

CHAPTER 1 - PART 1

by Rabbi David Sykes

Faith in God is the foundation of Judaism; it is the entire Torah. "All of Your commandments are faith" (Tehillim 119:86); thus King David, the "sweet singer of Israel," defined the commandments of our holy Torah. Faith is the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord Your God." Maimonides stated, at the very outset of his comprehensive code of Jewish law, Yad HaChazakah, that faith is "the foundation of the foundations and the pillar of wisdom."

The major principles of Judaism all branch out from faith: the belief in the Torah and in the prophecy of the greatest of the prophets, Moses, the belief in personal Divine Providence, reward and punishment, and also belief in the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. Faith is the key to the Redemption, and without it, there is no meaning to the entire hope of Redemption that has kept the nation of Israel alive in its prolonged exile.

The Rabbis said, "Our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt only in the merit of faith." So, too, the future redemption of Israel will only be through the power and merit of faith. The Jews will be redeemed from their exile because they believed and still believe in the God of Israel, and in the future that is destined for His treasured nation. Living with this faith made it possible for the Jews to remain committed to their Judaism, despite the sea of travails and suffering, the troubles and pain that the various exiles caused for them. As a result of the Jewish life, the life of faith, when the hoped for and awaited Messiah comes, he will actually find people to redeem. If not for our life of faith, we would have disappeared from the world long ago, and whom then, and what, would the Messiah redeem? This strength of Jewish faith was revealed in Egypt, at the time of our first redemption. After years of the harsh and cruel decrees of Pharaoh, after the crushing decree of "Every son who is born you shall cast into the Nile," we were still one nation; the oppressed slaves continued to preserve their identity and uniqueness. When Moses arrived to redeem them, he found them to be believers: believers in God, believers in Moses, and believers in their redemption, as it is written, "And the nation believed." Only then was Moses able to go to Pharaoh and say to him, "Let my people go."

But we must ask ourselves: It is true that we have stood and survived because of the power of faith, but, from where have we taken this power, this power to believe, this power to cleave to our faith, the courage, the strength of spirit, to suffer all that we have suffered, and not to cave in, not to despair, and to continue to believe? From where have we drawn such strengths as these, and what has fortified our strength to continue and unceasingly pay such a high price, a price that no other nation or person in the world would be capable of paying? We all know the answer, the one and

only answer. It is a short answer that contains only one word, but is the answer to questions that include myriads of words, asked by everyone in the world, in all generations. The answer is: Torah. Through the power of the Torah, and with the Torah, we have succeeded in surviving, and we will continue to survive, until the coming of the Messianic Redeemer. The cleaving to our holy Torah through its study and the fulfillment of its commandments is what has poured into us the strength to survive for the thousands of years of exile.
