

Must Jews Believe in God?



1. Rabbi Natan Slifkin (rationalistjudaism.com) Ortho-What?

The term "Orthoprax" (OP) usually refers to people whose departure from classical Judaism involves intellectual objections which have led them to a lack of faith, to a lesser or greater degree. While this may well lead to emotional strain, that is a result rather than a cause. They appreciate the Orthodox lifestyle and community and are still *shomer Torah u'mitzvos*.¹

A. Jewish Catechisms

1. Yigdal - Unknown Authorship - Found in Siddur

Exalted be the Living God and praised, He exists – unbounded by time is His existence;
He is One – and there is no unity like His Oneness – Inscrutable and infinite is His Oneness;
He has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal – nor has His holiness any comparison;
He preceded every being that was created – the First, and nothing precedes His precedence;

יְגִדֵּל אֱלֹהִים חַי וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, נִמְצָא
וְאֵין עֵת אֶל מְצִיאֹתָיו. אֶחָד וְאֵין
יְחִיד פְּיֻחָדוֹ, נִעְלָם וְגַם אֵין סוּף
לְאַחֲדוּתוֹ. אֵין לוֹ דְמוּת הַגּוּף
וְאֵינוֹ גּוּף, לֹא נִעְרֹךְ אֵלָיו
קִדְשָׁתוֹ. קִדְמוֹן לְכָל דְבַר אֲשֶׁר
נִבְרָא, רִאשׁוֹן: וְאֵין רִאשִׁית
לְרִאשִׁיתוֹ

B. Rounding Up

1. Talmud Bavli Makkot 23b - Unbalanced Equation

Rebbi Simlai expounded, Six hundred and thirteen mitzvos were told to Moshe.

דרש רבי שמלאי שש מאות ושלוש עשרה מצות נאמרו לו למשה

¹ <http://www.rationalistjudaism.com/2011/05/orthoprax-vs-off-derech.html>

2. Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 – Statement or Command?

<p>I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.</p>	<p>אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: לֹא-יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, עַל-פְּנֵי</p>
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C. Keep it Simple

1. Sefer HaChinuch (13th c. Spain) Mitzvah 25 – Our fundamental belief.

<p>The mitzvah to believe in God is to believe that there is a single unitary God Who brought into being all that exists by His power and desire, and that He is eternal. Furthermore, that He brought us out of Egypt and gave us the Torah.</p>	<p>מצות האמנה במציאות השם יתברך: להאמין שיש לעולם אלוה אחד שהמציא כל הנמצא, ומכחו וחפצו היה כל מה שהוא, ושהיה ושיהיה לעדי עד, וכי הוא הוציאנו מארץ מצרים ונתן לנו התורה.</p>
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2. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Makkot 24a – Central Pillar

<p>Habakkuk came, and condensed all of them [all of the mitzvot of the Torah] into one, as it says, “The righteous person lives according to his faith.”</p>	<p>בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת שנאמר וצדיק באמונתו</p>
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D. Back-Up A Sec!

1. Ramban (13th c. Spain) commentary to Sefer HaMitzvot

<p>It seems that the view of the Baal Halachot Gedolot (Behag) is that the count of 613 commandments are His decrees, may He be exalted, that He decreed upon us to do or to refrain from doing. But belief in His exalted existence that He made known to us with signs and wonders and the revelation of His Presence before our very eyes, this is the central point, the root from which [all] the commandments are “born” – this was not listed [in the 613]. A parable: A king enters a country and his servants tell him, “Make decrees for them!” He responds, “If only they would accept my reign, I would make decrees upon them. Because if they do not accept my reign, how can they fulfill My decrees?” So said God to Israel: “I am the Lord your God ... you shall have no other gods.” “Just like you accepted My reign, so too accept My commandments, ‘...you shall have no other gods.’” Accepting the Kingship [of God] is one matter, and the commandments and decrees ... are another matter.</p>	<p>והנראה מדעתו שלבעל ההלכות שאין מנין תרי"ג מצות אלא גזירותיו יתעלה שגזר עלינו לעשות או מנענו שלא נעשה אבל האמונה במציאותו יתע' שהודיע אותה אלינו באותות ובמופתים ובגילוי השכינה לעינינו הוא העיקר והשורש שממנו נולדו המצות לא ימנה בחשבונן. משל למלך שנכנס למדינה אמרו לו עבדיו גזור עליהם גזירות אמר להם לאו כשיקבלו מלכותי אגזור עליהם גזירות שאם מלכותי אינן מקבלים גזרותי היאך מקיימין כך אמר המקום לישראל אנכי י"י אלהיך לא יהיה לך ... כשם שקבלתם מלכותי קבלו גזירותי לא יהיה לך. קבלת המלכות עניין בפני עצמו והמצוות הנגזרות ... מענין אחר</p>
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E. Action vs Emotion

1. Vayikra 19:18 - Don't Tell Me Who To Love!

<p>You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.</p>	<p>לֹא תִקֶם וְלֹא תִטֹּר אֶת בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶהְבֶּתָ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה'.</p>
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2. Sefer HaChinuch Mitzva 243 - Acts of Love

<p>The elements included in this mitzvah follow the general principle that one should treat another person in the way he would treat himself, e.g. protecting his property, preventing him from being harmed, speaking only well of him, respecting him, and certainly not glorifying oneself at his expense...</p>	<p>ודיני מצוה זו כלולים הם בתוך המצוה, שכלל הכל הוא שיתנהג האדם עם חברו כמו שיתנהג עם עצמו, לשמור ממונו ולהרחיק ממנו כל נזק, ואם יספר עליו דברים יספרם לשבח ויחוס על כבודו ולא יתכבד בקלונו...</p>
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F. Faith or Knowledge?

1. Rambam (12th c. Egypt) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Asei # 1 – Emunah!

<p>The First Commandment is the commandment in which we were commanded to believe in God. That is, we must believe that there is an Originator and Cause, who is the Catalyst for all of existence. As God said, "I am the Lord your God" (Shemot 20:2 and Devarim/Deuteronomy 5:6).</p>	<p>המצווה הראשונה היא הציווי שנצטוונו להאמין באלהות, והוא: שנאמין שיש (שם) עילה וסיבה, שהיא הפועל לכל הנמצאים. וזהו אמרו יתעלה: "אנכי ה' אלקיך" (שמות כ, ב ודברים ה, ו).</p>
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2. Mishna Torah Rambam - Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 1:1-6 – Deah

<p>1. The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of [all] wisdoms is to know that there is a First Cause. And He created all that exists. All that exists in the heavens and earth and everything in between only exist due to the truth of His existence.</p> <p>6. The knowledge of [all] this is a Positive Commandment, as it says, "I am the Lord, your God" (Shemot 20:2)...</p>	<p>[א] יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות, לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון. והוא ממציא כל הנמצא; וכל הנמצאים מן שמיים וארץ ומה ביניהם, לא נמצאו אלא מאמיתת הימצאו. [ו] וידיעת דבר זה מצות עשה, שנאמר "אנכי ה' אלוהיך" (שמות כב, דברים ה, ו).</p>
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3. Rambam Guide For the Perplexed 2:33 - Scientific Theory

<p>For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and whatever can be established by proof is known by the prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect. These two principles were not known through prophecy alone...But the rest of the commandments are of an ethical and authoritative character, and do not contain [truths] perceived by the intellect.</p>
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G. Ortho-Heresy

1. Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot - End of Heresy?

The words “heretics” and “heretical” have often been invoked on a whole range of issues in the ideological battles within Orthodoxy in the last two centuries. It is important to note that most of the leading lights of the last two generations have rejected the application of the term “apikores” to various people who were led to their conclusions based on sincere reading of the sources. The roots of this perspective are in the famous comment of the Raavad that while the Rambam considered anyone who believed in a corporeal God (a rejection of one of the essential pillars of the faith acc. to Rambam) as a heretic, there were many great people who came to that erroneous conclusion from their reading of *Tanakh* and *Hazal*. And thus while they were wrong and the idea should be rejected, the person was not to be read out of the community...This trend was further developed by the perspectives of Rav Kook and the Hazon Ish that saw in the modern zeitgeist a period of hiddenness of God and “intellectual coercion” that neutralized the category of apikores as a live halakhic category.

2. Maharal - Be'er Hagolah 7 - Mitzvah of Curiosity (Rabbi Loew, 15th c. Prague)

A person should not reject something which is against his own view...especially if it is not presented as an attack on religion but is simply an honest expression of the other person's beliefs. Even if it is against his own religious beliefs and faith, he should not say, "Be quiet and shut your mouth," because there will not be a clarification of that person's religious understanding. In fact, in such cases we should tell a person to speak his mind freely and fully express how he feels, such that he should not feel that he has not been able to fully speak his mind. If sincere questions are silenced, this is indicative that the religion is weak. This attitude is the opposite of what some people think. They mistakenly think that forbidding people from discussing religion strengthens religious faith, but this is not the case. Suppression of dissent and prohibiting people from speaking is a weakening of religion.

ובפרט אותו שלא כוון לקנות רק להגיד
האמונה אשר אתו, אף אם הדברים הם נגד
אמונתו ודתו אין לומר אליו אל תדבר
ותסתום דברי פיך, שא"כ לא יהיה בירור
הדת. ואדרבה דבר כמו זה אומרים תדבר
ככל חפצך וכל אשר אתה רוצה וחפץ
לומר, ולא תאמר אם היה אפשר לי לדבר
הייתי מדבר יותר, כי אם עושה זה שסותם
את פיו שלא ידבר זה הוא מורה על
חולשת הדת כמו שאמרנו. ולכך דבר זה
הפך מה שחושבים קצת בני אדם, כי
חושבים כאשר אין רשאי לדבר על הדת
הוא חזוק הדת ותוקף שלו, ואין זה כך כי
העלם דברי המתנגד בדת אין זה רק בטול
וחולשת הדת