GUIDE 1:50
TRUE FAITH?

OVERVIEW

Suppose I ask what you believe about God. Perhaps you will reply *Ani Maamin*: "I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is One." Very well, I reply, but what do you believe about this One God? In other words, what is the specific content of your belief? You might say that God is wise, for He created this wonderful world and its perfect Torah; that He is powerful, since He created this world from nothing; that He exists, since only a living being could have done these things. I ask, the things that you tell me about, that He has wisdom, power, and existence, did God just acquire them or did He always have them? Surely, you reply, He always had them. I ask, the things you tell me He always had, are these things just words, or, are these things real? You retort that they must be real.

Obviously, it is easy to succumb to a belief in real eternal divine attributes. Maimonides diagnoses the germ of this disease in our loose talk of belief and knowledge, including the opposition we make between them. He explains that if belief does not correspond to reality it is empty. It is empty because it violates the Law of Contradiction: just as *A* cannot equal not-*A*, so God cannot be One and have many real eternal attributes.

For the past forty-nine chapters Maimonides patiently excluded the belief that any of the forty-nine levels of corporeality touch God. This chapter shows the way to true convictions about God, and reveals the meaning of such convictions. It is, therefore, an apt introduction to his textbook on attributes, Guide 1:51-60.

(The *Ani Maamin* is a daily recital of anonymous authorship based on Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith found at the end of *Helek*, from Commentary on the Mishnah).

INTRODUCTION TO ATTRIBUTES

Chapter 1:50 of the Guide unveils a dense interplay of epistemological and metaphysical issues. At the outset, Maimonides defines an untranslatable term, the Arabic *i'tiqad*. The translators and commentators struggle to grasp its meaning. Even in Arabic we learn that Averroes, discussing the same issues, uses a different term, *tatzdiq*, and that the Arabic *iman* could also be appropriate. The Hebrew and English translators split over *emunah*/faith and *dea*/knowledge as proper translations for *i'tiqad*. Kafih's footnote 1 is a strong argument for *dea*/knowledge, while Schwarz' note 15 to page 10 advances the case for *emunah*/faith. In the historical collision between faith and reason, Maimonides sculpted a principled position that is neither mere faith nor pure reason. He needed to do this because true belief in God, *i'tiqad*, requires negation of divine attributes.

I'TIQAD: FAITH OR KNOWLEDGE?

The problem is not translation. Rather, Maimonides is packing the term *i'tiqad* with an epistemological and theological tradition going back to Aristotle. For this essay, I use the actual term *i'tiqad*, since it carries no English baggage whatsoever. I hazard a definition: *i'tiqad* is the judgment the mind makes on information obtained from good sources. Essentially, it is properly justified assent. My definition leaves several matters open and uses none of the foregoing terminological candidates. Note that the definition is primarily applicable to the things of religion. The key is that Maimonides wants to release "belief" from the grip of the imagination. (I am indebted to Harry Austryn Wolfson's "The Double Faith Theory of Saadia, Averroes and St. Thomas" in Vol. 1, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, Harvard, 1973.)

SAADIA'S *I'TIQAD*

Saadia Gaon (882-942 CE) is the first to address the problem of *i'tiqad* among the Arabic Jewish commentators. The title of his book *Emunot v'Deot* (*Amânât wal-'I'tiqâdât)*, *Faith and Knowledge*, includes both ideas of *i'tiqad*. Saadia's *i'tiqad* is the assent the mind makes on knowledge derived from *immediate* or *deductive* sources.

He carries forward the Aristotelian tradition with this definition. *Immediate* knowledge includes 1) sense data and 2) knowledge of "primary premises." *Deductive* knowledge comes from *syllogisms* whose first premise is one of the two "immediate" sources of knowledge, that is, sense data and "primary premises."

In the case of *sense data*, Saadia, like Aristotle, privileges sight as a most reliable source of knowledge. If vision is unobstructed and healthy, it gets true knowledge of the perceived object. This is because the elemental composition of the object, i.e., its formula of water, air, earth and fire, is impressed upon the eye by means of the *spiritus visus* (or what Galen called *pneuma*). This somehow modifies the eye by same ratio of elements comprising the object of vision (Wolfson, p. 589; Aristotle, *De Anima 3:2*). Either because of this modification of the elemental ratio of the eye, or by the actual impress of the object's visual image through the intervening medium, the eye *becomes* like the perceived object.

This is hard to take scientifically, but it was basic to the outlook of the period. There is some general physical correspondence between sense data and its object. Such thinkers acknowledge the existence of sense data skepticism, but reject it. Saadia and Maimonides know about mirages and how straight sticks appear bent in water, but they do not let these optical anomalies disturb their high view of sense data.

The "*primary premises*" include such apriorisms as "truth is good and falsehood horrid." If our mind is unobstructed and healthy, these concepts naturally arise. Saadia's "primary premises" also include the results of properly derived syllogisms that start from other previously derived or aprioristically known premises. An example is "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." While not known *a priori* or from sense data, it is so axiomatic and so strongly derived from other primary premises that it is judged to be a primary premise itself.

Thus, we can derive *deductive* knowledge syllogistically from: A) sense data, B) *a priori* natural and moral "primary premises," and C) syllogistically derived "primary premises." Again, given that the organs employed are healthy and unobstructed, and that we properly deploy logic, the mind should assent to the information obtained. This assent is Saadia's *i'tiqad*.

MAIMONIDES' *I'TIQAD*

Maimonides, in our chapter, says that *i'tiqad* is the correspondence of a representation in the mind to its object in the world:

> "For belief (*i'tiqad*) is only possible after the apprehension of a thing; it consists in the conviction that the thing apprehended has its existence beyond the mind [in reality] exactly as it is conceived in the mind."

With this statement, Maimonides adopts the correspondence or realist sense-data theory of Aristotle, and like him means to extend it to other items of immediate and deductive knowledge. He primarily wants us to confer *i'tiqad* on the concepts of Divine singularity, unity, and freedom from attributes. Like Aristotle, he clearly views knowledge under the paradigm of sight: Just as the eye produces reliable sense data when sound and unobstructed, so, when the primary premises, *a priori* premises, or deductive premises are sound, the knowledge derived is worthy of *i'tiqad*.

In the next chapter, 1:51, he returns to *i'tiqad* by adopting Saadia's definition without explaining it in detail:

> "There exist several simply clear things, which are primary principles, sense data, and things that are close to them." (*yesh b'mziot devarim rabim berurim u'pashutim, mehem muskalim rishonim, u'mukhashim, u'mehem shehem karovim le-elu.*)

In this formulation appear Saadia's primary premises ("primary principles"), and sense data. The "things that are close to them" are syllogistically derived axioms like "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" where the derivation is from an original primary premise or a chain of them.

We first meet with *i'tiqad* at the beginning of Maimonides' Introduction to the Guide. Writing about difficult passages in the prophetic books, he states:

> "It is not here intended to explain all these expressions to the unlettered or to mere tyros, a previous knowledge of Logic and Natural Philosophy being indispensable, or to those who confine their attention to the study of our holy Law, I mean the study of the canonical law alone; for the true [inner] knowledge of the Torah is the special aim of this and similar works. The object of this treatise is to enlighten a religious man who has been trained to *believe* (*i'tiqad*) in the truth of our holy Law, who conscientiously fulfils his moral and religious duties, and at the same time has been successful in his philosophical studies. Human reason has attracted him to abide within its sphere; and he finds it difficult to accept as correct the teaching based on the literal interpretation of the Law, and especially that which he himself or others derived from those homonymous, metaphorical, or hybrid expressions. Hence, he is lost in perplexity and anxiety."

Friedlander, above, translates *i'tiqad* as belief, as does Schwartz (*b'emunato*), while Kafih translates it as knowledge (*b'daato*). Pines has "…a religious man for whom the validity of our Law *has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief*" which, though verbose, gives the essential idea of *i'tiqad* as a term for well-founded religious conviction. We should not miss the significance of the use here, since in this crucial paragraph *i'tiqad* links to *perplexity*. This religious man is perplexed despite his *i'tiqad*, because we have not yet persuaded him that the Bible uses expressions that he must interpret. Our chapter, by contrast, addresses one of his primary perplexities, the need to achieve *i'tiqad* on the central dogma of divine unity

I'tiqad is not opinion. The fools (*ha-petaiim*), accept mere opinion without introspection. Their belief is not *i'tiqad*. Out of sheer laziness, the fool prizes his belief in his opinions over what he can see or work out for himself. Maimonides says to him, "You have a very easy task as…many ignorant people profess… articles of faith without connecting any idea with them..." These fools include the great mass of the public. However, as we will see, they also include most intellectuals. (See grandson 'Obadyāh Maimonides' disdain for "him who passively accepteth belief," employing the Mutazilite epithet *taqlīd*, meaning unconsidered traditions. *Treatise of the Pool*, Paul Fenton, trans. and notes, p. 78, and note 21. This could also be a critique, not just of *taqlīd*, but of the verbal piety elevated to a principle by the Muslim *Karramiyya*, and even in the profession of the *Shahada*.)

The wise person is the one who strives reasonably to eliminate reasonable objections to his conclusions, and therefore has the right to have *i'tiqad* in them. Those who do not achieve *i'tiqad* do not have anything corresponding to their opinions in the real world. Worse, their opinions of the divine reality are *empty* since they correspond to nothing. If their opinion of God is merely derived and does not correspond to anything, they are unwitting atheists despite their verbal piety.

Abarbanel asks whether this definition of "belief" is tautologous (neither he nor the other ancient commentators knew that Ibn Tibbon's *emuna*/faith/belief masked the original's *i'tiqad*). His question is whether our belief is merely in what we *believe* are good sources of information. He answers, "This faith is a strong representation in the [subject's] mind which appears to reflect reality and be beyond contradiction. Accordingly, this representation is not merely believed in, but is the essence of true belief, a strong representation and belief in the

mind" (*ad loc.*, my translation). False *i'tiqad* is also possible, since in the area of divine science we cannot derive demonstrable proofs.

CAN THERE BE *I'TIQAD* OF PROPHECY?

There is one type of knowledge not included in this list, or anywhere in chapter 1:50, the knowledge derived from prophecy. Can we confer *i'tiqad* on knowledge derived from prophecy or revelation? We know from later chapters, as well as from an explicit statement at the beginning of Maimonides' *Letter on Astrology*, that while sight is on Maimonides' list of reliable sources of information, prophecy/revelation is also on the list. He writes there (the original is in Hebrew, using *emunah*/faith-belief, where in Arabic he probably would have used *i'tiqad*):

> "Know my masters that no man should believe (*l'ha-amin*) anything unless attested by one of three principles. *First*, rational proof as in mathematical sciences; *secondly*, the perception by one of the five senses; for instance, the detection of color by one's eyes, taste by the tongue, touch to distinguish between hot and cold, hearing between clear and confused sounds and smell between that which is distasteful or pleasant; and *thirdly*, tradition derived from the prophets and the righteous. It is accordingly incumbent upon every wise person to investigate his doctrinal beliefs (*emunat*) and classify them according to one of the three basic sources from which they are drawn, namely, tradition (from the prophets), sensation or rational insights. One, however, who grounds his belief in any other but one of those guiding principles, Scripture refers to him as 'the simple believeth every word.'" (Proverbs 14:15. Translation: Leon Stitskin, *Letters of Maimonides*, 119).

Being third on the list, we assume he means that prophecy is not our prime source of knowledge. Still, it is crucial that prophecy made the list at all.

The basic prerequisite of prophecy is that we must *validate* the prophet. We validate prophets according to rules in Mishneh Torah, *Laws of Prophecy* (e.g., his prophecies come true; he must not permanently abrogate Torah laws). We must follow the commands of the validated prophet even if beyond the ambit of the Torah (but never against the Torah). The unvalidated prophet risks committing a capital offense if he prophesizes at all and particularly if he prophesizes against the Torah. Thus, once the prophet has submitted to the prophetic validation process of the Mishneh Torah, his information is also worthy of *i'tiqad*. So, when Moses, greatest of prophets, tells me to take that first muddy step into the Red Sea I would be entitled to have *i'tiqad* over his command. I also conclude that if Aristotle really does *not* have a proof for the eternity of the universe, then I could have *i'tiqad* on the prophetic announcement that creation is *ex nihilo*.

DOES GOD HAVE PARTS?

The big problem for both fools and non-fools is the problem of divine attribution. The reason the intellectuals are fools, as we will see, is that by their belief in divine attributes they *ipso facto* reject divine unity.

Our chapter is the introduction to the section on the divine attributes. Friedlander's note 1 sets forth the program of the next ten chapters:

> "Before commencing his interpretation of the attributes of God (ch. 51 to 60), he discusses what faith is, and states that he who declares God to be one, and at the same time believes Him to be *baal taarim*, to possess attributes, believes in the unity of God only in words, but not in reality. In ch. 51, the reason is given why the rejection of the attributes of God is proved here (in the Guide). The author then proceeds to show the nature of attributes (1:52); and that the so-called attributes of God are qualifications of the *actions* of God (1:53-54); comparison between God and His creatures is impossible (1:55); attributes imply a comparison between all individual beings possessing the same attribute (1:56); even such [essential] attributes as *khai*—'living,' *yakhol*—'mighty,' *rotze*—'willing,' *khakham*—'wise,' *ekhad*—

> 'one,' are, as attributes, inadmissible (1:57); only negative attributes are admissible (1:58); and the more negative attributes man applies correctly to God, the nearer he comes to truth (1:59 and 60)."

Schwarz, note 7, p. 113, explains why we call this group of divine predications "essential" attributes. He says that the term emerges from the history of Muslim philosophy. The early Mutazilite theologians, who took a more "rationalist" view of theology, argued that logic teaches that the world must have a creator, and that no creator exists that does not have *power* to make things. Since the world features many perfect things, that creator also devoted *wisdom* to his work. Therefore, the creator has the attributes of power, and wisdom. If so, he must *live.* Furthermore, the *Q'uran* teaches that Creator *hears* and *sees*. Thus, we have the attributes of power, wisdom, life, sight and hearing. If the creator were a *man*, we would say that he is powerful through ("in virtue of") his attribute of power, knowing through his attribute of knowledge, etc. But since the Creator is *God*, they were only willing to admit that He is powerful in virtue of His *essence*, wise in virtue of his *essence*, etc. Thus, these five to seven attributes came to be called "essential." The opponents of the Mutazilites, the Asharites (who won the battle), had no problem with multiple divine attributes, especially since they facilitate the existence of a divine attribute of knowledge (*logos*) *eternally inlibrated* in the *Q'uran.* The Asharites were perfectly happy to say that God knows in virtue of his attribute of knowledge, which is a real eternal attribute *with* Him, not "essential" *in* Him. ("Inlibration" is H. A. Wolfson's coinage, as the Islamic contrast to Christian "incarnation").

The Mutazilites knew that the existence of divine attributes threatened divine unity, to which they were committed. But by holding to the real existence of essential attributes, even if they exist only in virtue of God's *essence*, they effectively denied unity. Maimonides writes, in our chapter: "Those who believe that God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume plurality in their thoughts," comparing them invidiously to the Christian trinitarians who maintain that three are one.

Logic, for Maimonides, compels the conclusion that God is a non-numerical unity, without corporeality and without composition. Thus, God does not even possess the "essential attributes" of life, knowledge, and power. Maimonides goes so far as to advocate the formula "God knows, but *not* in virtue of knowledge" to stress that "knowledge" is merely a word we use to describe an undifferentiated aspect of that non-numerical unity. Indeed, to say God is wise is merely to say that God is God.

The reason that the essentialists fail to have *i'tiqad* in God is that they violate the law of the *excluded middle*. They argue that God has many attributes, but that these many *real* attributes unite in the divine essence. But God either has attributes, as the Asharites said, or He does not, and the law of the excluded middle makes the formulation "God knows in virtue of His essence" *meaningless*. It is a pious verbal accommodation of two exclusive opposites. It is only be something that is *said*, since intellect could not assent to such a contradiction.

The response to this argument was the theory of modes, mentioned by Maimonides in our chapter. He writes: "God has no essential attribute in any form (Arabic: *wajh*) or in any sense (Arabic: *ḥal*) whatever." Wolfson explains that *wajh* and *ḥal* are technical terms for *modes* (Pines translates *ḥal* as "mode"). That is, attributes could perhaps be *conceptual* modes, not real existences or merely nominal ones. Instead of saying that they were meaningless names, on the one hand, or, as the Asharites held, real eternal entities, we could say that they were ideas (modes) in the mind of God. (*Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy,* Harvard, 1979, p. 31. See our essay on modalism, next chapter). There are three groups of attributists: 1) those for whom attributes are "essential" (Mutazilites), 2) those for whom they are real independent hypostases (Asharites), and 3) those Modalists for whom they were neither essential nor non-essential (Shem Tov, *ad loc*, p. 69).

Although Maimonides accepts the modal existence of universals (i.e., the "cupness" that instantiates all real cups), he does not accept the modal existence of attributes. This is because anything relating to God is real and *active*. The ideas of God, if they have any identifiable existence at all, must be real and active. Therefore, modes turn out to be mere verbal camouflage for the real attributes of the Asharites. This is precisely Maimonides' complaint: "Those who believe that God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume

plurality in their thoughts… *as if our object were to seek forms of expression, not subjects of belief.*" They violate the law of the excluded middle, but conceal the violation in casuistic expressions. They have no *i'tiqad* in God because their thoughts fail to *correspond* to anything.

As a result, it looks like we can say nothing about God. Were this all that Maimonides says on the subject, we might conclude that God had no content at all, and was an *Ayn Sof*, or like the negativity at the core of some Buddhist visions.

Fortunately, Maimonides clarifies what he means with an example of bad attribution. God is the knower, the knowledge and the known, in an undifferentiated unity (Guide 1:68). However, in the Christian Trinity, these three real attributes are at once separate and unified, three in one, and capable of personification, even incarnation. In opposing this concept, Maimonides aligns himself with the Muslims who regard Christians as polytheists. Thus, at the beginning of his *Letter on Resurrection* he ridicules a Christian reading of the three divine names in the *Sh'ma*: "Hear O Israel, the *Lord* is our *God*, the *Lord* is *one*," where they take it as a proof-text for the trinitarianism. However, Maimonides also deplores those Muslims who make the uncreated *Quran* eternal with God.

The Jews, too, are not immune to the attributive temptation, just as they were not immune to anthropomorphism. (The Muslims, curiously, despite anthropomorphisms in the *Q'uran*, used to charge the Jews with anthropomorphism. See Wolfson, *ibid*, 41-46).

Anthropomorphism is the application of human-like *corporeal* attributes to God. Abarbanel, *ad loc.*, explains that the denial of corporeality in God implies the denial of multiple attributes, since multiplicity is itself characteristic of corporeality.

Maimonides now says that just as we must deny all corporeal attributes, so we must deny the noncorporeal essential attributes, like life, intelligence, and power. What he means is that we *interpret* these terms homonymously, so that while applicable to both God and man, they have different meanings in each case. Those meanings are not contradictory, only contrary, so that God always has these characteristics in an absolute, undifferentiated manner, while man only sometimes possesses them as accidents. Thus, God is indeed the knower, the knowledge and the known, but without capital letters, as these are not hypostases in Him. The terms are only our meager attempt to understand God. *Sometimes* we think we know things. God, by contrast, *always* knows all, by knowing Himself.

This concept of God is precisely the knowledge of which we must have *i'tiqad*. *I'tiqad*, but not proof; for we cannot prove anything beyond the lunar sphere. One cannot achieve such *i'tiqad* in divine unity without serious training. One must learn how to deny the real existence of divine attributes, by disposing of doubts and counter-arguments. *I'tiqad* is the judgment of assent to divine unity rendered on knowledge acquired from good sources, either those immediate to us or those resulting from deductive confirmation. Prophecy is a source of that knowledge.

RELIGION'S NEED FOR PHILOSOPHY

What emerges from these considerations is that before we address the question of whether God exists, we must clarify what we mean by God. This clarification entails questions about His definability, His attributes and the meaning of divine unity. Since haphazard conceptualization of divine identity results in an empty, non-correspondent, conception of God; and since *i'tiqad* in divine unity is a religious requirement, it follows that the student must be prepared to refute all possible misconceptions of that unity. But this requires a process which, at the very least, entails working through something like the Guide's next nine chapters negating attributes. If that is the case, and since these chapters require a thorough grounding in logic, as well as such Aristotelian subjects as *categories*, not to mention later developments like *modes*, it follows that philosophy is required by religion. If

that is so, we must make some accommodation between religion's laws, which are for everyone, and philosophy's demand for the individual's pursuit of truth.

Maimonides addresses this collision, which is really the ancient collision of reason and revelation, by his definition of *i'tiqad*. Where the former demands knowledge and the latter demands faith, he takes a principled position that is neither one nor the other. *I'tiqad* is the mind's reasonable conviction on a matter of faith. The sources of that conviction include sense data, apriorisms, deductions and prophecy, although he studiously avoids mention of prophecy here. He avoids it because in this instance he wants to come down harder on the individual quest for truth even to the exclusion of traditional knowledge, when that lore has not been subjected to analysis.

Because this demand is so difficult of achievement, and because each individual's achievement is uniquely his, the demand for *i'tiqad* cannot rise to the level of halakhic law, despite the importance of reaching conviction on the meaning of divine unity. Looking closely at his actual words here and in other chapters, as Wolfson first pointed out, Maimonides comes as close as he possibly can to calling lack of such clear conviction idolatry or atheism without quite saying so. He says such people are fools and ignoramuses who substitute words for belief. He says their ideas are empty. But he pointedly never makes them guilty of a transgression, except against their own souls.

BE STILL!

In concluding the chapter, Maimonides writes:

> "Renounce desires and habits, follow your reason, and study what I am going to say in the chapters which follow on the rejection of the attributes; you will then be fully convinced of what we have said: you will be of those who truly conceive the Unity of God, not of those who utter it with their lips without thought, like men of whom it has been said, 'Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins' (Jeremiah 12:2). It is right that a man should belong to that class of men who have a conception of truth and understand it, though they do not speak of it. Thus, *the pious are advised* (*sh'ntztavoo ha-khasidim*) and addressed, 'Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still. *Selah*.'" (Psalms 4:5)

Pines translates the last line better than does Friedlander, that the pious are "commanded" rather than "advised" (Schwarz and Kafih agree). The pious do not attempt to articulate the inarticulable. This does not mean that just because you may say nothing, you know nothing. Quite the contrary. The pious have *i'tiqad.* They *know* that God is one. Their achievement is that they overcame their perplexity at being unable to *articulate* His oneness. They realized that their own corporeal nature, and the corporeal nature of all utterance, limits their expression of the truth. Still, the knowledge that they possess is "close to their reins" even though they cannot utter it. They must enter the divine palace (Guide 3:51) through their post-intellectual meditations (the formulation is David Blumenthal's). They should not be like those "outside the palace":

> "Those, however, who think of God, and frequently mention His name, without any correct notion of Him, but merely following some imagination, or some theory received from another person, are, in my opinion, like those who remain outside the palace and distant from it. They do not mention the name of God in truth, nor do they reflect on it. That which they imagine and mention does not correspond to any being in existence: it is a thing invented by their imagination." (Guide 3:51)

Since speech cannot adequately represent the mind's conviction of divine unity, we must be prepared to systematically negate all such speech. Better to say nothing, because that is all you can say.

As Joseph Dan said (see 1:47-48, above) "Mysticism is that which cannot be expressed in words, period," and "*the mystics and the religious are two kinds of believers who are separated by a common language*." Even-Shmuel, similarly, wrote, "Words act as a barrier (*mekhitza*) between man and his thought" (*ad loc.*, my trans., p. 225).

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