

PRECONCEIVED CONCLUSIONS - A REJOINDER REGARDING *THE LIMITS OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY*

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Introduction

After publishing my critical analysis of *The Limits of Orthodox Theology*,¹ DIALOGUE editors offered the author, Dr. Marc Shapiro, an opportunity to respond directly in these pages. He chose instead to issue a response on his own blog, where he wrote a number of lengthy posts in his defense.² As the actual merits of the arguments are easily lost in the loose internet format and enthusiastic cheering of his online supporters, it may be worthwhile to step back and assess if my core critiques have been adequately addressed.

Let us restate our basic objective: Dr. Shapiro's thesis is that "numerous

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1. "The Limits of Academic Criticism," Dialogue No. 8, p. 35-83, analyzing Dr. Marc Shapiro's *The Limits of Orthodox Theology*.

2. His response is apparently ongoing. We feel that after eighteen months and four sections posted to date, it is not premature to analyze his approach.

traditional theologians in the last 900 years have in fact taken issue with Maimonides' Principles."³ We are certainly aware that the formulation and composition of the Principles has not been universally accepted, but Shapiro aims further. He attempts to document the "extensive" occurrence of "scholars who thought that Maimonides' Principles were wrong, pure and simple."⁴ In his view, the tenets of belief are Rambam's innovations and are therefore disputable, and the reassessment of the Principles that he calls for has practical ramifications. "The fact that Maimonides put the stamp of apostasy on anyone who disagreed with his Principles did not frighten away numerous great sages from their search for the truth. The lesson for moderns is clear."⁵

In my critique, I demonstrated the lack of evidence for this thesis and how his work is replete with misreading and misapplying sources or equivocating between feeble implications. An analysis of his online responses, which contain numerous new citations, demonstrates that he has not changed his methods.

In Section I of this essay, I will briefly restate some of the basic methodological flaws upon which his thesis rests. I will not be repeating the upward of 75 different errors observed in my first article. For those, the reader is directed to the original piece. Instead, we will summarize three broad categories of issues that require clarification or retraction in order to better evaluate Dr. Shapiro's rebuttal.

In Section II, we will analyze Dr. Shapiro's responses and see what we can learn about the methods he uses to deflect uncomfortable scrutiny of his scholarship.

In Section III, we will examine some of the new citations in his online response and assess the reliability of his approach and the credibility of his conclusions.

Section I—Overview of Our Critiques

Our very specific critiques can be divided into three categories:

3. *Limits*, back jacket.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

Category A

The first class of flaws is the most basic and startlingly pervasive: In a disturbing number of cases, the sources either say the exact opposite of what Dr. Shapiro ascribes to them or have been distorted to the point where the inferences he draws from them have no basis.

One example⁶ is when Shapiro cites Rivash in support of the statement that Christians believe in a three-part God, while the Kabbalists believe in a ten-part God—a clear rejection of the Second Principle.⁷ A quick glance at Rivash⁸ reveals that he does indeed say such a thing as a quote from a philosopher, which he then proceeds to debunk.

Another example⁹ is Shapiro's incredible assertion that "*in Abarbanel's mind, only limited attention should be paid to [the Principles],*" because they were written in a text (*Pirush haMishnayos*) that was designed for beginners.¹⁰ This, as we observed, is a gross misrepresentation of Abarbanel, who merely explains Rambam's apparent redundancies in classifying the Principles, clarifying that Rambam was spelling them out for beginners who would not derive these Principles from studying on their own. The idea that Abarbanel felt that the Principles shouldn't be taken too seriously is directly contradicted by the rest of the book in which that passage appears.¹¹

The bulk of our critique is devoted to dozens of similar examples. Dr. Shapiro indignantly protests the suggestion that many of his references were culled from secondary sources without consulting the original, but it appears that this assessment is actually the charitable one; the alternative is either a breathtaking superficiality or simple mendaciousness.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

8. *Shut Rivash*, chap. 157.

9. Grossman, p. 50 – 51.

10. *Limits*, p. 7.

11. *Rosh Amana*, which Abarbanel devoted to resolving apparent questions on the Principles, concludes, "It is clear that the Thirteen Principles which [Rambam] articulated are indeed principles according to precise wisdom."

Category B

Aside from the direct misquotes and tweaking of sources, Shapiro displays little ability to recognize the appropriate inferences to be drawn from nuanced complexities in the subject matter.

A glaring example is when Shapiro decides that the kabbalistic concept of *Sefiros* contradicts both the Second Principle (unity of Hashem) and the Third (incorporeality). Of course, the kabbalists themselves do not consider this a conflict and explain at length why not, but Dr. Shapiro is not impressed by the reconciliations. “It is difficult for all but the most vigorous defenders of the *Sefirotic* system not to see in it a departure from the doctrine of the Unity of God.”¹²

Previous reviewers have explained why the two systems are indeed compatible.¹³ But, as we pointed out, the entire argument is beside the point. Shapiro is postulating that the Principles were not universally accepted. However, the very fact that the kabbalists feel a need to reconcile their views with Maimonides (a fact that Shapiro is aware of and acknowledges) demonstrates that they *do* consider the Principles authoritative. So we have Dr. Shapiro establishing the existence of scholarly dispute of the Principles by quoting scholars who specifically do *not* dispute them. Again, this is not a one-time slip;¹⁴ this is a natural side effect of his shallow approach to the sources that he cites.

Category C

Perhaps the most serious flaw we discuss¹⁵ is that Dr. Shapiro wrote his entire opus without attempting to explain any underlying theory to the Principles themselves. This makes it impossible to draw any coherent parallels or nuanced distinctions, which in turn renders the lion’s share of the work—supposedly an analysis of the Principles’ conceptual relationship with various viewpoints expressed by Rambam and other thinkers—essentially meaningless.

An example of this is our demonstration of a basic internal appreciation

12. *Limits*, p. 41.

13. See, for example, Shmuel Phillips, *Judaism Reclaimed*, chap. 9.

14. See Grossman fn. 81 for two more examples.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

of the Fifth Principle's underpinnings, which reveals most of Shapiro's citations to be irrelevant.¹⁶ This flaw represents a running fault line that undermines the entire project. It purports to dissect a discipline without any framework for understanding it on its own terms. Another example is Shapiro's blitheful statement that the existence of different traditions in chseyros and yeseyros contradicts the Eighth Principle. He opines the above without establishing the underlying idea behind the Eighth Principle and without drawing reasonable parameters and then assessing if they are indeed controverted.¹⁷ This method is almost the definition of analytical scholarship, and it is entirely absent in Dr. Shapiro's book.

Section II—Dr. Shapiro's Rebuttal

One would have anticipated that a multipart "Response to Criticism" might contain an attempt at rationalizing the scholarly indiscretions outlined above and the dozens of similar ones I discuss in my article. Alas, the thrust of our critique is ignored entirely; little attention is given to either the specific errors mentioned here or to the greater methodological failings that they represent.

Upon examining his response, we can identify a variety of "rebuttal techniques" that are enormously instructive in measuring the viability and sincerity of his arguments.

Technique #1—Assume Victim Status

A classic response to traditionalist criticism is to play up the narrative of, "here we go again, the right wing reactionaries are reflexively attacking us for daring to challenge the status quo." This attempts to delegitimize the critiques before we consider their rationale.

Although my article was carefully temperate in language and tone, Dr. Shapiro hits upon scandalized allegations of slander. He claims that at one point I mentioned that he had mocked the opinions of certain rabbinic greats.

And so, the counteroffensive opens with an earnest denunciation of the incivility, a theme then picked up by fellow bloggers. Headlines screaming

16. *Ibid.*, p. 66-67.

17. In fact they are not—see Grossman, p. 74-78 and see below.

of “The Slander of Mockery” announce how unserious the analysis is. Shapiro plays it to the hilt, quoting passages from his book amid hurt bewilderment over where anybody can see “mocking” in his tone. It’s all an act, of course—he knows exactly what the point of contention is—but it serves its function well. Painted in this light, his indignant devotees can chalk the whole thing up to yet another spurious attack, and that consideration need not be given to the content of the critiques.

Technique # 2 - Everyone Is Entitled to an Opinion

One way to deal with logical flaws in your thesis is to graciously acknowledge the validity of the objection and yet simply insist on the right to your own opinion as well.

Dr. Shapiro advances a theory that in his later years, Rambam no longer regarded the Thirteen Principles as the essence of Judaism. As evidence, Dr. Shapiro notes Rambam’s ruling to instruct a convert in the first two of the Thirteen Principles, “This limited theological instruction is itself significant, since the Talmud says nothing of the kind.” Now, wonders Shapiro, once Rambam was adding his own Principles to the list of required instructions, why did he stop at the first two? Apparently, at the time of *Mishneh Torah*’s writing, Rambam was “no longer as closely tied to his youthful formulation of the Principles as is often assumed.”¹⁸

In my critique, I point out that this assertion is based on an oversight. As observed by the Vilna Gaon and others, the ruling of Rambam does not in fact contain any supplement to the Talmudic formula, but is actually derived from a Baraisa cited in *Yevamos* 47b. In light of this information, Shapiro’s proof becomes effectively moot. “The limited theological instruction” is no longer “significant,” because it’s simply not true that “the Talmud itself says nothing of the kind.” There is no longer a question of why Rambam selectively innovated, because he didn’t innovate at all. This is not at all surprising, because *Mishneh Torah* virtually *never* innovates when codifying the Talmud’s halachic precepts, as Rambam himself points out in a letter.¹⁹

When presented with this correction, Dr. Shapiro is magnanimous in his acceptance: “This is a perfect example of how Grossman’s review could have been written, namely, present my points and then explain why he

18. *Limits*, pg. 8

19. *Iggeros haRambam*, letter to R. Pinchas HaDayan, Shilat ed., p. 443.

reads the texts differently and why my reading is forced, inconsistent with what the Rambam says elsewhere or with the Rambam's sources, or just flat out wrong because I misread a text."²⁰

We might imagine that such largesse would come along with a retraction or, at the very least, an explanation of why one would insist on maintaining a logical structure whose central assumption is found to be in error. But that is apparently not deemed necessary. Having allotted for himself the role of impartial referee, and subsequent to a lengthy digression in which he never returns to address this point, Shapiro merely concludes: "Yet I think we should all agree that this is a matter that reasonable people can disagree about, and it should not be used an example to show the world that I am clueless about the Mishneh Torah."

Perhaps, indeed, but when reasonable people disagree, they are expected to do more than insist on their right to do so; they are also expected to justify their respective positions.²¹

Technique # 3—Just Say Something

Another effective response technique, particularly when the subject matter gets technical, is to simply talk with an air of confidence and authority while saying essentially nothing at all.

For an example of this method, we turn to Dr. Shapiro's discussion of the *Mishna Berurah*,²² who rules that denial of the doctrines of *ge'ulah asidah* or *techiyas ha-meysim* renders one an *apikores* and unfit to serve as a *shaliach tzibur*. Dr. Shapiro sees in this an example of where Rambam's twelfth century innovation has even influenced later halachic convention:

20. *Seforimblog, Ibid.*

21. Dr. Shapiro attempts to salvage his theory by speculating that the Vilna Gaon may not have really meant what he wrote and that perhaps this case can be an exception to the non-innovation rule. And if so, we can thereby conclude that Rambam indeed contradicts himself and therefore must have secretly changed his mind. The whole thing is contrived to the point of desperation: why imagine insincerities and invent exceptions that serve no purpose other than to create an inconsistency where none exists and then create a history-revising speculation to resolve it? It appears that Dr. Shapiro began with his conclusion and is willing to turn whatever intellectual somersaults are necessary to manufacture a problem to solve.

22. *Mishna Berurah* 126:2.

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“Had Maimonides not included these Principles in his list, it is unlikely that denial of the last two, which are not necessarily of prime importance to a religious life, would disqualify one in this way.”²³

In my article I observe that this inference is in error, for the simple reason that this Halacha is culled directly from the *Talmud Yerushalmi*.²⁴ It is Chazal, not the Rambam, which forms the basis of *Mishna Berurah's* ruling.

In his third post, Dr. Shapiro spares no words in rebutting my objection:

The first thing to note is that I never said that the Mishnah Berurah's source for his ruling is the Rambam's Principles. What I said is that had the Rambam not included the Messianic era and Resurrection among his Principles, denial of them would not have been enough to affect a Jew's status (so that he couldn't be a prayer leader, etc.). I will explain what I mean, as Grossman has once again completely misunderstood my point.

Let us take Resurrection, which is mentioned in the Mishnah as an obligatory belief. Nevertheless, the Rambam was suspected by both opponents and supporters as not really believing in it literally. In response to this suspicion, he wrote his famous Letter on Resurrection, which affirms the literalness of Resurrection and tells us that when he included it in his Principles he really meant it. Imagine if Maimonides, in his Letter on Resurrection, had not affirmed literal Resurrection, but instead defended the notion that it is to be understood metaphorically, as referring to the World to Come. Had that occurred, then the Rambam's great authority would have ensured that belief in Resurrection would not be required.

My point is therefore simple: If the Rambam had declared that belief in Resurrection is not required, I do not believe that the Mishnah Berurah would have regarded this approach as

23. *Limits*, p. 17.

24. Shapiro was apparently unaware of the Yerushalmi, instead searched for *Mishna Berurah's* source in *Yeshu'as Ya'akov*.

heretical and thus invalidated a hazzan who held such a view, despite what other rishonim might have held. Similarly, had the Rambam not included the Messianic Era as a Principle of Faith, I do not believe that it would have been regarded as an obligatory belief, denial of which is heresy. It might have been a “recommended” belief, but not a generally accepted “obligatory” belief. In my opinion, this shows the great significance of the Rambam from both a theological and a halakhic perspective.

If you look at Jewish history, you will find that while many have asserted that certain beliefs are obligatory (e.g., gilgul, existence of demons, Divine Providence encompassing the animal kingdom, Daas Torah, R. Shimon Ben Yohai authored the Zohar, the Sages were infallible in matters of science), these beliefs have never become generally accepted to the extent that those who do not share them are regarded by the wider Orthodox world as outside the fold. Only Maimonides’s Principles were able to do such a thing. This explains what I mean when I say that had Maimonides not regarded the Messianic Era or Resurrection as obligatory beliefs, that “it is unlikely that denial” of them would have been enough to place the stamp of heresy on such a person, and thus to disqualify him from being a hazzan.

Please take a moment to read through these paragraphs again. If you are wondering how that lengthy soliloquy settles the issue, you are not alone. In fact, the five paragraphs not only fail to deflect our criticism, they fail to address it at all.

The point was not complicated: Shapiro assumes that this Halacha was influenced by Rambam’s innovations. This is incorrect, because *Mishna Berurah* was merely codifying an explicit Talmudic ruling and thus almost certainly would have done the same whether or not the Rambam had ever written his list.

When the dust settles on all the talk of how Grossman “*completely misunderstood him*,” the point remains untouched. Shapiro’s insistence on just repeating that had Maimonides not included it in his list of Principles, “it is unlikely that denial of resurrection would disqualify someone from being a hazzan,” constitutes a decision to simply ignore contrary evidence,

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not a rebuttal.²⁵

The efficacy of this sort of response derives from a basic sense of trust that the casual reader places in the author. Upon sensing his confidence and reading about how Grossman completely misunderstood his point, they are reassured that the issue has been adequately cleared up. It is unfortunate that Dr. Shapiro would so violate his readers' trust by the employment of this tactic.

A closer look at the relatively few times my critiques were directly addressed reveals this to be a recurring theme.

With regard to the idea that the philosophical approach of *Moreh Nevuchim* disagrees with the younger Rambam's *Peyrush haMishnayos*, we point out that R. Yosef Albo references a Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* to challenge a particular point of the Principles. Obviously, R. Albo was not of the opinion that Rambam changed his mind; otherwise he wouldn't ask a question on the Principles from something Rambam writes in the *Moreh*.

Shapiro has a ready response: "He [Grossman] states that R. Joseph Albo refers to the 'Guide of the Perplexed' in explicating Rambam's Principles." He then cites Albo's *Sefer haIkarim*:

And why did he not include the dogma of creation, which everyone professing a Divine law is obliged to believe, as Maimonides himself explains in the twenty-fifth chapter of the second part of the Guide of the Perplexed?

This is not an example of Albo using the Guide to explicate Rambam's Principles. In this chapter of *Sefer haIkarim*, Albo asks why the Rambam does not include creation as one of the Thirteen Principles. He cites the Guide not to explicate the Principles but to show that the Rambam regarded creation as an essential doctrine, and therefore it should have appeared

25. Along the way, Shapiro appears to have invented a new speculation: in a hypothetical world where Rambam would *argue* on the Twelfth and Thirteenth Principles and contradict the *Yerushalmi*, the *poskim* may theoretically have ruled like this imaginary Rambam's opinion over that of Chazal. Perhaps so, who is to tell? This is very much not the point that Shapiro makes in his book, where he purports to demonstrate the proactive halachic influence of the Rambam supposedly innovating the Thirteen Principles.

in the Principles.

He may be right; perhaps “explicate” was the wrong word. However, we are left wondering why a grammatical correction suffices instead of a response to the point.

Another example: in my article, I mention Dr. Shapiro’s claim that in Ma’amar Techiyas Hameisim, “the Thirteen Principles are not set apart as being fundamentally more significant than the rest of the Commentary on the Mishna or the Mishneh Torah.” I point out that this is simply not true. Just a few lines above the cited section, after explaining why he wrote his various works, Rambam says: “After undertaking this, we saw that it would not be logical (*eyno min ha-din*) to explain the branches of the faith and to neglect its roots.” Here we have Rambam referring to the Principles as the “roots” of Judaism, exactly what Shapiro says he does not do. Dr. Shapiro cites only partially the relevant passage, one that supports his thesis, presenting a false view of Rambam’s opinion.

How does he justify this error? “I myself refer to this source in “Limits,” p. 6, as one of the few times Rambam mentions the Principles subsequent to his Commentary on the Mishnah. This does not change the fact that the Rambam does not refer to the Principles as a unit in the Mishneh Torah or the Guide, and the understanding of Judaism found in these latter works is not always the same as what we see in the Principles.”²⁶

He goes on, but you get the idea.²⁷

26. <https://seforimblog.com/2020/08/response-to-criticism-part-3/>, August 2, 2020.

27. In his fourth response, which we received as we went to print, we find further examples. Regarding his claim about Abarbanel’s position on the Principles, Shapiro’s response is that he didn’t cite Abarbanel as an example of someone who disputes the Principles but rather in reference to his discussion about Rambam listing the Principles in the *Yad*. He is totally correct about the immediate context, but he pretends that this settles the issue, which it obviously does not. The issue is that he flagrantly misrepresents Abarbanel’s position about how seriously the Principles should be taken in order to claim credence for the book’s thesis. The viewpoint he ascribes to Abarbanel is false. Shapiro apparently feels that so long he has made some comment on a topic, no further clarification or retraction of his own mistakes is required. Shapiro’s response to falsely citing both Vilna Gaon and Chazon Ish as disputing the Principles, the claim that Chazon Ish “obviously never saw *Guide to the Perplexed*” or that Rambam contradicts himself in *Hilchos Yesodey haTorah* all follow the same misleading pattern.

Section III—Sources, Sources Everywhere

For the most part, the “Response to Criticism” is filled not with responses to the flaws and errors we have raised but rather with more and more citations that Dr. Shapiro feels support his thesis. Upon perusing his new sources, the pattern we first identified holds strong: Dr. Shapiro’s opinion of a supporting source is anything that can be plucked out of any section of a discussion, regardless of context or author’s intent or if the inference is at all tenable or consistent with the rest of the selection from which it is culled.

3A—Verify the Source

Dr. Shapiro cites the late R. Shimshon Pincus, *zatzal*, in his own support. “Rambam was the first who elucidated the Thirteen Principles ... What was Rambam looking to achieve when he established those ‘Principles’ and anyway, what makes them ‘Principles’? ... Rambam is giving these Principles Halachic significance and seemingly we have accepted his opinion.”²⁸

It is unclear what information Dr. Shapiro is claiming to adduce from this quote. If his point is that Rambam was the one who organized the list in its present form, it seems odd to turn to a twentieth century *sefer* to “prove” a historical fact that everyone knows and no one disputes. Rather, in context it is clear that Shapiro’s intent is more subtle. As in so many other instances, he is trying to create the impression of mainstream support for his ideas. “Look, even an impeccably credentialed traditionalist like R. Pincus understands the *Ikkarim* to be a somewhat arbitrary innovation of the Rambam, so what are the hotheads attacking me for?”

The ploy is effective, but only because Shapiro neglects to tell his readers that R. Pincus goes on and explains the intrinsic necessity and thematic consistency of the *Ikkarim*²⁹ and emphatically refers to them as “the most

See <https://seforimblog.com/2021/04/response-to-criticism-part-4-rabbi-zvi-yehuda-and-the-hazon-ish/>, April 12, 2021.

28. <https://seforimblog.com/2020/08/response-to-criticism-part-3/>, August 2, 2020. Ostensibly, this is a supporting source for the statement “Let us not forget that it was the Rambam who chose thirteen principles. He did not find this in the Torah or in the Talmud. When you examine the Mishneh Torah you see that he could just as easily have chosen fourteen principles or even more.”

29. Something which Dr. Shapiro steadfastly refuses to do and the need for which he

basic tenets of Judaism: When a Jew believes in them, he is considered part of the Jewish nation from a spiritual perspective.”³⁰

Selectively plucked quotations notwithstanding, R. Pincus is very far from sharing Dr. Shapiro’s view of arbitrary *Ikkarim*.

The same thing occurs when Shapiro quotes R. Chaim Sofer’s questioning why Rambam doesn’t require a convert to be instructed in the Principles. He neglects to apprise his readers of R. Sofer’s subsequent words: “Rambam didn’t add to the Talmudic formula,”³¹ exactly as I had written and directly in contradiction to Dr. Shapiro’s position.

And again when he quotes his own teacher, R. Isadore Twersky:

Now the need to expatiate concerning the theological foundations, in contradistinction to the ritual commandments, is not mentioned in the Talmud...

Given the Maimonidean stance, this emphasis is a logical corollary or even a self-evident component of the underlying text, which stipulates that the convert be informed about “some commandments” ... As a matter of fact, the entire presentation bristles with suggestive Maimonidean novelties which should not be glossed over and obscured.³²

But in the footnote Dr. Shapiro cites R. Mayer Twersky,³³ who indeed states clearly that Rambam was deriving this from *Yevamos* 47b, so which is it?

Dr. Shapiro seems to misunderstand what Dr. Twersky means by “novelties.” Of course, Rambam and all the Rishonim are replete with novel insights. However, this is not the same as saying that he invented matters on his own or “added to the Talmud,” as Shapiro claims. Dr. Twersky is apparently translating *chidushey Torah* as “novelties,” but Talmudic scholars who

does not seem to recognize.

30. *Nefesh Shimshon, be’Inyaney Emunah* (Jerusalem, 2005) p. 97.

31. *Machaneh Chayim, Yoreh Deah* 2, no. 25, p. 139: ואין דרכו של רמב"ם לכתוב דבר בלי יסוד: בש"ס כנודע.

32. Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*, p. 474-475.

33. Son of Isadore Twersky and a current Rosh Yeshiva at Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University.

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are fluent in the writings of Rambam understand the subtle difference—these “novelties” are *chidushey Torah* that are derived from the Talmudic discussion or, in other words “a self-evident component of the underlying text,” exactly as Dr. Twersky writes.

The confusion continues when he announces that “R. Pesach Finfer, [who] was a *dayan* in Vilna and considered the expert on Masoretic matters in Lithuania can be added to the list of those who understand *tikun sofrim* literally” (a concept which Dr. Shapiro explains to mean that “the Biblical text was changed by the Scribes”).³⁴ After all R. Finfer writes: “Ezra was worthy of the Torah having been given through him ... And he and Nechemyah performed *tikun sofrim* and *kinuyey sofrim*.”

It is totally unclear what Shapiro sees in that line, but his strategic ellipses carefully omit R. Finfer’s reference to his own source: *Teshuvos haRadvaz* 3:594.

Here is Radvaz:

And the truth is that all these examples [of *tikun sofrim*, *keri u-kesiv*, *itur sofrim*] are *Halacha leMoshe miSinai*, but still the scribes were very studious and precise and deducted how it is appropriate for each word to be read and written, even if they didn’t have the tradition from Sinai. Hence, everywhere that you find the terms ‘*mikra sofrim*,’ ‘*tikun sofrim*’ or ‘*itur sofrim*,’ it should not enter your mind, God forbid, that the word or letter was missing and the scribes amended it, for if you understand it that way, you give room for our antagonists to make that claim as they consistently do. Rather, the main idea is this: everything was *Halacha leMoshe miSinai* that it should be this way, and the scribes comprehend that it should be this way, precisely the way they write it, even without being told the *Halacha leMoshe miSinai*.

So this is R. Pesach Finfer—the man whom Dr. Shapiro cites as supporting a view that the scribes actually altered the Torah.

In his search for authorities who assume—unlike the Vilna Gaon—that Rambam invented the proselyte’s instructions, Shapiro hits on pay dirt: *Magid Mishneh* himself says so, right there on the page:

34. *Limits*, p. 99.

ומאריכיך בדבר זה: בייחוד השם ובאיסור ע"ז שאינו מבואר שם שיאריכו עמו בזה אבל הדבר פשוט שכיון שאלו הם עיקרי הדת והאמונה צריך להודיעם בברור ולהאריך עמם בזה שהוא עיקר היהדות והגירות – “**And we speak at length about this matter:** Regarding the Unity of God and the prohibition of worshipping idols, which is not explained there that they need to speak in length with him about this. But the matter is obvious since these things are the fundamentals of Judaism and our belief, it is necessary to spell them out clearly in details since this is the basis of Judaism.”

Except that he doesn't. *Magid Mishneh* simply says that that instruction in this area is not explicit but should be provided **at length**. By implication, it is abundantly clear that *Magid Mishneh* understands that the actual imperative to instruct *is* indeed explicit—exactly like the Gaon and in contradiction to Shapiro.

Things do not improve when Dr. Shapiro seeks to prop up his thesis that Rambam's omission of certain Principles in *Hilchos Yesodey haTorah* indicates a retraction. He informs us³⁵ that this is actually a well-established method of exegesis; other scholars have also found it noteworthy when Rambam does not include elements of his worldview in *Yesodey haTorah*.

*For example, R. Joseph Ibn Kaspi writes: הנה תמהתי על כבודו: בספרי המכונה ספר הסוד, כי [אם] כן עשה הוא דעת תורתנו ויסוד הדת—למה לא מנה זה בהלכות יסודי [!] התורה בתחלת מנותו היסודות actually wondered about [Rambam] in his sefer that is known as Sefer haSod, because [if] he did so, that is the opinion of our Torah and fundamental of religion, so why does he not enumerate this in Hilchos Yesodey haTorah when he begins to enumerate the Principles?”*³⁶

The snippet of the quote that Shapiro provides leaves the reader completely in the dark as to what Ibn Kaspi is discussing. All we are told is that somewhere, sometime, Ibn Kaspi felt that a certain unidentified something should have been mentioned in *Hilchos Yesodey haTorah*. This itself is noteworthy—Shapiro once again seems entirely in denial of the significance of context when establishing grand rules from specific instances.³⁷

35. <https://seforimblog.com/2020/08/response-to-criticism-part-3/>, Aug. 2, 2020.

36. *Amudey Kesef uMaskiyos Kesef* (Frankfurt, 1848), p. 113.

37. *Meiri, Shabbos 55a*, explains that fundamental Principles should not be garnered

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As it is, taking the time to look up the source reveals that not only is no such grand rule implied, but also that this is not an instance of a “scholar wondering why Maimonides did not include [something] in *Hilchos Yesodey haTorah*”³⁸ at all. Ibn Kaspi is actually pondering a contradiction in Rambam, not noting an omission: In *Moreh Nevuchim*,³⁹ Rambam argues—in opposition to the philosophers—that prophecy is only activated proactively by God, even if the requisite conditions are met. However, Rambam’s unqualified wording in *Hilchos Yesodey haTorah*: —מיד רוח הקודש שורה עליו— “Ruach haKodesh immediately rests on him” - seems to indicate otherwise.⁴⁰

A commentator noting an inconsistency in the opinion of Rambam bears no relevance on the question of what can or cannot be deduced from Rambam neglecting to write *Hilchos Yesodey haTorah* exactly the way Dr. Shapiro decided he should have.

Continuing to seek support for his “retraction” thesis, Shapiro finds an enticingly phrased statement by a recognized Rambam commentator.

Here is Shapiro:

the idea that ... Rambam changed his mind about including Reward and Punishment as one of the Principles, was actually earlier suggested by R. Solomon of Chelm in his classic commentary *Mirkevot haMishneh*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:8: וזה מכוון נגד ייג עיקרים שבפירוש המשנה סנהדרין פרק חלק, אלא דבחדא יש חזרה, דשם מונה שכר ועונש, וכאן בחיבורו השמיטו, לפי דמצוה לעבוד שלא ע”מ לקבל פרס מאהבה.⁴¹

Dr. Shapiro apparently was encouraged when spotting the term “*chazarah*.” However, once again, when studying this quotation in context, we realize

from isolated teachings: אין עיקרי האמונות תלויות בראיות של פשוטי מקראות ואגדות, וכבר ידעת שאין משיבין באגדות.

38. *Seforimblog, Ibid.*

39. *Moreh Nevuchim, 2:32*

40. This question is also clearly articulated by the *Lechem Mishneh* on the page, which is in turn referenced in our edition of Ibn Kaspi. Clearly, Dr. Shapiro once again felt no need to familiarize himself with the basic discussion before citing it in support of his favored conclusion.

41. <https://seforimblog.com/2020/08/response-to-criticism-part-3/> Aug. 2, 2020.

that *Mirkeves haMishneh* is not stating that Rambam changed his mind, nor that reward and punishment is not one of the Principles.

Mirkeves haMishneh is stating that the categories and classification of the Principles is different in *Mishneh Torah*. He is very clear that Rambam did not withdraw from the tenets of the Principles, as Rambam does still indeed hold reward and punishment to be a Principle. The ideas are merely listed in different ways in different places. Unfortunately, to understand the intent, one would have to read the entire selection,⁴² not to hit on one line and stop there.

We find examples where the representations of sources simply misappropriate the imprimatur of traditional authority, for often times, the works of these scholars are actually diametrically opposed.

Take the case of R. Avraham Hochman's *HaEmunah veYud Gimmel Ikorehah*.⁴³ In the course of building an idea, the author phrases a question⁴⁴ in a manner that Shapiro claims as support. In this particular instance, the author is alive and well and thus available to speak for himself. When R. Hochman was alerted to how he had been publicly cited, he was appalled: "Academics often quote a question and forget that for the wise, the question is half the answer. But the professors stick to the question and don't wait around for the answer. The entire theme of my *sefer* is to show that Rambam's Principles are absolute and that he derived all the Thirteen Principles from the Talmud!"⁴⁵

42. "השמיטו לפי דמצוה לעבוד שלא ע"מ לקבל פרס מאהבה עפ"י מה' תשובה ה"ד, ותו דמשיח ותחיית....". המתים כולל שכר ועונש עה"ז ועוה"ב כמ"ש העיקרים, ומנה במקומו אפיקורסות דתורה שבע"פ דבקדושין כנ"ל, וממילא בכלל תורה שבע"פ שכר ועונש רוחני, שלא נזכר בהדיא בתורה שבכתב.

43. Dr. Shapiro cites him thus (<https://seforimblog.com/2020/08/response-to-criticism-part-3/> Aug. 2, 2020): R. Avraham Menahem Hochman writes: "המורה הכפירה, מאחר וכל כך חמורה הכפירה, כיצד זה השמיטם מספרו היד החזקה ולא כתבם כפי סדרם וגדולה החובה לדעת את י"ג העיקרים, בפירוש המשנה. This certainly provides the impression that Rabbi Hochman approves of Shapiro's reasoning and that Rambam apparently did not hold of the Principles in his later years. This would be accurate if the discussion wholly consisted of only the few lines cited by Shapiro.

44. Regarding the different formulation of the Principles in *Hilchos Yesodey haTorah*.

45. R. Avraham Hochman, in private conversation with this author, cited with permission.

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R. Hochman went on to write a lengthy rebuttal of the way Shapiro had quoted him.⁴⁶ It is not the details of this response and Shapiro's unjustified conclusion that we are concerned with here—it is the brazenness of citing a recognized authority to promote a position that the author himself openly rejects.

Things really start to go “off the rails” when we examine Shapiro's claim in the name of R. Shlomo Fisher, *zatzal*, that one need not accept Mosaic authorship, that the Rambam abandoned his principles and that “*Rambam's formulation of the tenets of Jewish belief was far from universally accepted.*”⁴⁷

R. Fisher was very ill (since deceased) at the time I wrote this article, but I found these attributions questionable, so I checked with the family and *talmidim*. As in the case of R. Hochman, they were horrified that anyone would be using R. Fisher's name in this way.

After showing Dr. Shapiro's citation of R. Shlomo Fisher to his son, R. Meir Fisher of Bnei Brak, this is the response that I received: “I have seen the files that you sent me. It is impossible to attribute these words to my father. Precisely regarding matters like this our father had given us this letter.” (See attached, Appendix B, for the letter. R. Fisher was apparently accustomed to being wildly misquoted.)⁴⁸

So what is Shapiro relying on for this matter-of-fact citation? He quotes R. Uri Sherki of Jerusalem, so I contacted R. Sherki directly to discuss what he heard from R. Fisher. To my surprise, R. Sherki had not spoken to R. Fisher at all, but he had merely heard this from a friend who was an attendee at R. Fisher's *shiur*. Shapiro also cites Betzalel Naor as further source for these claims. The family checked with R. Naor, who would not confirm nor deny his testimony, but merely indicated that “someone will get back to you.”

A few days later, they received an anonymous call from a man who refused to identify himself, “I heard from R. Fisher that R. Yehudah Hachassid argues with the Rambam.”

46. See Appendix A.

47. [https://seforimblog.com/2007/08/marc-b-shapiro-forgery-and-halakhic-2/Aug 2, 2007](https://seforimblog.com/2007/08/marc-b-shapiro-forgery-and-halakhic-2/Aug%202007) and *Limits*, p. 26 no. 143.

48. R. Meir Fisher, one of his father's closest *talmidim*, has various speculations as to why this particular error could have been made. In any case, the family denies this attribution.

So here we have it—half-statements, delivered anonymously and heard third-hand, presented as evidence for this radical attribution to R. Shlomo Fisher.

If this is the manner in which current-day scholars are cited, it lends credence to our claim that the medieval sources brought by Shapiro all share the same drawback and have been distorted without basis, merely to serve a pre-existing agenda. The exact nature of that agenda is apparently something that Dr. Shapiro prefers to keep in the background, and this is where his arguments and retorts lose all credibility.

Dr. Shapiro spends much space on the assertion that Ibn Ezra believed in post-Mosaic additions to the Scripture, citing as one example the works of Shmuel David Luzzatto (Shadal) to prove his point.⁴⁹ Upon checking the source, we find yet another instance of Dr. Shapiro citing an author as believing something he actually vociferously denies. As Shadal points out, the primary source for this take on Ibn Ezra was the noted heretic Baruch Spinoza,⁵⁰ who popularized this theory [in Shadal's words]: “to ensnare Ibn Ezra in his trap, and to put in the hearts of those who are easily swayed that Ibn Ezra himself believed that Moshe Rabbeinu wrote only a very small portion of the Torah.”⁵¹

But Shapiro actually claims Shadal as support, completely erasing the Spinoza referenc in the text of his book, in the notes and in the bibliography, apparently with similar tactics to put in the hearts of those who are easily swayed...

49. *Limits*, p. 108.

50. *Shadal*, commentary on the Torah, *Devarim* 1:1: “I am obligated to make known the falsehoods and lies of Spinoza ... ” Spinoza's citation is in *Theological-Political Tractate*, chap. 8: “To treat the matter in logical order, I shall first deal with misconceptions regarding the true authorship of the Sacred Books, beginning with the Pentateuch. The author is almost universally believed to be Moses, a view so obstinately defended by the Pharisees that they have regarded any other view as heresy. It was for this reason that Ibn Ezra, a man of enlightened mind and considerable learning, who was the first, as far as I know, to call attention to the misconception, did not venture to explain his meaning openly, and expressed himself somewhat obscurely in words which I shall here not hesitate to elucidate, making his meaning quite plain ... ”

51. *Shadal*, *ibid.*

3B—Nuance and Distinction

The refusal to acknowledge the existence of nuance and internal parameters to Talmudic subjects is evident whenever Dr. Shapiro starts accumulating contradictions and instances of retraction.

In his online response,⁵² in an attempt to defend what he terms as the “approach that [Grossman] regards as ignorant as well as apparently blasphemous, that the Rambam changed his views about certain matters in the Principles,” Shapiro announces that he will reveal “one other place where it is possible that the Rambam changed his mind in a matter of dogma.” He goes on to observe that:

In Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 9:2, the Rambam states that the Messiah will be a great prophet, close to the level of Moses. He also mentions this in his Letter to Yemen.

In Hilkhot Melakhim 11:3 he tells us that R. Akiva thought that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah. Since Bar Kokhba was not a prophet, this is a proof that the Messiah does not need to be a prophet.⁵³

As mentioned, there is nothing in the Twelfth Principle about the Messiah being a prophet. Does this mean that the Rambam changed his mind?⁵⁴

It is hard to count all the errors that are encompassed in just this one section.

Messiah being a prophet is not a foundational belief of Judaism, so Rambam doesn't mention it in his list of Principles, while in *Hilchos Teshuvah*, Rambam notes that the Messiah will bring all the Jewish people to repentance. For that he will need the force of prophecy, so it is mentioned there. In *Hilchos Melachim*, where Rambam is discussing the national accomplishments that the Messiah will bring about as King of Israel, he does not mention that he will be a prophet for those achievements mark the initial stages of his success, and it is possible that at that point he will not have reached

52. <https://seforimblog.com/2020/08/response-to-criticism-part-3/>, Aug. 2,2020.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

the level of prophecy, or that God does not yet deem it the time for this. For the same reason, the fact Bar Kochba can be mentioned as a possible Messiah—although he was not yet a prophet—proves nothing. He may have had potential to be a prophet, but as he did not succeed in his quest to restore the national landmarks of Israel, this never reached fruition.

All this is actually discussed openly by R. Alter Hilewitz, in the very paper that Dr. Shapiro cites as proof to his proposition.⁵⁵ Once again, rather than a cited source being support for his claims, a careful reading reveals that it actually overturns Dr. Shapiro's thesis.

Equally revealing is his characterization of the debate. No one ever said it is “blasphemous to say Rambam changed his mind.” The Talmud is replete with Tano'im and Amoro'im, who recant their original positions, and it may indeed be true that Rambam changed his mind on numerous occasions. The issue at hand is not the piety of Dr. Shapiro, but the unreliability of his claims.

3C - Inner Dimensions of Torah

Shapiro's weakest scholarship appears when discussing kabbalistic matters. Hampering Shapiro is that in Kabbalah literature, ideas are never spelled out, and hence, we cannot rely on a text. Secrets remain so for they are transmitted only as ראשי פרקים לחכם המבין מדעתו—“abbreviated ideas for a wise person who understands on his own”.⁵⁶

In our original critique, discussing the Third Principle and the reflection or image of God, we noted a revealing error of Dr. Shapiro, who writes: “obviously there must be substance to cause reflection.”⁵⁷ Dr. Shapiro mischaracterizes *tzelem Elokim*, which comprises a subtle, spiritual and conceptual correlation between man and God, as explained at great length by Rambam in the Guide⁵⁸ and *Nefesh haChaim* at the outset.⁵⁹ To Dr. Shapiro, like everything else, even these transcendent expressions are taken at face

55. Alter Hilewitz, *Sinai 41*, (1957), p. 17.

56. *Chagigah* 11b.

57. *Limits*, p. 65.

58. Part 1, chap. 2.

59. Section 1, chapters. 1-2.

value.

This lack of nuance and depth regarding *penimiyus haTorah* is apparent wherever the discussion demands some acknowledgment of the esoteric elements of Torah.

Shapiro asks: “Regarding prophecy, R. Shlomo Aviner cites R. Kook that Adam was a greater prophet than Moses. I found this formulation noteworthy, as it contradicts Maimonides’ Principle that Moses was the greatest prophet.”⁶⁰

Why would Dr. Shapiro assume that this contradicts the Principle? As he explains it, Maimonides writes that Moshe was “the greatest.” This unfortunate formulation reduces matters of inchoate depth to common parlance. The pertinent words of Rambam in the Seventh Principle are “that we should believe that he [Moshe Rabbeinu] was the father of all prophets”—not “the greatest.” As with all the Principles, this fundamental aspect of Rambam’s teaching is left unexplained by Dr. Shapiro. Absent any understanding of Moshe’s singularity, how can we pose contradictions?⁶¹

In this same vein, Dr. Shapiro is bothered that: “the concept of Adam’s זיהרא עילאה is found throughout kabbalistic literature (which also states that Enoch would later receive this זיהרא עליאה). I had never understood it as also including prophecy, as opposed to simply greatness ...”⁶²

Once again, we see the same deficiency. What is “זיהרא עילאה?” According to Shapiro, it is “greatness.” Well, kind of, sort of ... Adam HaRishon was great, and Moshe Rabbeinu was even greater. Like Koufax and Drysdale.

It is this lack of precision, absent the subtlety and sensitivity required to unravel kabbalistic literature—which are הררים התלויין בשערה—“mountains that hang on a hairbreadth”⁶³—that creates the baseless contradictions that Dr. Shapiro presents.

זיהרא עילאה is actually a very specific term that refers to the total and unhindered illumination of life through God’s Presence and Will, marred by

60. <https://seforimblog.com/2020/08/response-to-criticism-part-3/>, Aug. 2, 2020.

61. This is actually referring to the fact that all subsequent prophecies stem from the revelation at Har Sinai that Moshe brings down to earth, as the verse (*Devarim* 18:18) states: נְבִיאָ אֲקוּמָה לְהֵם מִקְרֹב אֲחֵיהֶם כְּמוֹד וְנִתְתִי דְבָרֵי בְּפִיו וְדָבַר אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶנּוּ.

62. <https://seforimblog.com/2020/08/response-to-criticism-part-3/>, Aug. 2, 2020.

63. *Mishna Chagigah* 1:8

no physical and material understanding. In fact, this is the “קרן עור פני משה”⁶⁴ and the light in the Torah of Rabbi Meir, where it was written “אור עם א.”⁶⁵

With regard to this Torah of Rabbi Meir, Dr. Shapiro had assumed instead that the different spelling in his Torah is a contradiction to the Rambam’s Eighth Principle, so he writes: “As can be imagined, despite the great efforts made by the sages, not all difficulties were cleared up.”⁶⁶

Right here, we discover again why Shapiro’s perspective creates such confusion. A shallow explanation of the Rambam’s Eighth Principle becomes an inconsistency or “difficulty;” kabbalistic terminology is translated superficially, and we then need to “clear it up” or use apologetics to resolve non-existent problems.

None of what we have written is meant to deny the benefits of an academic’s approach to the text or historical insights to the circumstances of the time. When studying the text alone, one may indeed discover certain details, and cultural minutiae may provide a hint to missing information. But studying one piece out of context, devoid of its underlying Talmudic principles—as Shapiro does—hinders understanding that would illuminate and clarify the entire subject.

It appears that Dr. Shapiro has apparently read through a bulk of published materials: doctoral theses, independent studies and Judaic scholarship, and, indeed, most of his information seems to be amassed from these secondary sources. As we have demonstrated, this methodology is highly deficient when learning Torah, which requires analysis, debate and understanding—and not mere citations—certainly so when dealing with subtle and abstract points at the heart of the Torah.

What Dr. Shapiro does is not learning, but rather—research.

64. *Shemos* 34:29

65. *Yalkut Shimoni, Bereyshis, remez* 34; see *Nefesh HaChayim* 1:20 and *Da’as Tevunos* 126. For a good explanation, see *Nefesh HaChayim*, Ben Tzion Epstein ed., 2:17, p. 320.

66. *Limits*, p. 101.

Have We Not Heard This Somewhere Before?

Let's try to trace the formulation of his thesis and determine to what extent he has based his work on a true grounding in the primary sources.

We've mentioned Dr. Shapiro's speculation of Rambam wavering on the *Ikkarim*, in which he relies heavily on Rambam's "adding to the Talmudic formula" in *Yevamos 47a*.

The prominence given by Dr. Shapiro to that Gemara is actually quite puzzling. While the subject is of interest, scholars have not highlighted this *sugya* as revealing fundamental lessons regarding the *Ikkarim*. Shapiro writes, "When I wrote my book, I did not know of anyone else who raised this question, so it looks like it is original to me However, subsequent to the book's publication, I have found a number of others who wonder the same thing I did."⁶⁷

Shapiro cites and credits extensively the work of Dr. Menachem Kellner as setting the stage for his own book. That work, aptly named "*Must a Jew Believe Anything?*" was published in 1999, just a few years before Marc Shapiro's work on the Principles, so I thought it fit to study that work for comparison.

Kellner proposes a startling theory: until the time of Maimonides, there was no significance to Jewish teachings of faith, belief and dogma. Attention was purportedly given only to strengthening the performance of Mitzvos. Along came Maimonides to "turn accepted notions of conversion on their head to play down the importance in conversion of teaching ... obedience to the commandments," and "to place heavy emphasis on the dogmas of Judaism."

In building his thesis, Kellner bases himself strongly on *Yevamos 47a*! Dr. Kellner even drew a full chart in the second edition of his book, outlining the instances when Rambam added to the Gemara. The Gemara writes, "and we make known to him the punishment for the Mitzvos," but Rambam, when recording this, adds (according to Kellner) "though not at great length."

67. <https://seforimblog.com/2020/03/reuven-elitzur-saul-lieberman-and-response-to-criticism-part-2/>, Mar. 11, 2020.

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Apparently, Kellner neglected to turn the page: The Rambam was actually citing nearly verbatim the Gemara on 47b, which indeed states: ואין מרביץ עליו ואין מדקדקין עליו—“and we do not overload [him] with issues, and we do not go into much detail.”

When I asked Dr. Kellner why he did not mention this part of the Gemara, he had no answer.

Now we have discovered why Shapiro has also missed the Gemara on 47b. Clearly, this is where Dr. Shapiro draws his information, along with the mistaken premise that Rambam was adding to the Gemara. Thus, it is curious that he writes “When I wrote my book, I did not know of anyone else who raised this question.”

It is difficult to believe that the very same mistake in misreading sources can coincidentally be made by two scholars who know each other well, who have both published books on this topic and who have credited and consulted with each other, citing each other's work.

Conclusion

Accomplished scholars have praised Dr. Shapiro (though for some of his admirers, this seems to be mere delight at knocking the yeshiva world off its intellectual perch in Orthodoxy),⁶⁸ and the blogosphere

68. “Marc Shapiro's works constitute a programmatic assault on the ahistorical non-text critical traditionalist rabbinic approach to its own intellectual legacy. Shapiro's impeccably researched *Studies in Maimonides* advances his iconoclastic project in its methodical humanization of a virtual god in the *yeshiva* world whose every jot and tittle continues to be scrutinized and mined for meaning. More a collection of odds and ends than a book-length thesis, the connective thread is the demystification of a figure traditionally perceived as the personification of the very apex of religious life and thought. Shapiro demonstrates that what is often engaged in as the most noble of rabbinic endeavors, to resolve a problematic Maimonidean passage (*tsu farentferen a shverer Rambam*), can be simply an exercise in futility once human error, oversight and reformulation are taken into account. The most common is mere forgetfulness or erroneous citations from memory. Shapiro then took aim at the very foundation (or so it is believed) of its belief system—Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith in *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (2004). He convincingly demonstrated that far from unanimously embraced by what has been absurdly imagined as some amorphous rabbinic accord, virtually each one of the Principles has been contested and subjected to critical halachic debate since

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that applauded his book and responses will continue to do so, so we have no illusions that this article might mark the final word on this subject. Still, if we have provided a modicum of clarity for the objective truth seeker to see past the inaccurate presentations and ad hoc source compilations that characterize this book, we will consider our efforts to have been a success.

* * * *

In considering only Dr. Shapiro's presentation of sources, we have left aside the most serious flaw in his approach. Where is the explanation or the attempt to understand what Rambam is saying and why? What is the Rambam's basis for each of these Principles, and from where does he derive the concept of Principles upon which all of Judaism stands? Reading Dr. Shapiro's survey, one would never know that there is a veritable library of books explaining Rambam's Principles and their basis.⁶⁹

Why indeed does Rambam insist that one who even inadvertently denies the Principles loses his portion in Olam haBo and is no longer part of *Klal Yisroel*? How can we challenge Rambam without first understanding what he says and why?

Why does Rambam write a long treatise defining the nature of *Olam haBo* together with the Principles in *Peyrush haMishnayos* at the end of *Sanhedrin*? Relying on Dr. Shapiro, we would never know that this treatise makes up the bulk of the chapter on the Principles, and certainly no explanation is given. Can we really "reappraise the Principles"⁷⁰ without

their introduction by many of the major and respected rabbinic decisors. In other words, a twelfth-century construct was never considered by many of Orthodoxy's own sages to have originated in Sinai. Hardly a radical thesis for anyone possessed of even a modicum of critical sensibility, but once again, mission accomplished, drawing a collective "Heaven forbid" from the audience that has granted those principles canonical status." All this from James Diamond, co-author with Menachem Kellner of a new academic approach to Rambam in <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23048>, published on H-Judaic (December 2008). We have not noticed that Dr. Shapiro rejects this characterization of his work or claims to be misunderstood, as he did with our review.

69. For recently published works, see Ehud Rakovsky's three-volume *Da'as Emunah* or *Re'eh Emunah*, based upon a series of *shiurim* given by R. Moshe Shapira, *zatzal*. In English, see *Even Shesiyah* by R. Yochanan Bechhofer.

70. From the subtitle of *Limits*.

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understanding this?

This broader perspective has yet to be presented. Perhaps our next article will provide an answer to these questions.

APPENDIX A

Letter of Rav Avrohom Hochman

בס"ד

הנה פרופ' שפירו שמח על שמצא שותף להערתו גם בספר האמונה ו"ג עיקריה, ומעתיק הלשון בעמ' פ"ד וז"ל: "כיצד השמיט הר"מ ביד החזקה ולא כתבם כפי שסדרם בפירוש המשנה". מדקדוק הלשון "השמיט" הר"מ הוציא ולמד כאילו העלים לגמרי ענין י"ג העיקרים, והנה הוא עצמו מביא הלשון של אותה השאלה בפ' ח' עמ' ק"ג וז"ל "השמיט הרמב"ם את החובה הגדולה להאמין כו' באופן חיובי" ולא סדרם כו' כחובה להאמין רק סדרם באופן "שלילה" כו' באופן שהכופר בהם יוצא מכלל ישראל. ע"כ.

הרי שהשאלה ברורה לא העלמה והשמטה סתם מצא המחבר אלא **שינוי צורה וסידור שונה**. וביותר שהוא סותר עצמו בהערה שני' שלו לפיה צריך בהבנת את השאלה בשינוי של חיובי ושלילי (ביאור לזה יהא בסעיף אחר) א"כ ראה שהשאלה היא **השינוי** חיובי לשלילי ולא העלמה והשמטה ואיך עשה (כנר' בטעות) שאלה נוספת על השמטה גמורה].

נתייחס להערה של **העלמת הי"ג עיקרים** ביד החזקה. ומאחר שיש כאן לפי הבנתו "השמטה" מגיע שפירו למסקנות רחוקות שהר"מ ביד החזקה אינו מחוייב לאותם עיקרים אף שמזכירם פעמים בודדות ואינו תמיד זהה ומתאים לעיקרים.

ואנו מאד מצטערים שהגיע לכזו הבנה ומסקנא מהלשון "השמטה" שכתוב בספר.

איך יעלה על הדעת שהעלים והשמיט וחזר בו הרי שפירו בעצמו מודה שיש כאן שינוי של מסירת העיקרים **בצורה השלילית** האם זה יקרא שהעלים העיקרים. אתמהא!

הרי מסודרים להפליא גם במספר הי"ג בהל' תשובה פ"ג כופרים בתחיית המתים ובביאת הגואל וחילקם בשמות **הגנאי הגרועים ביותר** מינים אפיקורסים כופרים, וקבע דינם בהל' ממרים ובהל' ע"ז (ע' עמ' פ"ו) ובפירוש המשנה שמצוה לשונאם ולאבדם בעונש החמור ביותר שאין להם מקום במציאות. הנה עונש אלו חמור מאד מנודים ומרוחקים מישאל והיחס אליהם גרוע מיחס לגוי שאין לאבדו, ואפי' גרוע מבעל חי שמצווים אנו על **צער** בעלי חיים (אם לא לצורך האדם) ואלו אדרבה ממש כמו מחיית עמלק.

א"כ הרושם העצום שעשה הרמב"ם ללמד לישראל חומר העיקרים מדוייק להפליא ומזעזע את הלומד, ואיך עולה על הדעת העלמה וחזרה ח"ו, בעוד שעונשם הרבה יותר ממושעי ישראל שיש להם גיהנם על עבירות מתוך תאוה גרידא ומצוה לאהוב ולרחם עליהם.

הנה הרמב"ם סוף הל' רוצח בענין פריקה וטעינה לסייע לרשעים אלו (ולצדיקים) במלאכתם וכו' שם הר"מ מאחר שהם נלויים על ד' ומאמינים בעיקרי הדת [ג' רוב כתבי היד "עקרי" לשון רבים, הרי רומז להדיא לעיקרים שגם הזכירם ביד החזקה עצמו, וכאן מופיע באופן **חיובי**, שמאמין ומצוה לאהוב אותו.

Rabbi Avrohom Hochman of Modiin Illit, Israel, an accomplished teacher and scholar, is the author of *HaEmunah V'Yud Gimmel Ikkareiha*, (Jerusalem, 2005), and *MeyAfeila L'Ohr Gadol* (Jerusalem, 2010). The attached letter was written in response to Dr. Marc Shapiro's online citation of his work.

ואחר שהביא בהל' תשובה את כל העיקרים, אין שום תוספת והלכה חדשה לרשום בצורה מסודרת את העיקרים שיש להאמין כך וכך, שהרי חייב להאמין בכל אות בתורה וכפי שכותב על כל עיקר את הפסוק מהיכן למד, לא מסברא וכדו' וכמו שהאריך בסוף הי"ג בפירוש המשנה. ולכך צדק הרב גרוסמן שכתב לפי סדר ההלכות בכל מקום לפי עניינו, והנה כמה דוגמאות.

1. בפ"א הל' יסודי התורה ידיעת האמונה שיש מצוי ראשון שהמציא הכל כו' היא מצות עשה "אנכי כו'".

וכן האמנת שהוא ית' יחיד ולא שנים מ"ע שמע ישראל כו' ד' אחד".

2. וכן בהל' ע"ז פ"ב. לאו "דלא תתורו אחרי לבבכם" לא להעלות על לבנו כל מחשבה שגורמת לו לאדם לעקור עיקר מעיקרי התורה כו', פעמים יחשוב **ביחוד** הבורא, ופעמים **בנבואה** ופעמים **בתורה שמא מן השמים** וכו' עכ"ל, הרי מזכיר ורומז היטב לעיקרים הידועים מאד מאד שיראה הלומד בהל' תשובה ובפי' המשנה.

3. הבאנו לעיל סוף הל' רוצח, והח"ח בספרו אהבת חסד פ"ג העתיק הרמב"ם הנ"ל להלכה להקדים שינוי כזה שהוא רשע מהמאמינים בעיקרי הדת, וכ"כ הגר"א הל' צדקה מפייהמ"ש הובא באהבת חסד הנ"ל.

4. ובסוף הל' מלכים כשהגיע מקום ללמד הל' מלך המשיח ותחה"מ האריך במקומו.

בענין הערתו השני' בענין חיובי ושלילי.

הערה שני' ע"פ הבנתו בלשון "שלא סידר הר"מ **בחובה** להאמין כו' רק באופן "שלילה" **שהכופר** יוצא מכלל ישראל.

הבין שפירו (אולי בתרגום מילולי לאנגלית) חיובי אקטיבי ושלילי פסיבי, היינו חיובי-שליכנס לכלל ישראל מאמינים צריך ידיעה ואמונה בפועל.

שלילי- פסיבי כל שאינו יודע ולא שמע מהענין למשל שאינו גוף או לא שמע מתחיית המתים הריהו **כופר**.

ולפי הבנה מוטעית זו שפך חמתו על הרמב"ם מנין לו לחדש הלכה שאינה במשנה שכתוב הכופר בתחה"מ וכו' משמע שהכחשת היסוד ולומר ההיפך דוקא הוא הכופר ולא מחוסר ידיעה.

והנה אם זו טעות בהבנה או בתרגום המילולי לא על הר"מ תלונתו אלא על מחבר הספר שכן סגנונו הטעהו או על "המתרגם" לא נכון.

ואכן שפירו צודק מאוד בהערה זו, אמנם יש מצוה וחיוב לידע ולהאמין אבל הכפירה היא **לא פסיבית** והעדר ידיעה אלא כלשון הר"מ בהל' תשובה (בספרנו עמ' פ"ח) מין נקרא **האומר** שאין לעולם מנהיג וכו'.

האומר שהוא בעל גוף ומגשם, וכ"כ במו"נ ח"א פל"ו (עמ' קכ"ז בספר) מאמיני הגשמות רק באופן שפשע ולא חקר ושאל לבעלי העיון האמיתיים.

ועיין לעיל לשונות הר"מ בהל' יסודי התורה ע"א ובספר המצוות שהחיוב לידע ולהאמין. והמעלה על דעתו אפשרות שאינה נכונה [באופן שמחליט כן] הוא הכופר.

אחר שטעות גדולה טעה בתרגומו עלינו לפרש הכוונה הפשוטה בדברינו. ומבוארים ז"ל עמ' כ"ג מדוע השמיט הר"מ את החובה להאמין... באופן חיובי- וסדרם באופן השלילה שהכופר בהם וכו'.

PRECONCEIVED CONCLUSIONS: A REJOINDER

והביאור: חיובי- שמקיים **המצוה** של האמונה **בידיעה ואמונה** שיש בורא למשל וכל הלכות יסודי התורה.

ושלילי- היינו שעובר על המצוה ומכחיש וכפי שהובא לעיל "האומר" שאין לעולם וכו'.

ולא עלה על הדעת כלל מצב אמצעי של "**לא יודע**" שבין האקטיבי המאמין ויודע- למכחיש בפועל **אקטיבי** לכיוון ההפוך.

א"כ **ג' מצבים: 1. המאמין ויודע האמת** בכל י"ג העיקרים שאף א' בעולם אינו חולק על שום פרט על הרמב"ם אך חלקו על מספר ואלו עיקרים.

2. המכחיש וטוען מחוסר ידע והבנה (ע' מו"נ הנ"ל) וכופר שהוא גוף וכדו' [יש בזה אנוס ופטור שלא ידע וכדו' ע' פרק י"ב בספר].

3. פסיבי באמת לא שמע ולא ידע למשל שה' לא גוף ואותו מצב הוא אנוס גמור והוא יהודי כשר ומצוה לאהוב אותו (אפי' הוא רשע בשאר עבירות וכו"ל מהל' רוצח).

כמדומה שאין צורך להאריך והדברים ברורים כשמש, ובאשר לטענה שיש עוד עיקרים.

אכן צודק מאוד שיש כאלו, למשל (1) יסוד הבחירה ביהדות בלעדיו אין שכר ועונש.

(2) הר"מ עצמו באגרת תימן כותב שירבעם יענש על עגלים וע"ז שעשה וגם על מצות סוכה וזה העיקר יסוד מיסודי התורה והדת שיענש על הקלות ג"כ.

(3) הכחשת המופת, היינו נסים שהם יציאה מדרך הטבע וזו כפירה בעיקר ויציאה מן הדת ולזה נחשוב תחה"מ מפינות התורה ומוסיף שם ומי שירצה ויבחר לדבר עלינו סרה ולייחס לנו דעת שלא נאמנה וכו' עד שיכריע אותנו לכך חובה הוא עתיד ליתן את הדין ולו משפט כל איש רשע החושד בכשרים ועיי"ש.

והוא יסוד האומר שהעולם כדמיון שענין זה כבר שפך בכתבי הרמב"ן בדרשתו "תורת ה' תמימה" בענין הנסים המורים על חידוש העולם ע"י הבורא ית"ש והוא יסוד התורה, וכל רצון הכופרים להפקר ושלא יגבילים המוסר והמצפון הטהור, לשונו של הרמב"ן, וממשיך בלשונו שם: "בלי אמונת התורה אין בין אדם לחמור שרוכב עליו [או המכונית או המטוס] כלום. אלו הסבורים שהעולם קדמון (ואין מנהיג ושכר ועונש) אין אצלם לא מצוה ולא עבירה. אין מעשה טוב רצוי יותר מאחר. והכל שוה אצלם כמו הבהמות וכוונת בריאתם בטלה עכ"ל. [הובא בספרנו "מאפילה לאור גדול" במהדורה אחרונה תשע"ז עמ' ס"ו].

לסיום יש לידע שהרמב"ם מעיד במאמר תחיית המתים (בחלקו השני) שכל חברונו הם קב ונקי, אין כוונתו להגדיל גוף הספרים וכו'.

ואין שום חולק על עיקר מיסודי הדת אלא שנחלקו על מספר העיקרים, ומהם העיקרים וכמו שהובא לעיל. ונתפרסמו בכלל ישראל. ובמו"נ חוזר הרבה על יסודות אלו גם לחנך הנערים להרחיק ההגשמה ושה' אחד ע"ש [מו"נ לח"א פל"ד (בספרנו עמ' ל"ב)].

חזו"א כותב רוב הרגלי לערוך את החיים בודאות גמורה של י"ג העיקרים הקנו לי אהבת תורה בלא מצרים [בספרנו עמ' כ"ט ובמבוא לספר].

Rabbi Herschel Grossman

וח"ח אומר לתלמידו המובהק ר' אלחנן ווסרמן זצ"ל לא די לקרוא ב' פעמים ביום את העיקרים (בסידור) והגר"א הובא לעיל בהל' צדקה הובא בס' אהבת חסד הנ"ל מעתיק מפיהמ"ש.

א"כ לא מובן כ"כ על מה כ"כ הדיון אם צדק הר"מ בעיקרים ובינתיים המון הקוראים סבורים שיש כאילו דיון בעיקרים ויש חשש גדול מאזהרת הר"מ הובא לעיל בהל' ע"ז "לא תתורו וכו'". אלא שיש לדון באופן שהתשובות ברורות כשמש אלא שעלינו לבררם.

שנה טובה וכו' ח טובה לשנה הבעל"ט.

APPENDIX B

Copy of a letter provided by the Fisher family in response to the claims of Dr. Marc Shapiro regarding Rav Shlomo Fisher's position on Maimonides' Principles.

כ"ד אלול תשע"ח

הנני בזה באזהרה חמורה לבל יהין שום אדם להדפיס ולפרסם בשמי עניני הגדה והשקפה אפילו דברים ששמעו ממני ואפילו דברים שיש הקלטה מהם. וכן מה שכתבתי לאנשים פרטיים.

הכלל, שלא יודפס על שמי רק מה שיסכימו בני.

שלמה פישר