the oral law. The subjects relating to the *Pardes* are in the *Gemara* generally. When do these rules apply? When a man begins to study. When he has acquired knowledge he has no need to study the Holy Writ or to busy himself with the oral tradition, and he should then read the written law and oral law at fixed times (so that he may not forget

any of the laws of the Torah) and turn every day to the *Gemara* according to the capacity of his heart and the equanimity of his mind.

13. A woman who studies the Torah has a reward but not the reward of a man because she is not commanded to do it. One who does something which is not mandatory has not the reward of one who obeys a command, but a smaller reward. Although she has a reward, the sages commanded that a man should not teach his daughter the Torah because most women have not the capacity to apply themselves to learning; they change the matters of the Torah into nonsense because of their poor understanding. The sages said of anyone who taught his daughter the Torah that it was as if he taught indecency and, according to tradition, this applies to teaching of the oral law. As regards the written Torah, he should not start to teach her at all, but, if he does, there is no impropriety in that.

Treatise 4

IDOLATRY

Fifty-one commandments, two positive and forty-nine negative, are enumerated here. They are:

1. Not to follow idolaters (worshippers of the stars).
2. Not to follow evil thoughts and sights of the eyes.
3. Not to blaspheme.
4. Not to worship idols in the customary way.
5. Not to bow down to them.
6. Not to make a graven image for oneself.
7. Not to make a graven image for another.
8. Not to make any image even for its beauty.
9. Not to entice others to serve it.
10. To burn an idolatrous city.
11. Not to rebuild it.

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12. Not to benefit from any of its wealth.
 13. Not to entice anyone to serve an idol.
 14. Not to love an enticer.
 15. Not to stop hating an idolater.
 16. Not to save him.
 17. Not to plead for him.
 18. Not to refrain from testifying against him.
 19. Not to prophesy in the name of idolatry.
 20. Not to listen to such prophesy.
 21. Not to prophesy falsely even in the name of the Lord.
 22. Not to fear to destroy a false prophet.
 23. Not to swear in the name of idolatry.
 24. Not to practise necromancy.
 25. Not to practise sorcery.
 26. Not to sacrifice to Moloch (burning first born in sacrifice).
 27. Not to set up a pillar.
 28. Not to bow down to a figure made of stone.
 29. Not to plant a grove.
 30. To destroy idols and their belongings.
 31. Not to benefit from idol worship and its belongings.
 32. Not to enjoy their plated ornaments.
 33. Not to make a covenant with idolaters.
 34. Not to show them favours.
 35. Not to let them dwell in our land.
 36. Not to follow their customs or dress.
 37. Not to practise witchcraft.
 38. Not to practise divination.
 39. Not to practise augury.
 40. Not to practise enchantment.
 41. Not to seek the spirits of the dead.
 42. Not to consult those who practice spiritualism.
 43. Not to consult augurers.
 44. Not to practise magic.
 45. Not to round off the side curls of the head.
 46. Not to destroy the corners of the beard.
 47. Man shall not adorn himself in women's clothes.
 48. A woman shall not adorn herself in armour or the clothes of a man.
 49. Not to practise tattooing.
 50. Not to lacerate oneself.
 51. Not to tear one's hair for the dead.
- An elucidation of all these commandments is given in the following chapters.
- ◆ **Chapter 1**
1. In the days of Enosh the children of mankind erred grievously and rejected the advice of the wise men of that generation, and Enosh himself suffered from that. Their mistake was to say that "because God made the stars and planets to rule the universe and placed them on high to share honour with them, for they are ministers who render service in His presence, they are worthy of praise, glory and honour." They also said that, "It is the will of God—blessed be He—to exalt and honour what He exalted and honoured, just as a king desires to honour those who stand before him: such is the prerogative of a king." When this idea arose in their hearts, they began to build temples, to offer sacrifices, and to praise and glorify them in words. Because of a wrong belief they bowed down before the stars in order to reach the will of the Creator. This is the basis of idolatry and was the verbal tradition of the worshippers who

knew its origin. They did not say that there was no god except one special star. Jeremiah said: "Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations? for to Thee doth it appertain ... there is none like unto Thee. But they are altogether brutish and foolish; the stock is a doctrine of vanities" (Jeremiah 10:7–8), meaning "All know that Thou art alone, but by mistakes and folly they think that vanity is Thy will."

2. After a long time there arose among the children of men false prophets who said that God had commanded them to serve such and such a star, or all the stars. They brought offerings and libations to drink in certain quantities, built a temple and made an image for all the people, men, women and children to bow down before it. A prophet made it known that an image, which he had invented in his heart, was the form of a particular star, revealed to him in prophecy. In this way, they began to make images in the temples and under groves, and on the hill tops and high places where they congregated and bowed down. The people were told that "this image did good or evil and was worthy of worship and awe." The priests said to them that by "such service you will prosper and have good fortune, so do so and so, or don't do so and so." Then other deceivers arose who said that the star itself, or the planet or messenger had spoken with them and told them to serve the idol and to worship it by doing one thing and not another. The service of images by different ceremonies with sacrifice and bowing down before them spread throughout the world. After a long time the great and awful Name was forgotten and the people, men, women and children, only recognised an image of wood or stone and the temple of stone which they had been brought up from infancy to serve by bowing down, and by swearing by its name. The wise men among them, the priests and such like, thought that there was no god except the stars and planets whose images were made in their likenesses. So the Rock of the universe had no one to recognise Him except solitary persons like Enosh, Methuselah, Noah, Shem and Eber. Thus the world continued to revolve until a pillar of the world was born—Abraham, our father.
3. When this mighty one grew up, he began to think hard. Even when young, he thought by day and night and wondered how it was possible for the universe to revolve without a driver to turn it, for

it was impossible for it to do that by itself. He had no teacher or instruction in the matter, for he was sunk in Ur of the Chaldees among foolish idolaters. His father and mother and all the people worshipped the stars, and he worshipped with them. His heart struggled to reach the way of Truth and to understand the correct line of thought. He realised that there was one God who led the planets and that He had created all and that there was no other god except Him. He knew that all were mistaken and that what caused them to err was worship of the images which drove the Truth out of their minds. Abraham was forty years old when he recognised his Creator and, as soon as he recognised and understood, he began to think of changing the sons of Ur of the Chaldees to spread judgment among them and to teach that theirs was not the way of truth. He broke the images and began to tell the people that it was proper to worship only the Lord of the Universe, to bow down to Him and to offer sacrifice and drink offerings so that all future creatures might recognise Him. It was proper to destroy and smash the idols so that the people should not err by them like those who think there is no god save images. When he had won them by his evidence, the king sought to kill him and by a miracle he escaped to Haran. There he stood up and made known to all that there was one God in the Universe who should be served and whom he proclaimed. He went forward from city to city and from country to country until he reached the land of Canaan and proclaimed the Name of the Lord, as the verse states: "Abraham called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God" (Genesis 21:33). When the people collected round him and questioned him about his words, he explained to each according to his intelligence until he turned them to the way of Truth. Thousands and tens of thousands gathered and became Abraham's household and he planted in their hearts this great principle. He wrote books and taught Isaac his son, and Isaac taught and advised and instructed his son, Jacob, and made him a teacher. Jacob our father taught all his children and appointed Levi head of the school of learning—to teach the way of the Lord and to fulfil Abraham's commands. Jacob commanded his children not to cease continual support for the Levites so that learning might not be forgotten. So the movement advanced in strength among the sons of Jacob and their associates so that a people arose who knew the Lord. When the children of



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Israel had spent a long time in Egypt they relapsed into idolatry from local customs. But the tribe of Levi remained faithful to the commandments of their fathers and were never idolaters. Soon the root which Abraham had planted would have been uprooted and the children of Jacob would have returned to the errors of the world but for the love of the Lord for us. To maintain the oath with Abraham He appointed Moses, our master, as lord of all the prophets and made him His messenger. When Moses our teacher prophesied, the Lord chose the people of Israel for His inheritance and crowned them with the commandments. He made known to them the way of His service and what would be the judgment against idolatry and all its erring followers.

Treatise 5

REPENTANCE

This deals with one positive commandment that the sinner shall repent of his guilt and confess it before the Lord. The explanation of this command and the principles related to it are given in this treatise.

◆ Chapter 1

1. If a man transgresses one of the positive or negative commands of the Torah, whether intentionally or by mistake, when he repents and turns back from the sin it is a duty to confess before the Lord—blessed be He! The verse states: “When a man or woman shall commit any sin ... they shall confess their sin which they have done” (Numbers 5: 6,7) and this is a confession in words and the confession is a positive command. How is it done? The sinner says: “I beseech Thee Great Name, I have sinned. I have been perverse and transgressed before thee, I have done so and so. Now behold. I repent and am ashamed of my deed and I shall not repeat it again.” This is the fundamental form of confession. Whoever elaborates his confession and prolongs it is praiseworthy. But the transgressor or guilty one when bringing sacrifices for mistakes or deliberate misdeeds will not be pardoned by a sacrifice until he repents and confesses in words, as the verse says: “he shall confess that he hath sinned” (Leviticus 5:5). Also all under sentence of death from the *Beth Din* and those sentenced to lashings do not atone by death or the lashing unless they repent and confess. Any one who injures his fellow man or damages him in money matters, even if he makes recompense for what is due, does not have atonement until he has confessed and turned from such doings for ever. As the verse states: Any sin that men commit ... they shall confess their sin which they have done” (Numbers 5:6,7).
2. The scapegoat because it is sent away atones for the sins of all Israel. The High Priest confesses over it for the whole of Israel. As the verse says: Aaron shall ... confess him all the iniquities of the children of Israel” (Leviticus 16:21). The scapegoat atones for all the transgressions mentioned in the Torah, the minor and major, the deliberate or accidental and whether done knowingly or in ignorance. The goat atones for all who repent, but if the sinner does not repent, the goat only atones for minor offences. What are minor and major transgressions? The major sins are those which carry the death penalty of the *Beth Din* or *karet*. False swearing, although it does not imply *karet*, is a major sin. All other negative and positive commands which do not involve *karet* are minor.
3. In these times when there is no Temple standing and we have no altar for atonement, there is nothing left but repentance. Repentance atones for all transgressions. Even one who has done evil all his days, if he repents, will have nothing of his wickedness held against him in the end. The verse says: “As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness” (Ezekiel 33:12). The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) itself atones for those who repent, even as the verse states: “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you” (Leviticus 16:30).
4. Although repentance atones for everything and the Day of Atonement itself atones, there are some transgressions which are atoned for at once and there are others which are not forgiven for some time. For example, if a man sins against a positive commandment which does not carry *karet* and he repents, he is forgiven straight away; of such the verse says: “Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jeremiah 3:22). If he transgresses a negative command which does not deserve *karet* or the death penalty of the *Beth Din* and he repents, it is suspended till the Day of Atonement pardons; of such the verse says: “For on that

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day shall the priest make an atonement for you” (Leviticus 16:30). If he sinned and deserved *karet* or execution from the *Beth Din*, repentance and the Day of Atonement suspends them and the sufferings which follow for him complete the atonement. Forgiveness and atonement are not complete until suffering comes to him; of such it is said: “Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (Psalm 89:32). When does this

apply? To one who does not profane the Holy Name when he has sinned. But he who blasphemed the Holy Name, even if he repented and was still penitent on the Day of Atonement and suffering came to him, is not completely forgiven until his death. Repentance and the Day of Atonement and suffering may suspend judgment but only death atones, as the verse says: “Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die” (Isaiah 22:14).

Glossary

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| <i>Beth Din</i> | a rabbinical court |
| Bozrah | an ancient city in Edom, or modern-day Jordan |
| Canaan | the ancient name for the region that encompasses modern-day Israel, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories |
| Enosh | often spelled Enos, the first son of Seth, mentioned in the book of Genesis as one of Adam’s descendants |
| Gemara | one of the early records of the oral tradition of the Torah |
| Haran | an ancient Assyrian city where Abraham lived part of his life |
| Isaac | Abraham’s son and the father of Jacob |
| Jacob | Isaac’s son and the father of the Twelve Tribes of Israel |
| <i>karet</i> | literally “excision,” or the cutting of the soul, which causes premature earthly death and a severing of the soul’s connection with God |
| Levi | one of Jacob’s twelve sons and the progenitor of the tribe of Israel, which gave Israel its priests |
| Methuselah, Noah, Shem and Eber | figures in the biblical listing of generations descended from Adam |
| Moses | the biblical patriarch who led the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt to Mount Sinai, where he received the Written Law (the Ten Commandments) and the Oral Law |
| <i>Pardes</i> | exposition of the Torah in rabbinical Judaism |
| Torah | the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, commonly referred to as the Old Testament in Christianity: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy |
| Ur of the Chaldees | an ancient biblical city whose location remains the subject of dispute |