

The Rambam's Thirteen Principles, Introduction

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Toward the end of his Introduction to *Perek Cheilek*, after the Rambam has listed his Thirteen Principles of proper *Hashkafos* regarding HaShem and His Torah, the Rambam writes:

“...When... a person will dispute one of these fundamental principles, he steps beyond the circle [of our people], and denies the essence [of Torah]. He is called a heretic, an apostate and one who uproots the saplings[of Judaism]. We are obligated to hate such a person, to destroy him; concerning him is applied the verse: (Tehillim 139:21) \’Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate You? And do not I strive with those that rise up against You?’”

This author believes that it is important to note three things about the above statement of the Rambam:

1) The Rambam does not use the word “*deny*,” but rather the word “*dispute*” when describing the person he later labels a heretic. This is significant because the Rambam is not using verbiage to suggest either acceptance or denial of each “Principle,” but rather is teaching us that one who redefines one of his “Principles” is placing himself in the category of being a heretic.

2) Next, the Rambam teaches us that one who disputes/redefines one of the “Principles,” is guilty of “*denying*” the essence of Torah.

3) Then, the Rambam uses the phrase, “*...one who uproots the saplings.*” We would like to suggest that “saplings” is a reference to those whom the heretic comes into contact with – those whom he teaches his heretical view(s). This individual, we believe, is guilty of placing a stumbling-block before a blind person (*Vayikra 19:14 Thou shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but thou shall fear thy God: I am the LORD.*) as someone – whether his child or his student – who is dependent upon him for the Truth of Torah will have his mind filled with untruths, and will have a faulty foundation upon which to build additional learning.

The remainder of the paragraph speaks for itself: we are **not** to love this Jew; we are **not** to “give him the benefit of the doubt;” rather, we are taught by the Rambam that this Jew should be “*destroyed*” lest he have his heretical views perpetuated. [*This author does NOT advocate going around killing his fellow Jews who have mistaken hashkafos that contradict the Rambam's Principles, but he DOES want to point out how strongly the Rambam felt about such individuals.*]

The Rambam finishes his “*Introduction to Cheilek*” with the following the following two paragraphs, emphasizing the importance of “contemplating” and “understanding” the “Thirteen Principles,” as well as letting the student of Torah know how diligently he labored to produce his list:

“I have elaborated extensively, going beyond the scope of this text [that being only the subject of Olam Haba]. I did this because I saw that this would bring great benefit, [and strengthen many people's] emunah. For I have collected many beneficial concepts that were scattered throughout many great works. Take pleasure in [my words]. Contemplate them thoroughly. If your mind tries to deceive you by telling you that you have understood the matter after a single reading – or even after ten readings – G-d knows that you have been deceived.

“Do not read this text hurriedly. I did not write it casually, but instead did so after much contemplation and reserved thought, concentrating on [differentiating between] correct principles and incorrect ones, with the intent of reaching a conclusion concerning what our beliefs are, and clarifying the supports for each particular matter. I have asked G-d to guide me in the path of truth.”

The Rambam teaches us, in these two paragraphs, the importance of a deep understanding of these Thirteen Principles; the importance of reviewing them over and over again; the fact that he put much thought and effort into their codification. But, most importantly, the Rambam teaches us that it is possible, even likely, that one will glance hurriedly at these Principles, believe that he has them incorporated into his being, and move on with his learning – when in reality he is fooling himself about his “understanding,” and he about to build his Torah Knowledge on a foundation unworthy of supporting a single feather.

We will list the Rambam’s Thirteen Principles, his Thirteen Foundations upon which all of the remainder of HaShem’s Torah must rest in order to come to a correct understanding of that Torah. The translation we are utilizing here is that of Rav Zechariah Fendel, *zt”l*, found in his *sefer*, “**Torah Faith: The Thirteen Principles.**” We are doing this in order to dissect each Principle, to see whether more than one lesson can be derived from those Principles, and to set the foundations for this web-site. This author hopes that the reader will follow the advice of the Rambam, and learn the Rambam’s Principles over and over again in order to imbue his mind and inculcate his Torah thoughts with them.

The First Principle – Belief in the existence of the Creator, be He blessed ... This means [that it is incumbent upon us to believe] that there is a “Being” Who is perfect in every manner of existence. He is the Primary cause of existence of all that exists. Upon Him is the perpetuation of their existence contingent, and through Him they are sustained.

Nor shall one entertain the thought of the absence of His existence, for in that event, all existence would be nullified, and could not possibly exist, nor would it be possible for any being to have any semblance of existence.

And though we should entertain the thought of all existence, other than His own, being null and void, the existence of the Creator, be He blessed, would not be nullified, nor would it be diminished. Unity and Mastery are His alone, blessed be His Name. For He is self-sufficient in His existence, and He suffices unto Himself. Nor is His existence contingent in any way upon any other being. And all that exists, such as purely intellectual beings – that is, the Angels – and the heavenly constellations and all that they contain, as well as all that exists below them, are all dependent for their existence upon Him.

This is the First Principle, which is expressed in the commandment (*Shemos* 20:2) “***I am the Lord, thy G-d.***”

The Second Principle – G-d’s Unity, be He blessed ... We shall believe that he Who is the Primary Cause of everything, is One. Nor is He like on ‘pair,’ nor like one ‘species,’ nor like one individual, who is divided into many parts; nor even like one simple unit of matter, which is one in number, but which can nevertheless be divided and subdivided into an endless array of smaller units. But He, be He exalted¹, is One with a unity which is unparalleled elsewhere under any circumstances. This is the Second Principle, which is expressed in the verse (*Devarim* 6:4) “***Hear, O Israel, the lord, our G-d, the Lord is One.***”

The Third Principle –His Non-Corporeality ... We shall believe that this One [G-d] Whom we refer to, is not corporeal, nor is He a force within a corporeal entity, nor will he be affected by any physical occurrences, such as movement, or rest, or dwelling, neither innately, nor by chance occurrence. Therefore did the Sages remove from Him any association with the concepts of joining and separation,

¹ Cf. the Rambam’s 12th *Ikkar*, the Messianic Era, and the obligation to exalt the Mashiach. This author would contend that HaShem must be exalted for the things He does, and the Mashiach must be exalted for the things he is to do – but nary the twain meet! In other words, do not confuse the Role played by HaShem with that played by the Mashiach, and vice-a-versa. To do so is to repeat a mistake of long ago: the Golden Calf, and Moshe as HaShem’s (*chas v’shalom*) ‘partner.’ [Cf. the Rambam’s Fifth Principle, “***It is He alone ... Whom it is fitting to ...exalt, to make His greatness known...***”]

and they said (Chagigah 15a), “**There is Above, neither sitting nor standing, neither separation or joining together**” ... as it says (Yishayahu 11:4), “**They shall press upon the shoulders of the Philistines,**” that is, they will press “upon their shoulders,” because they are joined to them [through a common boundary].

The Prophet said (Yishayahu 40:18), “**Unto whom will you liken G-d?**” and (Yishayahu 40:25), “**Unto whom will you liken Me, that I shall be equal? Said the holy One.**” Yet, were He corporeal, He would be similar to other corporeal entities. And wherever it may be found in the Holy Scriptures that He is described in physical terms, such as walking, standing, sitting, or speaking, it is to be interpreted in an allegorical sense. As Chazal said (B’rachos 31b), “**The Torah speaks in the language of human beings.**” The Sages spoke about this at great length.

The Third Principle is expressed in the following verse (Devarim 4:15), “**Take therefore good heed unto yourselves, for you saw no manner of form, on the day that the Lord spoke to you in Chorev out of the midst of the fire.**” This means, you did not perceive Him to have any form whatsoever, for as we have noted above (Rambam’s Introduction to Perek Cheilek), He has no semblance of corporeality whatsoever.

The Fourth Principle – His Eternity ... We shall believe that this One [G-d] is the absolute Eternal, nor any other being be regarded as “eternal” when compared to Him [for He created them all]. There are numerous verses to this effect in Scriptures. This Fourth principle is clearly expressed in the verse (Devarim 33:27), “**[The heavens are] a dwelling place for the Eternal G-d.**”

The Fifth Principle – [To worship Him exclusively] ... It is He alone, blessed is He, whom it is fitting to worship, to exalt, to make His greatness known, and to fulfill His commandments. Nor shall one do likewise in regard to any lower beings, be they Angels, stars, heavenly spheres, the elements, or anything which is composed of them, for they all pursue the course of nature which was assigned to them. They have neither judgment, nor free will; these are possessed by the Almighty alone, be he blessed.

Nor is it proper to worship them, that they might serve as intermediaries [through which] to approach him. Instead, unto him alone shall all thoughts turn, while all other [beings] shall be forsaken. This is the Fifth principle, which comes under the admonishment concerning idolatry, and a major portion of Torah warns against this.

The Sixth Principle – Prophecy ... The individual shall know that the human race contains individuals who are endowed with exceedingly fine and highly refined character traits and with great [spiritual] perfection, and whose souls are properly prepared, so that they might attain a “vibrant” intellect. Whereupon, their human intellect is joined with an “active” [celestial] intellect, from which there emanates upon them a noble spirit of Divine inspiration [which descends upon these select individuals].

These are the Prophets, and this is prophecy, and this is its essence. A clear explanation of this Principle would necessitate a very lengthy dissertation. It is not our intent here to prove each of these [Thirteen] Principles, or to clarify how prophecy is attained, or this includes all branches of wisdom. Rather, I will present these Principles only in simple factual form. [Many] Torah verses attest to the [authenticity of the] prophecy of numerous Prophets.

The Seventh Principle – the Prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu ... It is incumbent upon us to believe that Moshe Rabbeinu is the father of all Prophets who preceded him and who succeeded him. They are all inferior to him in stature. He was the most perfect individual of the entire human species. His understanding of the Almighty surpassed that of any other human being – past, present, or future.

Moshe Rabbeinu, may his soul find repose, rose above the human species, until he attained the stature of the *Malachim*, and was included in the high station of the *Malachim*. There remained no veil which he did not tear asunder, that he might enter therein. He was not impeded [in his attainment of spiritual perfection] by any physical impediment, nor was he deficient in even the slightest degree. In his

perceptions, all sensual feelings and powers of imagination were completely nullified, and his powers of physical desire and temptation were confounded, until he remained pure intellect. In this regard has it been said concerning him, that he spoke with the Almighty, be He blessed, [directly,] without *Malachim* serving as intermediaries.

It was my intention to clarify here this wondrous topic, to elucidate the hidden meaning of various Scriptural passages, and to explain the meaning of (*Bamidbar* 12:8), “**mouth to mouth [do I speak to him]**,” as well as of that entire verse and related verses – had I not realized that these matters are very delicate, and that they will necessitate very many proofs, and will require many preliminary and introductory remarks and examples.

It would be necessary to clarify first the reality concerning the existence of *Malachim* and their various degrees of proximity to the Creator, be He exalted. And we must clarify [the essence of] the soul and all of its properties. And the scope of the discussion would be broadened to include the visions of the Prophets concerning the Creator and the Angels. Nor will this alone suffice. And even if all this should be written as concisely as possible [it will contain] one hundred pages. I will therefore leave this topic for its own place, either in a *sefer* clarifying the *Midrashim* of the Sages which I have promised to write, or in the *Sefer* of Prophecy which I have begun to write, or in a *sefer* which I will compose, to clarify these [Thirteen] Principles.

I will return to the intent of this Seventh Principle, and I will say that the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu, may his soul find repose, surpassed the prophecy of all [other] Prophets in four respects:

(a) First, all Prophets communicated with G-d, be He blessed, only through an intermediary, while Moshe communicated [directly] without any intermediary, as it is written (*Bamidbar* 12:8), “**Mouth to mouth will I speak to him.**”

(b) Second, all other Prophets attain prophecy only while sleeping, as it says (*Bereshis* 31:24), “**In a dream by night,**” or (*Iyov* 33:15), “**In a dream, in a vision of the night,**” and many similar instances. Or else, [they may attain prophecy] by day, after a deep sleep will come upon the individual so that all his perceptions might be nullified, and his thoughts will be clear, as in a dream. This is called ‘a vision’ or ‘a revelation’ (cf. *Yechezkel* 8:3 “*in the visions of G-d*”). Moshe, however, attained prophecy by day, while [he, Moshe, stood before the Ark, as] He [HaShem] was “standing” between the two Cherubim, as the Almighty, be He blessed, assured him (*Shemos* 25:22), “**And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the cover, from between the two Cherubim, which are on the Ark of testimony.**” And the Almighty, be He exalted, said [to Aaron and Miriam] (*Bamidbar* 12:6-8), “**If there be a prophet among you, I, G-d, would make Myself known to him in a vision, in a dream would I speak to him. Not so is My servant, Moshe ... Mouth to mouth do I speak to him.**”

(c) Third, when a Prophet attains prophecy – even though it be in “a vision,” and through a *Malach* – he will become very weak, his body will be afflicted, and he will be overcome by a great fright, with his soul almost departing from him, as Daniel explained. When Gabriel spoke to him in a vision, Daniel said (*Daniel* 10:8), “**There remained no strength in me, and my robust appearance was entirely corrupted, and I retained no strength.**” And it says (*Daniel* 10:9), “**And I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face toward the ground.**” And it says (*Daniel* 10:16), “**In the vision, I trembled violently.**” But with Moshe, may his soul find repose, it was not so. Rather, G-d’s word would come to him, and he would not be engulfed by any fear or trembling whatsoever. As is written (*Shemos* 33:11), “**And the Lord spoke to him face to face [directly], as a man will speak to his friend.**” That is, just as a man will have no terror when speaking to his friend, so, too, it was with Moshe. He had no fear during [his] prophetic revelation, even though it was “**face to face**” [directly]. And this was because of his firm attachment to pure intellect, as we have noted above.

(d) Fourth, all other Prophets will not attain prophetic revelation whenever they might desire to do so, but only when the Almighty, be He blessed, desires [to commune with them]. Thus, a Prophet might wait many days or years, and not attain prophecy. And he may beseech the Almighty to enlighten him prophetically concerning some matter, and he might wait many days or months until he attains his answer through prophecy, or he may never attain an answer. There were many groups among them who used to prepare themselves and purify their thoughts, as Elisha did, as it says (*Melachim Beis* 3:15), “**And**

now bring me a minstrel,” and then prophecy came to him. And yet, it is not certain that he will attain prophecy whenever he sets his mind to it.

But Moshe Rabbeinu, whenever he desired, he said (*Bamidbar* 9:8)², “**Stand still, and I will hear what the Lord will command concerning you.**” And it says (*Vayikra* 16:2), “**Speak to your brother, Aaron, that he might not enter at all times into the Sanctuary.**” Whereupon, our sages, of blessed memory, said (*Sifra, Vayikra* 16:2), “**Aaron was prohibited entry; Moshe was not prohibited entry.**”

The Eighth Principle – The Divine Origin of Torah – We shall believe that the entire Torah which is found in our hands today, [is that] which was given through Moshe Rabbeinu, [and that it] is entirely the word of G-d. That is, that it came to Moshe entirely from the Almighty, be He blessed, in a manner which we refer to, for lack of a better description, as speech. Nor is it known [to us] precisely how this occurred, but only that it was he, Moshe, who received it, and that he was like a scribe, to whom it was dictated, while he transcribes all the events that transpired – the narratives and the commandments. Therefore is he referred to as “the Scribe.”

Nor is there any difference between the words (*Bereshis* 10:6), “**And the sons of Cham were Kush and Mitzrayim and Put and Canaan,**” or (*Bereshis* 36:39), “**And the name of his wife was Meheitvel bas Matred,**” or (*Bereshis* 36:12), “**And Timnah was a concubine,**” and between (*Shemos* 20:2; *Devarim* 5:6³), “**I am the Lord, your G-d,**” or (*Devarim* 6:4), “**Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our G-d, the Lord is One.**” For it is all the word of G-d, and it is all G-d’s perfect Law (cf. *Tehillim* 19:8) – pure, and holy, and true.

The individual who maintains that these [*Bereshis* 10:6, 36:39, 36:12 cited above] or similar verses or narrative were written by Moshe himself, is regarded by our Sages and our Prophets as the most grievous of all apostates, for he believes that the Torah contains essential and non-essential sections, and that these historical narratives and stories serve no useful purpose, and that they were [written] by Moshe.

This is the meaning of the phrase, “**The Torah is not from heaven,**” [in the Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 90a) referring to an individual who maintains] that the Torah was not Divinely given, [whom the Sages classify in the Mishnah as one who has lost his share in *Olam Habah*, the Hereafter]. *Chazal* said (*Sanhedrin* 99a), “**This applies [even] to an individual who believes that the entire Torah is the Word of the Almighty, with the exception of one verse, which [he maintains] was not said by the Almighty, but only by Moshe himself.**” This is (*Bamidbar* 15:31), “**For he has despised the word of G-d.**” May G-d’s Name be exalted and blessed, contrary to the words of the apostates.

Rather, every word of the Torah contains wondrously profound wisdom for those who are able to comprehend it. Yet, the entire scope of its wisdom will never be fully comprehended. (*Iyov* 11:9) “**The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.**” [To be worthy of achieving fuller comprehension of Torah] the individual should follow in the footsteps of David, Mashiach of the G-d of

² There is a caveat, though, that must be noted concerning the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu. There was a thirty-eight year lacuna during which the quality of Moshe’s prophecy was hampered because of the actions of his students – beginning with the Golden Calf, sealed at the Sin of the Spies, and only ending after that generation had died in the desert (but their children still made the same mistake when Miriam died, the Well of Miriam dried up, and they turned to Moshe to supply them with water). See our understanding in *The Rambam’s Thirteen Principles Illuminated*.

³ However, see Rashi (*Shemos* 19:9) “...**the words of the people, etc.** [Namely] a response to this statement I have heard from them [the Israelites], that they want to hear [directly] from You [HaShem]. [*They maintain that there is no comparison between one who hears [a message] from the mouth of the messenger and one who hears [it] from the mouth of the King [Himself]*]. [They say,] “**We want to see our King!**”

This author maintains that while the entire Torah is undoubtedly from HaShem, that the first two commandments (*Shemos* 20:2-3), “**I am the Lord your God, Who has brought you out of the land of Egypt ... You shall have no other gods before Me,**” which were heard by all of Israel at Sinai (*Makkos* 24a), are qualitatively different from the remainder of Torah that was heard through Moshe.

Ya'akov, who prayed (*Tehillim* 119:18), “**Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your Torah.**”

And so, too, is the traditional oral interpretation of the Torah – [the Oral Law] – also the word of G-d. That which we observe today in regard to the form of a *sukkah*, *lulav*, *shofar*, *tzitzis*, *tefillin*, and other mitzvos, is the very same form which the Almighty, be He blessed, transmitted to Moshe, and which he conveyed to us. And he [Moshe] who was entrusted with the mission, was the faithful intermediary.

The Eighth Principle is clearly expressed in the following verse (*Bamidbar* 16:28), “**And Moshe said, ‘Hereby shall you know that the Lord sent me to do all these things [to present all of His Torah], [and] that it was not of my own mind.’**”

The Ninth Principle – Abrogation [the immutability of the Torah] ... This means that this Torah of Moshe will never be nullified. Nor will another Torah ever come forth from the Almighty besides this one.⁴ Nor will anything be added to it, or deleted from it, either in the Written law, or in the Oral Law. As it says (*Devarim* 13:1), “**You shall neither add thereto, nor detract there from.**”⁵ We have already clarified all that is necessary for this Principle in the Introduction of this work.

The Tenth Principle – [Omniscience and Divine Providence] ... The Tenth Principle is that He, Be He exalted, knows the deeds of human beings, and does not turn His gaze away from them, contrary to those who say (*Yechezkel* 8:12), “**G-d has forsaken the earth.**” Rather, it is as is written (*Yirmiyahu* 32:19), “**[You are] great in counsel and mighty in work; for Your eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of man.**” And as it says (*Bereshis* 6:5), “**And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth.**” And it says (*Bereshis* 18:20), “**Verily, the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great.**” These verses are indicative of this Tenth Principle.

The Eleventh Principle – [Reward and Retribution] ... The Eleventh Principle is that He, be he exalted, will reward an individual who will fulfill the commandments of the Torah, and will punish an individual who will violate its injunctions, and that the greatest reward is Olam Habah – the Hereafter, while the greatest punishment is to be “cut off” [from life in the Hereafter]. We have already discussed this matter adequately [in the Introduction to Perek Cheilek].

The following verses clarify this Principle. [When Israel sinned grievously with the transgression of the Golden Calf, Moshe said to the Almighty] (*Shemos* 32:32), “**Yet now, if you will forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray to You, out of Your Book which You have written.**” Whereupon, the Almighty, be He blessed, answered him (*Shemos* 32:33), “**He who has sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My Book.**” This proves He knows who serves Him and who transgresses against Him, to reward one, and to punish the other.

The Twelfth Principle – The Messianic Era⁶ ... We shall believe and affirm that he will come, and we shall not think that he will be late. (*Chavakkuk* 2:3) “**If he should tarry, wait for him.**” [Alternately, as befits the *p’shat* of the *passuk*, “**We shall believe and affirm that it (the *Geulah*) will come, and we shall not think that it (the *Geulah*) will be late ... If it should tarry, wait for it.**”]

⁴ It has been suggested by Rav Yosef Albo (*Sefer Halkkarim*) that it is “possible” that HaShem could convene a “Sinai II” where He might change His Torah. This author in The Rambam’s Thirteen Principles Illuminated offers a refutation of this suggestion by Rav Albo.

⁵ This author is aware of a seeming challenge to the Rambam’s 9th Principle. See our understanding of this potential contradiction in our paper *The Rambam, the Or HaChayim, and the Firstborn*.

⁶ Based upon the Gemara (*Pesachim* 112a, *Bava Basra* 21a) that **a lesson learned in youth is difficult to unlearn**, this author is taking liberty with this Principle in order that the reader/student not get the wrong impression regarding the Mashiah before he has had the chance to consider Tanakh, the Siddur, and the words of our Sages regarding the role the Mashiah is to play in HaShem’s End of Day’s Redemption. See this author’s book *Yud-Ches Sha’arim* for an extensive look at the Rambam’s 12th Principle when viewed in light of the Rambam’s 5th Principle.

Nor shall the individual set a date for his [its] coming [arrival]. Nor shall he attempt to derive deductively from Scriptural verses, a set date for his [its] coming [arrival].

The Sages said (Sanhedrin 97b), “*May the souls expire of those who calculate the end.*” [Cf. Daniel 12:4 “...Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, *until the time of the end...*” Daniel 12:9 “...Go your way, Daniel; for the words are closed up and sealed *till the time of the end.*”]

We shall believe that the Mashiach – [HaShem’s End of Day’s messenger who will deliver the message that the “time of the end” is at hand, and who will clarify these matters (that have been kept intentionally vague); cf. Daniel 11:35 “*And some of those with understanding shall fall, to test them, and to refine them, and to make them white, until the time of the end; for it is yet for the time appointed.*” Daniel 12:4 “...*many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.*”] – will be superior, and have greater eminence and prestige than any other king [of flesh and blood] who ever reigned. We shall exalt him, love him, and pray in his behalf. This [belief in Mashiach] is in accordance with the prophecies concerning him, by all the Prophets, from Moshe Rabbeinu, until Malachi. And he who has doubts concerning his coming, or he who belittles his eminent stature, has denied the Torah which foretold this in the *parshah* of Balaam [*Bamidbar* 24:17-19], and the *parshah* of *Nitzavim* [*Devarim* 30:1-10].

Included in this [Twelfth] Principle, is [the awareness] that every king of Israel must be a descendant of the house of David, and a descendant of Solomon [see *Shmuel Beis* 7:12-15; *Divrei HaYomim Alef* 28:5-7]. Whoever disputes this family’s right to the throne denies [the Words of] the3 Almighty and the words of His Prophets.

The Thirteenth Principle – Resurrection ... The Thirteenth Principle is *Techiyas HaMeisim* – Resurrection of the dead. We have already clarified this Principle [in the Introduction to *Perek Cheilek: Resurrection of the dead is one of the fundamental principles in the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu. There is neither Jewish faith nor any attachment to the Jewish faith, for an individual who does not believe in this.*]