

Chapter 6:

Is This Heresy?

In today's world, the accusation of heresy seems quaint. We live in an age of heterodoxy and personal freedom. Who is anyone to tell another what he can or cannot believe? Everyone has the right to believe whatever he wants.

We agree that every person has the legal right to choose what he believes. However, if he chooses to believe in heresy then he will be removing himself from the community of believing Jews. An apikorus – a heretic – is someone who rejects a fundamental belief of Judaism. Should an outwardly observant Jew reject such a belief, as is his legal right in a free country, then he is no longer in the community of believers. He is no longer a part of Orthodox Jewry.

While we can debate the matter cordially, with each side presenting its side intelligently, we must remember that someone who chooses an incorrect belief is deciding his own ultimate fate. For instance, two philosophers can have a friendly debate over the existence of G-d. Each philosopher is extremely learned and can present an intelligent case for his point of view. When both philosophers go home happy

after a very civil and friendly debate, one is on the side of G-d and the other denies the very reason for the universe. We believe that our arguments in this book are decisive. If so, we must investigate the ramifications of someone who accepts the beliefs that we emphatically argue are outside of Torah Judaism. While we may like the meshichists personally and respect the many wonderful things they have done in their lives, we feel the same way about many atheists as well. However, G-d demands not only deeds but faith as well. And sometimes a belief can be catastrophically wrong.

The issue of apikorsus is not merely a matter of semantics and labels. There are serious halachic ramifications to rejecting a fundamental belief. For example, an apikorus is not a valid witness for any halachic testimony including weddings and, more importantly, divorces. A get whose signed witnesses are apikorsim is not a valid get; the couple is still married and any subsequent “marriages” are deemed adulterous. This is a very serious matter! While this heretic who signed the get may consider himself a believer, he might also think he is a chicken. Just like the other chickens will treat him like a person despite his vehement protests to the contrary, the community of believers must treat him as he is and not as he claims to be.

The question we must raise is whether someone who holds any of the mistaken beliefs we have discussed is an apikorus. Let us now list the six beliefs we have addressed:

1. The Rebbe is alive and is Moshiach

2. The Rebbe is dead but **may** be Moshiach in the future
3. The Rebbe is dead but will **definitely** be Moshiach in the future
4. The Rebbe is dead but **is already** Moshiach
5. The Rebbe is G-d

The classic formulation of the fundamental beliefs of Judaism that has been widely accepted as authoritative is the Rambam's thirteen principles that he enumerates in his commentary to the Mishna in Sanhedrin 10:1.

The following is the Rambam's second principle.

The second principle is the unity of G-d, may He be exalted. In other words, to believe that this Being, which is the cause of all, is one. This does not mean one as in one of a pair nor one like a species nor one as in one object that is made up of many elements nor as a single simple object which is infinitely divisible. Rather, He, may He be exalted, is a unity unlike any other possible unity. This principle is indicated by the verse "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one" (D'varim 6:4).

והיסוד השני אחדותו
יתעלה. והוא שזה עלת הכל
אחד, לא כאחדות המין ולא
כאחדות הסוג, ולא כדבר
האחר המורכב שהוא
מתחלק לאחדים רבים, ולא
אחד כגוף הפשוט שהוא
אחד במספר אבל מקבל
החלוקה והפיצול עד בלי
סוף, אלא הוא יתעלה אחד,
אחדות שאין אחדות כמוה
בשום פנים, וזה יסוד מורה
עליו מה שני שמע ישראל
ה' אלקינו ה' אחד.

(Commentary to Mishna, Sanhedrin,
ed. Kafah p. 141)

Belief that G-d is in any way divisible is contrary to this principle. The following is the Rambam's third principle.

The third principle is that He is not physical. This means to believe that the One whom we have mentioned is not a body nor a force within a body. The characteristics of physical bodies such as movement and rest cannot be part of His nature nor can they happen to Him. Therefore the Sages of blessed memory denied to Him the concepts of combination and separation in saying, "There is no sitting, nor standing, nor shoulder, nor fatigue"... This third principle is indicated by the verse "For you did not see any form" (D'varim 4:15), in other words, you did not perceive Him as being an entity with a form because, as we mentioned, He is not physical and His power is not physical.

והיסוד השלישי שלילת הגשמות ממנו. והוא שזה האחד אינו גוף ולא כח בגוף, ולא יארעוהו מאורעות הגופים כגון התנועה והמנוחה, לא בעצם ולא במקרה. ולפיכך שללו ממנו עליהם השולם החבור והפירוד ואמרו לא ישיבה ולא עמידה לא עורף ולא עפוי... וזה היסוד השלישי הוא אשר מורה עליו מה שני כי לא ראיתם כל תמונה כלומר לא השגתם אותו בעל תמונה, לפי שהוא שאמרנו לא גוף ולא כח בגוף.

(Commentary to Mishna, Sanhedrin, ed. Kafah pp. 141-142)

From this principle we can see that any claim that G-d has a body or can appear as a body is clearly beyond the pale of Judaism. The belief that the Rebbe is somehow an incarnation of G-d – a physical representation of Him – is certainly contrary to these fundamental principles. G-d cannot be divided to include the Rebbe as part of Him, nor can He appear in any physical form. Belief that the Rebbe is

somehow G-d other than in the most figurative, non-literal sense is not only heresy but it is also idolatry.

The twelfth principle is belief in the coming of Moshiach. Let us see the Rambam's exact words.

The twelfth principle is Yemos HaMoshiach. This means to believe and be certain that he will come, and not to think that it is too late for him to come, "if it seems slow, wait for it" (Chabakuk 2:3). You should not set a time for him, and you should not make calculations from the Scriptures to determine the time of his coming. The Sages say, "Let despair come upon those who calculate endtimes." One must believe in him by praising him, yearning for him, and praying for him according to what was prophesied regarding him by all the prophets, from Moshe till Malachi. One who doubts this or minimizes this matter denies the Torah that testifies explicitly to [the coming of Moshiach] in the account of Bilam (Bamidbar 24) and in the portion of Nitzavim (Dvarim 30:3-5). Included in this principle is that there is no king to the Jewish people except from David and the descendants of Shlomo specifically. Anyone who

והיסוד השנים עשר ימות המשיח, והוא להאמין ולאמת שיבא ואין לומר שנתאחר אם יתמהמה חכה לו ואין לקבוע לו זמן, ולא יפרש את המקראות כדי להוציא מהו זמן בואו, אמרו חכמים תפוח דעתן של מחשבי קצין. ולהאמין בו מן הגדולה והאהבה ולהתפלל לבואו בהתאם למה שנאמר בו על ידי כל נביא, ממשה ועד מלאכי. ומי שנסתפק בו או זלזל בענינו הרי זה מכחיש את התורה שהבטיחה בו בפרשת בלעם ואתם נצבים. ומכלל היסוד הזה שאין מלך לישראל אלא מדוד ומזרע שלמה דוקא. וכל החולק בענין משפחה הזו הרי זה כפר בה' ובדברי נביאיו.

disagrees with [the status of] this family denies G-d and His prophets.

(Commentary to Mishna, Sanhedrin, ed. Kafah p. 144)

There is nothing in this principle that addresses whether Moshiach will be from the living or from the dead. Furthermore, there is no explicit statement in the Gemara that Moshiach cannot come from the dead so a believer in such is not contradicting the Gemara. It is therefore difficult to label someone who believes that the deceased Rebbe *may* be Moshiach as an apikorus. Even though he is mistaken, and some may argue foolishly so, it seems that he is not a heretic.

However, it can be argued that those who believe that the Rebbe is *definitely* Moshiach – whether he is alive or not, already Moshiach or future Moshiach – are not truly waiting for Moshiach as required by the twelfth principle. Rather than waiting for the true Moshiach whoever he may be, they are waiting for someone who definitely cannot be Moshiach. Ironically, the loudest advocates of Moshiach have turned their hopes away from Moshiach and toward the deceased Rebbe. This insistence on the Rebbe rather than the true Moshiach, for whom believers wait every day, might very well be heresy.

There is also the question whether the Rebbe was descended from Shlomo. Earlier sources in Lubavitch trace in detail the

Alter Rebbe's illustrious lineage, going back to Rashi, who is descended from King David. However, Rashi's descent comes from King David's son Shfatya ben Avital, as is specified in numerous sources, not Shlomo ben Bassheva. No one ever brought any such lineage for the Rebbe, or indeed for anyone else we know, of patrilineal descent from Shlomo. Although this issue may not be required for someone who is bechezkas Moshiach, the Rambam would certainly **require** it for believing that someone is a Moshiach with certainty.

There is yet another, more complex, angle to follow. It is incontestable that there were medieval rabbis who disagreed with some or parts of the Rambam's thirteen principles. For example, as we saw above, the Rambam's third principle is that G-d is not and cannot be physical or appear in any physical manifestation. However, Rav Moshe Taku (thirteenth century) argues in his Ksav Tamim that G-d can and does appear physically when He chooses to do so. While this view was later discredited as heretical, at that time Rav Moshe Taku was accepted as a Torah authority. Ramban even quoted him in his chiddushim to Gittin 7b. If a Torah giant could disagree with the Rambam's third principle, does this provide a precedent for someone today to disagree with this principle as well? The answer is absolutely not. Halachic questions that were once under question can be decided by poskim and, if widely accepted, become standard halacha. The Rambam's thirteen principles may have been debated at one time but the halacha now is

that anyone who disagrees with one of these principles is an apikorus.

This applies not only to the Rambam's thirteen principles but to other similar issues as well. The Gemara in Sanhedrin 99a quotes Rabbi Hillel as saying that there is no Moshiach for Israel. Exactly what he meant is much debated and is not for this discussion. What is relevant is that the Chasam Sofer (Tshuvos, Yoreh Deah 356) writes that, while Rabbi Hillel was not an apikorus for saying what he did, the question has already been decided and anyone who would say the exact same thing today would be an apikorus. The Rebbe ruled similarly in Likkutei Sichos vol. 34 p. 114 n. 5. As questions arise and conclusive answers are accepted by Klal Yisroel halacha becomes more crystallized and defined.

Based on this, it can be further argued that even though (and if) belief in a resurrected Moshiach does not contradict the wording of the Rambam's twelfth principle, it does contradict the way generations of Jews and their rabbis have understood the concept of Moshiach. Rather than contradicting the Rambam's principle of Moshiach, it contradicts Klal Yisroel's principle of Moshiach. If one had asked, it can be argued, gedolim from previous generations such as the Chasam Sofer and the Chofetz Chaim whether Moshiach can come from the dead they would certainly have said no. Therefore, anyone who believes such contradicts the idea of Moshiach as accepted by Klal Yisroel and is therefore an apikorus.

We have advanced three arguments in this chapter. The first is that those who believe that the Rebbe is the literal essence of G-d contradict the second and third of Rambam's thirteen principles. The second argument is that those who believe that the Rebbe definitely is or will definitely be Moshiach are denying the twelfth principle by not awaiting the true Moshiach. And the third is that those who believe in a resurrected Moshiach are contradicting a sacred belief of Klal Yisroel.

Are these arguments correct? Do they stand up to the logical tests to which a psak halacha must? What about other factors such as inadvertent heresy? We are not at all certain about these conclusions and, as this issue becomes more and more halachically relevant, we anxiously await the rulings of the Gedolei Torah of our generation, from whose mouths we live and whose views we accept happily.