

Shandong University: Center for Judaic & Inter-Religious Studies

1) Abraham as Founder of “Judaism”- Laws of Idolatry 1:3

כיון שנגמל איתן זה התחיל לשוטט בדעתו והוא קטן והתחיל לחשוב ביום ובלילה והיה תמיה היאך אפשר שיהיה הגלגל הזה נוהג תמיד ולא יהיה לו מנהיג ומי יסבב אותו, כי אי אפשר שיסבב את עצמו, ולא היה לו מלמד ולא מודיע דבר אלא מושקע באור כשדים בין עובדי כוכבים הטפשים ואביו ואמו וכל העם עובדי כוכבים והוא עובד עמהם ולבו משוטט ומבין עד שהשיג דרך האמת והבין קו הצדק מתבונתו הנכונה, וידע שיש שם אלוה אחד והוא מנהיג הגלגל והוא ברא הכל ואין בכל הנמצא אלוה חוץ ממנו, וידע שכל העולם טועים ודבר שגרם להם לטעות זה שעובדים את הכוכבים ואת הצורות עד שאבד האמת מדעתם, ובן ארבעים שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו, כיון שהכיר וידע התחיל להשיב תשובות על בני אור כשדים ולערוך דין עמהם ולומר שאין זו דרך האמת שאתם הולכים בה ושיבר הצלמים והתחיל להודיע לעם שאין ראוי לעבוד אלא לאלוה העולם ולו ראוי להשתחוות ולהקריב ולנסך כדי שיכירוהו כל הברואים הבאים, וראוי לאבד ולשבר כל הצורות כדי שלא יטעו בהן כל העם כמו אלו שהם מדמים שאין שם אלוה אלא אלו. כיון שגבר עליהם בראיותיו בקש המלך להורגו ונעשה לו נס ויצא לחרן, והתחיל לעמוד ולקרוא בקול גדול לכל העולם ולהודיעם שיש שם אלוה אחד לכל העולם ולו ראוי לעבוד, והיה מהלך וקורא ומקבץ העם מעיר לעיר ומממלכה לממלכה עד שהגיע לארץ כנען והוא קורא שנאמר ויקרא שם בשם ה' אל עולם, וכיון שהיו העם מתקבצין אליו ושואלין לו על דבריו היה מודיע לכל אחד ואחד כפי דעתו עד שיחזירוהו לדרך האמת עד שנתקבצו אליו אלפים ורבבות והם אנשי בית אברהם ושתל בלבם העיקר הגדול הזה וחבר בו ספרים והודיעו ליצחק בנו, וישב יצחק מלמד ומזהיר, ויצחק הודיע ליעקב ומינהו ללמד וישב מלמד ומחזיק כל הנלוים אליו, ויעקב אבינו למד בניו כולם והבדיל לוי ומינהו ראש והושיבו בישיבה ללמד דרך השם ולשמור מצות אברהם, וצוה את בניו שלא יפסיקו מבני לוי ממונה אחר ממונה כדי שלא תשכח הלמוד, והיה הדבר הולך ומתגבר, בבני יעקב ובנולדים עליהם ונעשית בעולם אומה שהיא יודעת את ה

After this mighty man was weaned, **he began to explore and think.** Though he was a child, he began **to think [incessantly] throughout the day and night**, wondering: How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve. **He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him.** Rather, he was mired in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idolaters. His father, mother, and all the people [around him] were idol worshipers, and he would worship with them. [However,] **his heart was exploring and [gaining] understanding.** **Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth** and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension. He realized that there was one God who controlled the sphere, that He created everything, and that there is no other God among all the other entities... **Abraham was forty years old** when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he **began to formulate replies** to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim and **debate** with them, telling them that they were not following a proper path. **He broke their idols and began to teach... When he overcame them through the strength of his arguments, the king desired to kill him.** He was [saved through] a miracle and left for Charan. [There,] **he began to call in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one God** in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him. He would go out and call to the people, **gathering them in city after city and country after country**, until he came to the land of Canaan - proclaiming [God's existence the entire time] - as [Genesis 21:33] states: "And He called there in the name of the Lord, the eternal God." When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he **would explain [them] to each one of them according to their understanding**, until they turned to the **path of truth... composed texts about it, and taught it to Isaac**, his son. This concept proceeded and gathered strength among the descendants of Jacob and those who collected around them, **until there became a nation within the world a nation that knows God.**

Vs.

2) Nahmanides:

Biblical History as Archetype “everything that happened to the fathers is an indication of what will happen to the children.” (Commentary on Torah, Gen. 12:6, 1:77)

“for when a circumstance of one of the patriarchs occurs one can better understand from it what is decreed to occur to his descendants.” (Commentary, Gen. 12:6, 1:77)

–“a book of the formation (*yetzirah*) regarding the creation (*hidush*) of the world and the formation of all that has been formed, and all the events of the fathers that are like a formation (*yetzirah*) for their descendants since all their occurrences are *figurae (tziyurei)* of things alluding to and informing about everything that will happen to them in the future.” (Commentary, 1:279).

3) Example

Genesis 14. That passage culminates with Abraham's defeat of one of them, rescuing his nephew Lot who had been taken captive, and retrieving all his possessions that had been seized. המעשה הזה אירע לאברהם להורות כי ארבע מלכיות תעמודנה למשול בעולם ובסוף יתגברו בניו עליהם ויפלו כלם בידם, וישיבו כל שבותם ורכושם. *Commentary*, Gen. 14:1, 1:83. For Nahmanides those seemingly inconsequential events are in fact of utmost consequence in not only presaging the ultimate political redemption of the Jews but guaranteeing it. The four kings portend the four political empires within whose oppressive orbit Israel will be caught, climaxing in the final overthrow of Edom, the medieval sobriquet for Rome or Christianity, whose repressive hand is the lived experience of Jews contemporaneous with Nahmanides' own time.

VS Maimonides

its relevance is in its portrayal of Abraham as a political and moral archetype for human values in general. His actions are a testament to the power of ideas and common beliefs as a socially cohesive force since it "gives us knowledge of his defense of his relative because of the latter's sharing his belief." (GP, III:50, p.614) In addition, Abraham's refusal of any material gain offered him as tribute for his victory is emblematic "of a striving for moral nobility." (Ibid) of an ethical constitution which is easily contented, eschews material gain,.

"It follows that he alone is a descendant of Abraham (*zera avraham*) who maintains his religion (*dat* or law) and his straight way," (MT, Kings 10:7) the implication being that Jewish heredity is a function of ethics. Consequently ancestral claims are forged not in genetics, but in conduct that manifests notions of morality and theology "fathered" by Abraham. Thus, while for Nahmanides Jewish history inheres in Abraham's biography physically and metaphysically, to be played out by his biological descendants, for Maimonides Abraham's life provides a manual on how to qualify as his ideological offspring.

4) Letter (Responsum) to Ovadiah the Convert

Ever since then whoever adopts Judaism and confesses the unity of the Divine Name, as it is prescribed in the Torah, is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father, peace be with him. These men are Abraham's household, and he it is who converted them to righteousness.

In the same way as he converted his contemporaries through his words and teaching, he converts future generations through the testament he left to his children and household after him. Thus Abraham our Father, peace be with him, is the father of his pious posterity who keep his ways, and the father of his disciples and of all proselytes who adopt Judaism. Therefore you shall pray, "Our God" and "God of our fathers," because **Abraham, peace be with him, is your father.**

5) Meaning of "Son"

a) Guide of Perplexed I:7- "": "whoever instructs an individual in some matter and teaches him an opinion, has, as far as his being provided with this opinion is concerned, as it were engendered that individual."

b) Laws of Talmud Torah 1:2- מצוה על כל חכם וחכם מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל לִלְמֹד אֶת כָּל הַתְּלִמִּידִים אֲף עַל פִּי שְׂאִינָן בְּנֵי, שְׁנֹאמֵר וּשְׁנֹנְתָם לְבָנִיךָ מִפִּי הַשְׁמוּעָה לְמַדּוּ בְּנִיךָ אֵלּוּ תִּלְמִידֶיךָ שֶׁהַתְּלִמִּידִים קְרוּיִין בָּנִים שְׁנֹאמֵר וַיֵּצְאוּ בְנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים

it is a mitzvah for each and every wise man to teach all students, even though they are not his children, as [Deuteronomy 6:7] states: "And you shall teach them to your sons..." The oral tradition explains: "Your sons," these are your students, **for students are also called sons**, as [II Kings 2:3] states: "And the sons of the prophets went forth."

6) Parallels to Ruth as Paradigmatic Convert

a) "I received the question of the master Obadiah, the wise and learned proselyte, may a perfect recompense be bestowed upon him by the Lord of Israel, **under whose wings he has sought cover.**"

ישלם יקנוק פִּעְלֶךָ וַתְּהִי מִשְׁכַּרְתְּךָ שְׁלֵמָה מֵעַם יְקֹנֵק אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־בָּאת לְחַסּוֹת תַּחַת־כַּנְּפָיו- Ruth 2:12

Boaz says to Ruth- "may a perfect recompense be bestowed upon you by the Lord of Israel, under whose wings you have sought cover."

b) **Ruth 1: 22**- וַתָּבֹאוּ בֵּית לְחֶם בְּתַחֲלַת קַצִּיר שְׁעָרֵים- and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Chag HaBikkurim

Mishneh Torah- Laws of Bikkurim 4:3

הגר מביא וקורא שנאמר לאברהם אב המון גוים נתתיך הרי הוא אב כל העולם כולו שנכנסין תחת כנפי שכינה, ולאברהם היתה השבועה תחלה שיירשו בניו את הארץ

A convert, by contrast, may bring the first fruits and make the declaration, for [Genesis 17:5] states with regard to Abraham: "I have made you a father to a multitude of nations." Implied is that he is the father of all those who enter under the shelter of the Divine presence.

7) What Maimonides Thinks of “Yichus” (Pedigree)

a) Letter to Ovadiah:

Do not consider your origin as inferior. While we are the descendants of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, you derive from Him through whose word the world was created. As is said by Isaiah: “One shall say, I am the Lord’s, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob” (Is. 44:5). The convert declares “I am the Lord’s” and the Israelite “calls himself by the name of Jacob”

Vs. מסכתות קטנות מסכת אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א פרק לו ד"ה קטנים בני

זה יאמר לה' אני אלו צדיקים גמורים. וזה יקרא בשם יעקב אלו קטנים בני רשעה. וזה יכתוב ידו לה' אלו רשעים שפירשו מדרכיהם וחזרו בהם ועשו תשובה. ובשם ישראל יכנה אלו גרי אמת

b) Elijah’s Messianic Role

Mishnah-Eduyot

The sages say he doesn’t come to distinguish pedigree but rather to make universal peace

Maimonides:-

והחכמים אומרים אין עוול ביוחסין כל הנקרא בשמי וכו', הכל מתיחסין אל האמת, והתורה היא אב לכל, אבל העוול הוא השנאה שיש בין בני אדם, לפי שהיא שנאת חנם והוא עושה לו עוול בשנאתו אותו, והוא אמרם לעשות שלום בעולם

“Yichus” is to the truth and the Torah is the father to all.

8) Laws of Prohibited Sexual Relations 14:1- (Conversion)

ומודיעין אותו עיקרי הדת שהוא ייחוד השם ואיסור עכו"ם, ומאריכין בדבר הזה ומודיעין אותו מקצת מצוות קלות ומקצת מצוות חמורות ואין מאריכין בדבר זה

We inform him of the **fundamentals of the faith**, i.e., the unity of God and the prohibition against the worship of false deities. We elaborate on this matter. We inform him about some of the easy mitzvot and some of the more severe ones. We do not elaborate on this matter

9) Circumcision

Maimonides (Guide III:49)

According to me circumcision has another very important meaning, namely, that all people professing this opinion—that is, those who believe in the *unity of God*—should have a bodily sign uniting them so that one who does not belong to them should not be able to claim that he was one of them, while being a stranger. For he would do this in order to profit by them or to deceive the people who profess this religion. Now a man does not perform this act upon himself or upon a son of his unless it be in consequence of a genuine belief. For it is not like an incision in the leg or a burn in the arm, but is a very, very hard thing.

It is also well known what degree of mutual love and mutual help exists between people who all bear the same sign, which forms for them a sort of covenant and alliance. *Circumcision* is a covenant made by *Abraham our Father* with a view to the belief in the *unity of God*. Thus everyone who is circumcised joins *Abraham's covenant*. This covenant imposes the obligation to believe in the unity of God: *To be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee*. This also is a strong reason, as strong as the first, which may be adduced to account for *circumcision*; perhaps it is even stronger than the first.

Vs.

Nahmanides

Nahmanides reads Gen. 17:4, *Behold my covenant is with you and you shall be a father to all the nations*

=“it is only after the covenant that you become a father to all the nations.”

Praises God for his calculated timing of the circumcision command which “preceded Sarah's conception *in order that his seed be holy.*”[emphasis mine] ברוך השם אשר לו לבדו נתכננו עלילות שהקדים וצוה את אברהם לבא בבריתו להמול קודם שתהר שרה, להיות

•זרעו קדוש