

“Dat ha-Emet” in Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*

Chaim Rapoport

Abstract: This article argues that Maimonides’ uses the term “*Dat ha-Emet*” (“the true religion”) equivocally. Regarding Jews, it refers to revelation at Sinai or the Torah and its 613 commandments given to Moses. Regarding gentiles, it refers to the Noahide revelation and the seven commandments contained in the covenant between God and humanity. Hence when Maimonides claims that all people adopt the true religion in the messianic era, he does not mean that humanity will convert to Judaism, but that the nations of the world will worship the one God of the universe and live by the moral commandments contained in the Noahide code.

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I. The Contexts in Which Maimonides Uses the Term “*Dat ha-emet*”

At six points² in his *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides employs the term “*dat ha-emet*” [“the true religion” or “the religion of truth”].³

1. *Hilkebot Hamets u-matsab* 7:4

[In telling the story at the Passover *sefer*] he must begin with disgrace and conclude with glory. How so? He begins by recounting how, at the outset, in the days of Terah and before, our ancestors were

unbelievers, straying after vanity and pursuing idolatry, and he concludes with *dat ha-emet*, in that [God] drew us close to Him,⁴ distinguishing us from those who go astray and drawing us close to His Unity.⁵

2. *Hilkebot Matanot Eyyonim* 10:1 (*MR*, p. 135)

We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of charity [tsedaqah] than any other positive commandment because charity is the sign of the righteous man,⁶ the seed of Abraham our Father, as it is said, “For I

¹ Translated from the Hebrew by Joel Linsider. Except as otherwise noted, translations from quoted Hebrew sources are by the present translator. Translations of biblical verses are based on the Old Jewish Publication Society version (The Holy Scriptures [Philadelphia, 1917]), modified to remove archaisms and as otherwise needed to conform to the understanding of the text in this article. Translations of passages in the *Mishneh Torah* that are included in Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (Springfield NJ: Behrman House, 1972) (henceforth: *MR*) are taken from and cited to it; passages from *Mishneh Torah* not so cited are not included in *MR* have been translated by the present translator. Translations of passages in *Guide of the Perplexed* are taken from Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. and with an Introduction and Notes by Shlomo Pines (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), cited as “Pines.” Footnotes marked by Arabic numerals are by the author; footnotes marked by lower-case Roman numerals are by the translator. Brackets around a footnote marker indicate a footnote inserted into a quoted passage. Note that the word “*dat*” is translated most often translated as “religion” but occasionally as “law”; the word “*torah*” is translated as “Torah” or as “Law,” as context may require. Wherever variant readings of Maimonides’ text are noted, they are based on *Yalqut shinuyei nusha’ot* [Collected textual variants] in Maimonides, ed. Shabbetai Frankel.

² The number may be seven—see *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkebot Sanbedrin* 24:10, cited in Section II below.

³ In Part 34 of his *Liqutei shihot*, p. 211, n. 2, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, noted the need to identify the source of the term “*dat ha-emet*.” The Rebbe wrote: In the Bible (Esth. 3:8), the word *dat* appears in the plural—*dateihem shonot* (“their customs are different”). In biblical Hebrew, then, we find that the word *dat* is used only to mean custom (*minhag*); see the Targum to Esther, id. That is not the case in rabbinic Hebrew, however; see, for example, *beimirab datab* (“she changed her religion”; that is, she apostatized) (*Sukkah* 56b); “*bamarat dat* [change in religion; apostasy] invalidates the paschal sacrifice” (*Pesahim* 96a); and see *Pirquei de-rabbi eli’ ezer*, beginning of chapter 41, s.v. *dat avoteinu*.

The Rebbe added that he had not found any uses of the term in works that precede Maimonides, though the term “*dat ha-amiti*” is used in the translation of R. Judah ha-Levi’s *Kuzari* by R. Judah Ibn Tibbon (whose son, R. Samuel Ibn Tibbon, translated Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*). See *Kuzari*, Ibn Tibbon trans., Part 4 chap. 3; Part 5, chaps. 20, 23.

⁴ Some read “to His service” (“*la-avodat*”) instead of “to Him” (“*lo*”). See *Liqutei shihot*, Part 17, p. 83, n. 43.

⁵ Some read *le-yihudo* with two *yods* rather than one.

⁶ See *Yalqut shinuyei nusha’ot* (above, n. 1), n. 1.

⁷ See *Yalqut shinuyei nusha’ot* (above, n. 1). Cf. *Tur*, *Yoreh de’ab* sec. 247: “And every one who is scrupulous in it is evidently a descendant [of Abraham] whom God has blessed, as it is written, [Gen. 18:19] “to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice.”

know him, that he will command his children...to do righteousness [*tsedaqab*]"⁷ (Gen. 18:19). The throne of Israel is established and the religion of truth [*dat ha-emet*] is upheld only through charity, as it is said, "In righteousness shall you be established" (Is. 54:14). Israel is redeemed only through charity, as it is written, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and they that return to her with righteousness" (ibid. 1:27).

3. *Hilkbot Hagigab* 3:1 (MR, p. 147)

It is a positive commandment to assemble all Israelites, men, women, and children, after the close of every year of release when they go up to make the pilgrimage, and in their hearing to read chapters from the Law which shall keep them diligent in the commandments and strengthen them in the true religion [*dat ha-emet*].

4. *Hilkbot Hagigab* 3:6 (MR, p. 149)

Even if there is any who cannot hear, he should keep his heart intent on this reading, for Scripture has ordained it solely for the strengthening of the true religion [*dat ha-emet*]; and a man should so regard himself as though the Law was now laid upon him for the first time and as though he now heard it from the mouth of the Lord, for the king is an ambassador to proclaim the words of God.

5. *Hilkhot Melakhim* 4:10 (MR, p. 218)

All the land he [the king] conquers belongs to him. He may give thereof to his servants and warriors as much as he wishes; he may keep thereof for himself as much as he wishes. In all these matters he is the final arbiter. But whatever he does should be done by him for the sake of heaven. His

sole aim and thought should be to uplift the true religion [*dat ha-emet*], to fill the world with righteousness,⁸ to break the arm of the wicked, and to fight the battles of the Lord. The prime reason for appointing a king was that he execute judgment and wage war, as it is written: "And that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:20).

6. *Hilkbot Melakhim* 12:1 (MR, p. 224)

Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation be introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course. The words of Isaiah: "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (Is. 11:6) are to be understood figuratively,⁹ meaning that Israel will live securely among the wicked of the heathens¹⁰ who are likened to wolves and leopards, as it is written: "A wolf of the deserts does spoil them, a leopard watches over their cities" (Jer. 5:6). They will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*], and will neither plunder nor destroy,¹¹ and together with Israel¹² peacefully eat that which is permissible, as it is written: "And the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Is. 11:7). All similar expressions used in connection with the Messianic age are metaphorical. In the days of King Messiah the full meaning of these metaphors and their allusions will become clear to all.¹³

II. The Meaning of the Term: First Impressions

Here we must ask: What is meant by this distinctive term, "*dat ha-emet*"? At first glance, the answer is simple: *dat ha-emet*—"the true religion"—means "the religion of Israel"; that

⁸ Some read "to fill *all* the world with righteousness."

⁹ The Hebrew term here translated as "figuratively" is *mashal ve-hidab*; cf. *Hilkbot Yesodei ba-Torah* 7:6: "For all the prophets...see what they see as *mashal ve-hidab*."

¹⁰ See *Guide* III:11; see also below, n. 70.

¹¹ The wording is based on Is. 11:9—"They shall not hurt nor destroy." See also *Guide*, id.

¹² Some read "like Israel" instead of "together with Israel."

¹³ See *Hilkbot Melakhim* 12:2 (MR, p. 224): "No one is in a position to know the details of this and similar things until they have come to pass."

is, the entire Torah and all the commandments that G-d gave to Israel, his nation.¹⁴

At first glance, Dat ha-Emet means “the religion of Israel”

In support of this interpretation, one should consider Maimonides’ comments, in *Hilkhot Sanhedrin* 24:10,¹⁵ on the proper conduct of a judge:

In all things he should act for the sake of heaven, and he should not treat human dignity lightly, for it can supersede a negative commandment,¹⁶ and even more so should he take care not to undermine the dignity of the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,¹⁷ who maintain to the true Torah [*torat ha-emet*].

Some read “maintain the true religion [*dat ha-emet*]” instead of “maintain the true Torah [*torat ha-emet*], and that reading clearly implies that *dat ha-emet* means the Torah and commandments maintained by the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁸

III. Defining the Words “*Dat ha-emet*”

And why is our holy Torah referred to as “*dat ha-emet*”? The simple answer is that the word “*emet*” (“truth”) modifies “*dat*” (“religion”); in other words, the religion is true rather than false (*sheqer*).¹⁹ That is, this religion, which is the Torah of Moses, “given to us through Moses our Teacher entirely from God...All of it came from God, and all of it is the Torah of God,²⁰ perfect, pure, holy, and true”;²¹ “a truth with no flaw.”²²

¹⁴ Prof. Menahem Kellner has written that “in the six places in the *Mishneh Torah* where the term “*dat ha-emet*” appears, it connotes what we today refer to by the general term ‘Judaism.’ See his article “*Farteicht Un Farbessert—be’arot al ‘iqqunim’ megamatyim be-kitvei ha-rambam*” [*Farteicht un farbessert—notes on tendentious “corrections” to Maimonides’ writings*], in *Be-darkhei shalom – iyyunim be-hagut yehudit mugashim le-shalom rozenberg* [Festschrift for Shalom Rosenberg] (Jerusalem, Beit Morashah, 5767 [2006-07]), n. 25. (A slightly different version of the article appears in English as “*Farteicht un Farbessert* (On ‘Correcting’ Maimonides),” *Me’orot* 6,2 [November, 2007].)

¹⁵ Quoted verbatim in *Tur*, *Hoshen Mishpat*, sec. 2.

¹⁶ See *Hilkhot Shabbat* 26:23; *Hilkhot Aveil* 3:14. See also *Hilkhot Kil’ayim* 10:29.

¹⁷ See also *Hilkhot Sanhedrin* 25:2 (MR, p. 205): “He [a judge] is also forbidden to treat people with disrespect, though they be ignorant...for though they be uninformed and lowly, they are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of the hosts of God, brought forth out of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.” See also *Hilkhot Matanot Eryonim* 10:17.

¹⁸ Additional support for this interpretation may possibly be found in Maimonides’ wording at the end of *Hilkhot Tesbhuvah* (10:2, MR, p. 83), where he describes one who serves God out of love as “[occupying] himself with the study of the Law [*torah*] and the fulfillment of commandments...[doing] what is truly right [*oseh ha-emet*; lit., doing the truth] because it is truly right.” This suggests that the Torah and commandments are referred to as “truth.”

¹⁹ “*Sheqer*,” in the sense of “something contrary to reality”—as in such terms as “*navi sheqer*” (“false prophet”), “*shevu’at sheqer*” (“false oath”), “*eidut sheqer*” (“false testimony”), etc.—is a frequent locution in *Mishneh Torah*. See also Maimonides’ comment that a judge should know “...who will call him to account if he deviates from the line of truth [*qav ha-emet*]” (MR, p. 203).

²⁰ It is possible as well that the term “*dat ha-emet*” refers to the giver of the Torah, who is a “true God”; the phrase would then be equivalent to “the religion of the true God” or “the religion of the God of truth.” As Maimonides writes (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 1:4; MR, p. 44): “This is what the prophet means when he says, ‘But the Eternal is the true God’ (Jer. 10:10); that is, He alone is real and nothing else has reality like His reality. The same thought the Torah expresses in the text: “There is none else besides Him” (Deut. 4:35); that is: there is no being besides Him, that is really like him.” [The word translated as “real” in the foregoing is “*emet*,” and the passage might read, more literally: “...that is, He alone is true and nothing else has truth like His truth...there is no true being besides Him, that is like him.—*translator*.] Similarly, God is referred to (*Hilkhot Tesbhuvah*, 6:3; *Hilkhot Berakhot* 10:3 et seq) as “*dayyan ha-emet*” (“the true judge”) And see *Guide* II:47 (Pines, vol. 2, p. 409): “For only truth pleases Him, may He be exalted, and only that which is false angers him....Accordingly it says...I the Lord speak righteousness [Isa. 45:19].”

²¹ Maimonides’ Commentary on the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 10:1; MR, p. 421.

²² *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 8:1.

One may find support for this understanding in Maimonides' Epistle to Obadiah the Proselyte, in which he describes a convert in the following terms:²³

A man who left his father, his native land, his nation's realm...and, having gained inner understanding, came to join this nation...and recognized and knew that their religion is a true and righteous religion [*dat emet va-tsedeq*]. He came to understand the ways of Judaism and to know that all [other] religions are purloined from their [the Jews'] religion, one adding and another diminishing, one changing and another deceitfully defaming G-d with words that are not so,²⁴ one tearing down the foundations and another speaking [of it] perversely. He came to recognize all this and sought after G-d, traversing the holy path and entering under the wings of G-d's presence,²⁵ embracing the dust at the feet of

Moses our Teacher, the master of all prophets, peace be upon him.

Maimonides thus defines Judaism as "a true and righteous religion," in contrast to other religions that deceive and lie,²⁶ that are stolen and perverse.

Dat ha-Emet can also describe the religion that shows us the way of truth and uprightness

The words "*dat ha-emet*" can also be taken to describe the religion that *shows us* the way of truth and uprightness.²⁷ "Truth" in our context means "a word of wisdom," in contrast to words of folly that have no value,²⁸ or, in Maimonides' wording, truth in contrast to vanity.²⁹ The Torah and commandments are "*dat emet*" because by means of them, "[God]

²³ *Teshuvot ha-rambam* [Responsa of Maimonides], ed. Freiman (Tel-Aviv, 5694 [1933-34]), sec. 369; *Teshuvot ha-rambam* [Responsa of Maimonides], Meqitsei Nirdamim edition (Israel, 5720 [1959-60]), sec. 248, p. 728.

²⁴ Cf. *Hilkhot Me'ilah* 8:8; MR, p. 146:

"It is fitting for man to meditate upon the laws of the holy Torah and to comprehend their full meaning to the extent of his ability. Nevertheless, a law for which he finds no reason and understands no cause should not be trivial in his eyes...[he] should...be on guard not to rebel against a commandment...only because he does not understand its reason; or to heap words that are not right against the Lord.... How much was King David distressed by heretics and pagans who disputed the statutes! Yet the more they pursued him with false questions, which they plied according to the narrowness of man's minds, the more he increased his cleaving to the Torah, as it is said, "The proud have forged a lie against me; but I with my whole heart will keep Your precepts" (Ps. 119:69). It is also said there concerning this: "All your commandments are faithful; they persecute me falsely, help You me" (ibid. 119:86).

²⁵ See sources cited below, n. 61.

²⁶ See also *Hilkhot Melakhim*, end of Chapter 11 (MR, p. 227), telling how, in the time of King Messiah, Christians and Muslims will "realize that they have inherited naught but lies from their fathers, that their prophets and forebearers led them astray."

²⁷ Note Maimonides' terminology in *Hilkhot Rotseilah* 12:14: "A transgressor who is blinded by his lusts and therefore does not see the way of truth."

²⁸ Cf. *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:6: "The wise and knowledgeable know that all these things are nonsensical and vain, offering no profit." See also *Hilkhot Tefillin* 4:25 (MR, p. 94): "[One wearing phylacteries] is not drawn into frivolity and idle talk, does not dwell on evil thoughts but occupies his mind with thoughts of truth and righteousness."

²⁹ See the quotation from *Hilkhot Teshuvah* in the preceding note. See also *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:4 (MR, p. 76): "Those of you who forget the truth in the follies of the times and go astray the whole year in vanity and emptiness which neither profit nor save...his evil course and the thought that is not good." (On the term "follies of the time" [*bevelei ha-zeman*], see also *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 7:1; *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:4; 9:1; *Hilkhot Mezuzah* 6:13. Full consideration of the matter is beyond the scope of this article.) In *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* 11:16 (MR, p. 75), Maimonides writes:

These practices are all false and deceptive and were means employed by the ancient idolaters to deceive the peoples of various countries...Whoever believes in these and similar things and, in his heart, holds them to be true and scientific and only forbidden by the Torah, is nothing but a fool, deficient in understanding...Sensible people, however, who possess sound mental faculties, know by clear proofs that all these practices which the Torah prohibited have no scientific basis but are chimerical and inane [*bevelei*; "vain"], and that only those deficient in knowledge are attracted to these follies and, for their sake, leave the ways of truth.

In this paragraph, Maimonides combined the two senses of the word "*emet*": it is the opposite of lying and deceit, and it is the opposite of vanity and folly.

delivered us from groping in the darkness by making the commandments a lamp to straighten out the crooked places and a light to teach us the paths of uprightness,”³⁰ for “the greater part of the rules in the Law are but ‘counsels from of old’ (Is. 25:1) from Him who is ‘great in counsel’ (Jer. 32:19), to correct our moral qualities and to keep straight all our doings.”³¹

It may be that both of the foregoing interpretations are correct and that “*dat ha-emet*” means “the religion truly given by G-d, which shows us the path of truth.” Looking more deeply into the concept, we can suggest that the word “*dat*” in the expression “*dat ha-emet*” connotes not only the commandments

and laws of the Torah in all their details³² but also—perhaps primarily—the true opinions and beliefs³³ that form the basis and infrastructure of the religion. Maimonides refers to these as “*yesodei ha-dat*” (“basic principles of religion”)³⁴ or “*iqqarei ha-dat*” (“principles of religion”)³⁵—beginning with “the basic principle of all basic principles,” “the great principle on which everything depends”³⁶ and including additional principles such as the unity of G-d, the eternity of the Creator,³⁷ and the belief in the divine origin and eternity of the Torah. On this view, the words “*dat ha-emet*” mean “the true faith,” which is the principle of the religion of Israel—“the religion based on the true faith.”³⁸

³⁰ *Hilkbot Sheḥitab* 14:16 (MR, p. 125).

³¹ *Hilkbot Temurah* 4:13 (MR, p. 150). Maimonides concludes: “And so He says: ‘Have I not written you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that I might make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you might bring back words of truth to them that sent you’” (Prov. 22:20).

³² For “*dat*” in the sense of “law” or “ordinance,” see *Hilkbot Yom Tov* 6:9 (“that is the law [*dat*]—in the morning, all rise early...”); *Hilkbot Sanhedrin* 21:5 (MR, p. 199) (“for we are powerless to maintain intact all the requirements of the law [*dat*]”); id., 24:6 (“to close breaches in the law [*dat*]”); *Hilkbot Mamrim* 1:1 (MR, p. 207) (“is bound to follow their [the Sanhedrin’s] guidance in the practice of religion [*dat*] and to lean upon them”); id. 1:2 (MR, p. 208) (“the ordinances, decrees, and customs which they promulgate in public in order to strengthen religion [*dat*]”); id., 2:4 (MR, p. 209) (“religion [*dat*] will thereby be strengthened and safeguarded and the people will be restrained from disregarding the words of the Torah”). Note also *Hilkbot Melakhim* 3:7: “The sages decreed that the kings of Israel [the northern kingdom, as distinct from the kings of the House of David] are not to judge...for they are haughty, and there might result an impediment or detriment to the law [*dat*].”

³³ See also *Hilkbot Teshuvah* 6:4: “The righteous and the prophets in their prayers beseech God to help them to the truth...that is, may my sins not divert me from the way of the truth, through which I will know your ways and the unity of your name, until I return to understand and know the way of truth.”

³⁴ *Hilkbot Yesodei ha-Torah* 7:1: “One of the principles of religion [*dat*] is to know that God calls to human beings.”

³⁵ See *Hilkbot Issurei Bi’ab* 13:12 (“to acquaint him with the principles of the faith [*dat*]”); id. 14:2 (MR, p. 121) (“He should then be made acquainted with the principles of the faith [*dat*], which are the oneness of God and the prohibition of idolatry”); id. 14:9 (“They make him acquainted with the principles of the faith [*dat*]”); *Hilkbot Rotseiah* 13:14 (MR, p. 169) (“all Israelites acknowledge God and believe in the essentials of our religion [*dat*]”); *Hilkbot Melakhim* 12:2 (MR, p. 225) (“neither the exact sequence of those events nor the details thereof constitute religious dogmas [*iqqarei ha-dat*]”). Note also *Hilkbot Teshuvah* 5:5 (“Not solely through acceptance of religion [*dat*] is this matter known”); *Hilkbot Rotseiah* 1:11 (The Sabbath and prohibition of idolatry are principles of the religion [*iqqarei ha-dat*]).

³⁶ *Hilkbot Yesodei ha-Torah* 1:1; 1:6 (MR, pp. 43, 44). See also *Hilkbot Qeri’at Shema* 1:2 (MR, p. 87): “The Unity of God, loving Him, and studying His words. This is the great and essential matter [*iqqar*] on which all depends.”

³⁷ See *Guide* II:13 (Pines, vol. 2, p. 282; italics in Pines) regarding belief in the eternity of God, which “is undoubtedly a basis of the Law of Moses our Master, peace be on him. And it is second to the basis that is the belief in the unity [of God]...It was Abraham our Father, peace be on him, who began to proclaim in public this opinion to which speculation had led him. For this reason, he made his proclamation in the Name of the Lord, God of the world [Gen. 21:35].” (In a footnote, Pines points out that “God of the world” is better translated “God of Eternity”; hence the proof it provides for the eternal pre-existence of God—*translator*.)

³⁸ In section II above, I noted a variant reading in *Hilkbot Sanhedrin* 24:10 that speaks of “*dat ha-emet*” rather than “*torat ha-emet*.” Given the present discussion, it appears that Maimonides’ intention there (and in *Hilkbot Sanhedrin* 25:2, cited above, n. 17) was similar to that in *Hilkbot Rotseiah* 13:14, namely, “the Torah is very solicitous for the lives of Israelites, whether of the wicked or of the righteous, since all Israelites acknowledge God and believe in the essentials of our religion [*iqqarei ha-dat*]” (MR, p. 169).

But whatever the “literal meaning” of the words “*dat ha-emet*,” the expression, at first glance, is meant to denote what was suggested above: the Torah and the commandments that G-d gave to His people Israel.

The wicked heathens will all accept the true religion

IV. The Flaw in This Interpretation

The meaning of the term “*dat ha-emet*” has important implications for Maimonides’ portrayal, in *Hilkebot Melakhim* 12:1, of the time of the Messiah. There he writes (MR, p. 224) that, in the Messiah’s time, “Israel will live in security among the wicked of the heathens....They will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*]³⁹. Given the foregoing

interpretation—that “*dat ha-emet*” connotes the Torah and commandments given by G-d to Israel—the statement in *Hilkebot Melakhim* must mean that in the time of the Messiah, all the nations will convert to Judaism,⁴⁰ becoming righteous converts⁴¹ who observe the Torah and its 613 commandments.⁴² (That is a position consistent with the view of Rabbeinu Nissim of Gerona (Ran, ca. 1310-ca. 1380), who wrote that “one of the great expectations related to the coming of our Messiah is the expectation [of universal conversion], as [the prophet] says (Zeph. 3:9): ‘For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent.’ By this he means that all the nations will turn to our faith, including the rules and details of the Torah, as we know them...for all the nations will turn to our faith, *in all the details and specifics of the commandments*, as has been said.”⁴³)

³⁹ It should be noted, however, that some versions of the text here read “they will all repent” (“*yahzeru bi-teshuvah kullam*,” instead of “*yahzeru kullam le-dat ha-emet*”); on that reading, the text does not refer to conversion. In addition, some read “the wicked of the world” (“*rish `ei olam*”) instead of “the wicked of the heathens” (“*rish `ei umot ha-olam*”); lit., “the wicked of the nations of the world”); on that reading, he may be speaking of the wicked within Israel and, again, the text would not be speaking of conversion. (See also the discourses of Rabbi Joshua Ibn Shuib, cited below, n. 79.) The textual variants require further inquiry.

⁴⁰ This is implied by the *gemara* in *Berakbot* 57b: “Our rabbis taught: One who sees a place from which idolatry was uprooted recites ‘Blessed [be God], Who has uprooted idolatry from our land; and as it has been uprooted from this place, so may it be uprooted from all places in Israel, and [may You] return the hearts of their worshippers to worship You.’ And outside the Land of Israel there is no need to say ‘return the hearts of their worshippers to worship You,’ for the majority there are gentiles. R. Simeon ben El’azar says: Even outside the Land of Israel one must say that, for they are destined to convert, as it is written, ‘then will I turn to the peoples a pure language.’”

⁴¹ As Maimonides puts it in *Hilkebot Issurei Bi’ab* 12:17, “They will convert and take upon themselves all of the Torah’s commandments” and they will be “like Israelites in all respects.”

However, the Lubavitcher Rebbe has already noted that “it is evident from his ensuing remarks in *Hilkebot Melakhim*, id., that Maimonides did not mean to say that they will convert and accept the religion of Israel.”⁴⁴ For after writing that the wicked of the nations “will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*],” he went on to write that they “will neither plunder nor destroy, and together **with** Israel earn a comfortable living in a legitimate way⁴⁵ — implying that they will live in peace together with Israel but not that they themselves will become part of Israel.⁴⁶

This seems to follow as well from Maimonides’ ensuing comment (*Hilkebot Melakhim* 12:4; MR, p. 225): “The sages and prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the world, or rule over the heathens, or be exalted by the nations.” While he may have written this to refute a mistaken view of what Messianic times would be like, the point that clearly emerges is that diverse nations will continue to exist.

To similar effect is *Hilkebot Teshuvah* 9:2 (MR, p. 83), stating that the King Messiah “will teach the whole of the Jewish people and instruct them in the way of G-d; and all nations will come to hear him, as it is said, “And at the end of days it shall come to pass that the mount of the Lord’s house shall be established as the top of the mountains’ (Micah 4:1, Isa. 2:2)”⁴⁷. [“and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.”]⁴⁸

Moreover, if Maimonides, in writing “they will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*],” meant

to say that all the gentiles would convert and take upon themselves all the commandments, he should have said so earlier, at the end of Chapter 11 of *Hilkebot Melakhim*, or later, at the end of Chapter 12, in the context of discussing the Messiah’s influence on the gentile nations and the changes in the world as a whole that will come about in Messianic times. It would seem to be more pertinent in that context than where he in fact included it, that is, in explaining the prophetic expectation that “Israel will live securely among the wicked of the heathens, who are likened to wolves and leopards.” Clearly, for the purposes of living securely together with the other nations it is not necessary that they all convert to Judaism!

Maimonides did not mean to say that they will all convert to the religion of Israel

In light of all the above it is reasonable to assume that when Maimonides says “they will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*],” he does not mean that all the nations of the world will convert to Judaism and that all the world’s populace will become a single nation. Accordingly, we must attempt to ascertain what he did mean, and just what religion is connoted by the *dat ha-emet* that is destined to be universally accepted.

V. A Novel Suggestion Regarding the Meaning of *Dat ha-emet*

I want to suggest that there is no need to interpret *dat ha-emet* (wherever it appears in

⁴⁴ *Liqqutei sibot*, part 23, p. 179, n. 76, q.v.

⁴⁵ MR’s translation. Alternatively (as above): “peacefully eat that which is permissible”.

⁴⁶ The rule is that a gentile who converts becomes part of Israel: “All gentiles, once they have converted and taken upon themselves all of the Torah’s commandments...are like Israelites in all respects” (*Hilkebot Issurei bi’ab* 12:17).

⁴⁷ Some versions read “etc.” following the *Mishneh Torah*’s extract from the biblical verse; that reading seems correct, for otherwise, the portion of the verse pertinent to the point being made—that is, the bracketed insert in the text here—would be omitted.

⁴⁸ Scripture continues with the following: “And many peoples shall go and say: ‘Come you and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between the nations and shall decide for many peoples...nations shall not life up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Maimonides' writings) as referring specifically to the Torah of Israel. Earlier in *Hilkhot Melakhim* (8:11-12; MR, p. 221), we find the following:

Moses our Teacher bequeathed the Law and commandments to Israel, as it is said, "an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4), and to those of other nations who are willing to be converted (to Judaism), as it is said, "One law and one ordinance shall be both for you, and for the resident alien" (Num. 15:16). But no coercion to accept the Law and commandments is practiced on those who are unwilling to do so.⁴⁹ Moreover, Moses our Teacher was commanded by G-d to compel all human beings⁵⁰ to accept the commandments enjoined upon the descendants of Noah. Anyone who does not accept them is put to death. He who does accept them is invariably styled a resident alien....A heathen who accepts the seven commandments and observes them scrupulously is a "righteous heathen," and will have a portion in the world to come, provided that he accepts them and performs them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Law and made known through Moses our Teacher that the observance thereof had been enjoined upon the descendants of Noah even before the Law was given.

What Maimonides says here implies that the other nations—the children of Noah, in all their ethnicities⁵¹ ("all human beings"; also referred to in English as "Noahides")—are subject to the law [*dat*] given by God to Moses. Accordingly, it is reasonable to say that the term "*dat ha-emet*" subsumes both "the

Torah of Israel" and the "Torah of the Noahides"⁵²—both of which are the subject of divine command in the one Torah given to us by Moses our teacher.

This proposed interpretation of *dat ha-emet* requires no modification in the meanings of the two words as discussed above, in Section III. We saw there that the words may signify that the religion is true rather than false or that it is a religion that shows us the true and upright way; the term may also have a dual meaning, blending both of the foregoing: "the religion truly given by G-d, which shows us the

"Dat ha-Emet" subsumes both the Torah of Israel and the Torah of the Noahides

path of truth." On any of those interpretations, the term applies just as much to the "Law of the children of Noah" as it does to the "Law of Israel." With respect to the first meaning—truth vs. falsehood—Maimonides, to be sure, declared that "Moses our Teacher bequeathed the Law and commandments [only] to Israel"; but we nevertheless believe with complete certainty that "Moses our Teacher was commanded by G-d to compel all human beings to accept the commandments enjoined upon the descendants of Noah"—that is, the true religion [*dat ha-emet*] in contrast to falsehood. Regarding the second meaning, Maimonides wrote that "A non-Jew who accepts the seven commandments and observes them scrupulously is a 'righteous gentile'⁵³ and will have a portion in the world to come"; it follows that the "Law of the children of Noah" constitutes "*dat ha-emet*" in that it is the upright way that a person should choose

⁴⁹ Maimonides' wording implies that it would be desirable if the gentiles converted, but that they are not compelled to do so. See, to similar effect, *Meshekh Hokhmah* on the Torah (*Parashat Ve-zot ha-berakhab*, Deut. 33:4).

⁵⁰ The Hebrew term is *kol ba'ei olam*, lit., "all who come into the world." See Maimonides' use of the term in *Hilkhot Shemittah ve-yovel* 13:13 (MR, p. 139) ("...every single individual from among the world's inhabitants [*kol ba'ei olam*]"; *Hilkhot Sanhedrin* 12:3 (MR, p. 195) ("all human beings [*kol ba'ei olam*] are fashioned after the pattern of the first man."

⁵¹ Note that in *Hilkhot Nedarim* 9:20, Maimonides says that "only members of other nations [i.e., non-Jews] are referred to as children of Noah."

and by means of which he will attain “the good that is set aside for the righteous, namely, the life of the world to come, which is...the good with no admixture of bad”⁵⁴—the good promised to “the man who has attained perfection in the ways of truth.”⁵⁵

And if we say, as I suggested above, that the words “*dat ha-emet*” refer primarily to the foundations of religion and the principles of belief, they, too, pertain to all the inhabitants of the world; for according to Maimonides’ teachings, belief in God and in the prophecy of Moses his servant are common to all mankind, Israelite and Noahide alike. As he says early in Chapter 9 of *Hilkebot Melakhim*, Noahides are commanded “not to engage in idolatry...and a Noahide is subject to capital punishment for any sort of idolatry for which a Jewish court may impose capital punishment on a Jew...and even though he is not put to death, it is forbidden in all respects.” He likewise says (*id.*, 8:11; *MR*, p. 211) that Noahides must undertake to perform their commandments “because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Law and made known through Moses our Teacher....”

Moreover, according to Maimonides [*Hilkebot Avodah zarah* 1:3; *MR*, p. 73], even before the Torah was given, Abraham our Father,

...having attained this knowledge [of the Creator]...began...to instruct the people that it was not right to serve any one but the God of the universe, to whom alone it was proper to bow down, offer up sacrifices and make libations, so that all human creatures might, in the future, know Him...He then began to proclaim to the whole world with great power and to instruct the people that the entire universe

had but one Creator and that Him it was right to worship. He went from city to city and from kingdom to kingdom...till he arrived in the land of Canaan. There, too, he proclaimed his message, as it is said, “And he called there on the name of the Lord, God of the universe” [Gen. 21:33].

Similarly, in the *Guide*, III:51 [Pines, vol. 2, p. 624] he wrote of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, “that the end of all their efforts was to spread the doctrine of *the unity of the Name in the world* and to guide people to love Him.” And with respect to the eternity of the Creator, he wrote (*Guide*, II:13; Pines, vol. 2, p. 282) that Abraham our Father, peace be upon him, “began to proclaim in public this opinion to which speculation had led him. For this reason, he made his proclamation in the Name of the Lord, God of the world” and (*id.*; Pines, vol. 2, p. 285) that “the purpose of every follower of the Law of Moses and Abraham our Father or of those who go the way of these two is to believe that there is nothing eternal in any way at all existing simultaneously with God.”⁵⁶

When a Noahide turns to belief in God he has turned to “Dat ha-Emet.”

In view of all the foregoing, one may say that there is but one “*dat ha-emet*,” and it is the religion given by God via his faithful prophet.⁵⁷ This religion is based on the belief in one God and in Law promulgated by Him. The religion comprises two systems of laws and rules: one, referred to as “Torah and commandments,” is for the children of Israel (and those who convert to Judaism); the other, referred to as “the seven commandments,” is for the children

⁵² See *Hilkebot Melakhim* 10:9: “He may become a righteous convert and accept all the commandments, or he may adhere to his own Law (*torah*), neither adding nor detracting from it.”

⁵³ See also *Hilkebot Issurei bi’ab* 14:7.

⁵⁴ *Hilkebot Teshuvah* 8:1; see also *id.* 8:6.

⁵⁵ *Id.* 8:6.

⁵⁶ See also *Guide*, II:17 (Pines, vol. 2, p. 296): “We the community of the followers of *Moses our Master and Abraham our Father*, may peace be upon them, believe....”

of Noah.⁵⁸ Accordingly, when a Noahide turns to belief in God and observance of his seven commandments, one may say that he has turned to “*dat ha-emet*.”⁵⁹

VI. Support for My Proposed Understanding of *Dat ha-emet*.

Support for the foregoing understanding of “*dat ha-emet*” can be found in Maimonides’ letter to Obadiah the Proselyte.⁶⁰ He there writes:

...Abraham our Father taught the people, opened their minds, and revealed to them the true faith [*dat ha-emet*] and the unity of God; he rejected the idols and abolished their adoration; he brought many children under the wings of the Divine Presence;⁶¹ he gave them counsel and advice, and ordered his sons and the members of his household after him to keep the ways of the Lord forever, as it is written, “For I have known him to the end that he may command his

children and his household, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice” (Gen. 18:19). Ever since then whoever adopts Judaism and confesses the unity of the Divine Name, as it is prescribed in the Torah, is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father,⁶² peace be with him. These men are Abraham’s household,⁶³ and he it is who converted them to righteousness.

In the same way as he converted his contemporaries through his words and teaching, he converts future generations through the testament he left to his children and household after him.⁶⁴

Now it is self-evident that Abraham did not instruct his contemporaries to observe the entire Torah of Israel, including all 613 commandments. As Maimonides himself wrote (*Hilkhot Avodah zarah* 1:3; MR, pp. 73-74), Abraham our Father “attained the way of truth, apprehended the correct line of

⁵⁷Note Maimonides’ wording in his introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*: “[In the first book, I have included all the commandments that are the principles of] the religion of Moses our Teacher.” Note as well that the commandments identified as the principles of “the religion of Moses our Teacher” are “the unity of His Name, may He be blessed, and the prohibition of idolatry”—both of which apply as well to gentiles.

⁵⁸Note Maimonides’ wording in *Hilkhot Melakhim* 9:1 (MR, pp. 221-222): “Six precepts were given to Adam.... An additional commandment was given to Noah: prohibition of (eating) a limb from a living animal.... In Egypt, Amram was charged to observe other precepts, until Moses came and the Law was completed through him.”

⁵⁹See *Hilkhot Melakhim* 10:9: “The rule is that they are not permitted to form a new religion or devise commandments for themselves on their own. Rather, [a gentile] must either become a righteous convert and take on all the commandments or else retain his own law [*torah*], neither adding to it nor detracting from it.” It seems clear, as discussed in the text, that when he “retains his own law” he is not creating a new religion; he is observing “*dat ha-emet*.”

⁶⁰MR, pp. 475-476. For Hebrew versions, see *Teshuvot ha-rambam* (ed. Freiman) (Tel-Aviv, 5694 [1933-34]), sec. 42; *Teshuvot ha-rambam* (pub. Meqitsei Nirdamim) (Jerusalem, 5720 [1959-60]), sec. 293, p. 549.

⁶¹Note that throughout the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides uses “entry under the wings of the Divine Presence” (*kenisah taḥat kanfei ha-shekhinah*) as a synonym for “conversion” (*geirut*). See *Hilkhot Issurei bi’ab* 13:4 (“When a gentile wishes to enter into the covenant, be sheltered under the wings of the Divine Presence, and take upon himself the yoke of the Law”); *Hilkhot De’ot* 6:4 (MR, p. 60) (“To love the proselyte who comes to take refuge beneath the wings of the *Shekhinah* [Divine Presence]”); *Hilkhot Melakhim* 8:5 (“If she takes upon herself to enter under the wings of the Divine Presence, she immerses for the purpose of conversion”). So, too, in *Sefer ha-mitsvot*, neg. comm. 252 (“and now she enters under the wings of the Divine Presence”). See also the passage from the letter to Obadiah quoted above, in Section III: “A man who left his father, his native land.... and enters under the wings of the Divine Presence.”

⁶²The wording “a disciple of Abraham our Father” is presumably borrowed from *Mishnah Avot* 5:19: “Anyone who possesses all three [of these traits] is of the disciples of Abraham our Father.... The disciples of Abraham our Father derive benefit in this world and gain a share in the world to come.” See *id.* and Maimonides’ *Commentary* ad loc.

⁶³See also Maimonides’ statement in his *Commentary on the Mishnah, Bikkurim* 1:4: “For Abraham is the father of all human beings, for he taught them the faith and the religion [*ba-emunah ve-ha-dat*].” In *Hilkhot Bikkurim* 4:3, however, he wrote that “It was said to Abraham, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’—he is the father of the entire world who enter under the wings of the Divine Presence.” See also above, n. 61, pointing out that in the *Mishneh Torah*, “entry under the wings of the Divine Presence” connotes “conversion.” The matter requires more extensive consideration than can be given here.

thought....Having attained this knowledge, he began to refute the inhabitants of Ur of the Chaldees, arguing with them and saying to them ‘the course you are following is not the way of truth....’ When the people flocked to him and questioned him regarding his assertions, he would instruct each one according to his capacity till he had brought him to the way of truth [*derekb ha-emet*].”

They will turn to correct belief in one God and the commandments given to the children of Noah

The only way to understand Maimonides’ statement in his letter to Obadiah that Abraham taught the people, opened their minds, “and revealed to them the true faith [*dat ha-emet*]” is to take it to mean that he taught them the foundations of the faith that apply to Noahides as well and (as Maimonides puts it in the passage quoted earlier), “the observance of which had been enjoined upon the descendants of Noah even before the Law was given.”

It may be argued, to be sure, that Maimonides’ terminology in his *Mishneh Torah* differs from that in his letters and responsa.⁶⁵

Still, it appears from the foregoing that he used the term “*dat ha-emet*” in the same sense in both corpora, and that the term is not limited to the Torah of Israel. It refers, rather, to the true religion (based on belief in God and denial of idolatry) that the Creator of the world gave to all its inhabitants.

VII. The Meaning of the Term in the Final Chapter of the *Mishneh Torah*

In view of all the foregoing, it appears that what Maimonides meant when he said, early in Chapter 12 of *Hilkebot Melakchim*, that in the days of the Messiah all the wicked of the nations would change for the better and “they will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*],” was that they will turn to the true and correct belief in one God, take upon themselves and diligently observe all the commandments given to the children of Noah through Moses acting as God’s messenger.⁶⁶

Indeed, earlier, at the end of Chapter 11 of *Hilkebot Melakchim* (11:4; MR, p. 224), Maimonides had already written that, in the time of the Messiah, all the nations will turn to belief in God and the entire world will serve God in unison, “as it is written ‘For then will I

⁶⁴ It may be noted, incidentally, that all of Maimonides’ comments about Abraham our Father (in this responsum and in the various passages cited above in the text and notes) pertain to our obligations as Jews. As Maimonides wrote in *Sefer ha-mitsvot*, pos. comm. 3: “He commanded us to love Him, may He be exalted, meaning that we should contemplate and apprehend His commandments and His actions, to the point that we apprehend Him and, in that apprehension, attain perfect bliss—and that is the love that is obligatory....And [the sages] have already said that this commandment includes as well an obligation to call all people to His service, may He be exalted, and to believe in Him—just as when you love a person, you direct your attention to him, praise him, and ask other people to love him as well. And, by way of analogy, when you truly love God to the extent you can attain apprehension of His truth, you will no doubt call on the deniers and fools to know the truth that you have known. As *Sifrei* says, ‘You shall love the Lord your God—you shall make Him beloved to people [taking ‘love’ as a causative verb] as did Abraham your father, as it is said (Gen. 12:5), ‘and the souls that they had gotten in Haran.’ In other words, just as Abraham, because he loved God—as Scripture says (Is. 41:8), “Abraham my friend [lit., ‘who loves me’]”—and attained great apprehension of Him, summoned people to believe on account of the power of his love, so shall you love Him to the point of summoning people to Him.”

⁶⁵ It should also be noted that in *Iggerot ha-rambam* [Maimonides’ epistles], ed. Rabbi Isaac Shilat (Jerusalem, 5747 [1986-87]), pp. 233 et seq., the text of this responsum reads “[Abraham] revealed to them the way of truth [*derekb ha-emet*], instead of ‘*dat ha-emet*].” See Kellner (above, n. 14).

⁶⁶ See also the lines in *Hilkebot Avodah zarah* 1:3 just quoted: “Abraham our Father would... instruct each one [of the Noahides] according to his capacity till he had brought him to the way of truth [*derekb ha-emet*].”

turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent' (Zeph. 3:9).⁶⁷ They will also believe in the Torah of Moses;⁶⁸ that given, they will certainly accept and fulfill their seven commandments, which "the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Law and made known through Moses our Teacher that the observance thereof had been enjoined upon the descendants of Noah even before the Law was given."⁶⁹

Accordingly, it is easy to see how "they will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*]" refers to

the continuation of the passage: "they will neither plunder nor destroy." Inasmuch as the wicked of the nations of the world will turn to belief in God and observance of the Noahide commandments (by which they had long since been bound)—commandments that include the prohibitions against murder and robbery—the Noahide laws that apply to resident aliens will assure us that "the world will not be corrupted"⁷⁰ and that, accordingly, "they will neither plunder nor destroy"; they will neither murder nor harm, and Israel will be able to dwell among them in security and tranquility.⁷¹

⁶⁷ See also the ensuing passage (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:5; MR, p. 226): "The one preoccupation of the whole world will be to know the Lord." "The whole world" (*kol ha-olam*) includes the non-Israelite nations as well (as is evident from the preceding *halakhah*, which states (MR, p. 225) "The sages and prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the world (*kol ha-olam*).")

⁶⁸ And see Maimonides' conclusion there (MR, p. 227): "But when the true King Messiah will appear...they will forthwith recant and realize that they have inherited naught but lies from their fathers, that their prophets and forebears led them astray."

⁶⁹ See also R. Jacob Hazan of London, *Ets hayyim – halakhot, pesaqim, u-minhagim*, part 3, Mosad ha-Rav Kook edition (Jerusalem, 5722 [1961-62]), *Hilkhot Mashiah ve-Avodat Beit ha-Miqdash*, which is based on Maimonides' *Hilkhot Melakhim*. "When Scripture says [Is. 11:6] 'And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,' it means that Israel will dwell securely with the wicked of the nations of the world, who are compared to the wolf and the leopard. They will repent (see above, n. 39) and will no longer rob or eat forbidden foods, as it is said, 'they shall not hurt nor destroy' [id., v. 9] and 'the lion shall eat straw like the ox' [id., v. 7]." The texts about neither hurting nor destroying and about eating straw provide the basis for "not eating forbidden foods," and the reference, accordingly, is to the prohibition of robbery and so forth; for it were referring to the prohibition of impure animals, the texts would not be pertinent to our subject.

⁷⁰ Maimonides' wording in *Hilkhot Melakhim* 10:11.

See also *Guide*, III:11 (above, n. 10; Pines, vol. 2, p. 441; italics in Pines): "For through cognition of the truth, enmity and hatred are removed and the inflicting of harm by people on one another is abolished. It holds out this promise, saying: *And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb...and the cow and the bear...and the sucking child shall play, and so on.* Then it gives the reason for this, saying that the cause of the abolition of the enmities, these discords, and these tyrannies, will be the knowledge that men will then have concerning the true reality of the deity. For it says: *They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* Know this."

⁷¹ This interpretation removes the basis for suggesting a possible inconsistency in Maimonides. *Hilkhot Issurei bi'ab* 13:15 states that "throughout the days of David and Solomon, the court accepted no converts—in David's time because [the convert] might have been motivated by fear, and in Solomon's time because [the convert] might have been motivated by the benefits and grandeur of the Israelite kingdom." For the same reason, it is said in the *gemara* (*Yevamot* 24b; *Avodah zarah* 3b) that converts will not be accepted in the time of the Messiah. Some commentaries have asked, how, in light of those statements, could Maimonides write that in the days of the Messiah "they will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*]" (see, e.g., *Responsa Divrei yetsiv* [above, n. 42]). My interpretation resolves the problem, for Maimonides simply did not mean that all nations would convert.

A further possible contradiction may be charged on the basis of Maimonides' ruling, in *Hilkhot Berakhot*, in accordance with Rashba's view of this matter. Rashba states, in connection with a *baraita* in *Berakhot*, that even outside the Land of Israel, we pray that God "return the hearts of their worshippers [that is, the false gods' worshippers, the heathen] to worship You"; and that the reason we do so is that they are destined to convert, as it is said, "For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language[, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent]" (see above, n. 40)—a seeming contradiction of the view just suggested. But the difficulty is easily resolved, for Maimonides means not that they will become *geirei tsedek* (converts) but that they will become *geirei toshan* (resident aliens), as he ruled in *Hilkhot Melakhim* 8:10 (MR, p. 221), "He who does accept them [the seven Noahide commandments] is invariably styled a resident alien [*ger toshan*]." (con't)

VIII. “Together With Israel [They Shall] Peacefully Eat That Which Is Permissible”

Given that when Maimonides wrote “they will all accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*]” he did not mean they will convert and become Jews in all respects,⁷² his ensuing statement that “together with Israel [they shall] peacefully eat that which is permissible” cannot mean that they will avoid eating the foods that are forbidden to Jews,⁷³ such as impure animals,

carcasses not properly slaughtered, etc.⁷⁴ (as some writers have understood)⁷⁵ or even foods forbidden to Noahides, such as limbs torn from live animals.⁷⁶ He means, rather, that the wicked among the nations, who had acted with force, regularly stealing, robbing, trampling, and plundering—actions forbidden by the Noahide commandments—will stop doing so and will eat, use, and derive benefit from only “that which is permitted” to them, in tranquility and “peacefully with Israel.”⁷⁷

⁷¹ (con’t) Yet another challenge might be raised on the basis of Rashi’s comment at *Avodah zarah* 24a, on “it is written ‘to serve Him with one consent.’” According to Rashi, “This means that there is no distinction between the Israelites and the nations of the world who serve Him; their service will be the same, in all His commandments.” But we can respond that Maimonides took the view that appears in Maharsha’s *Hiddushei aggadot*, namely, that “one consent” (*shekbem ehad*) refers to only “one portion of the commandments” [for *shekbem* as “portion,” see Gen. 48:22], “for inasmuch as converts will not be accepted in the time of the Messiah, it will be impossible for them to serve Him with all His commandments, like Israel; but the gentiles will serve Him with one part of the Torah, which it is possible for them to fulfill, and the prohibition of bestiality is included within that part, for the Noahides had already been commanded regarding it.” The issue requires broader treatment, going beyond the scope of this article.

⁷² While it is possible that some of them (and, over time, perhaps all of them) will convert, that is far from certain. It is one of those things about which Maimonides wrote “no one is in a position to know the details of this and similar things until they have come to pass.”

⁷³ A number of passages refer to a gentile not bound by the commandments being rewarded for observing them. For example, “a Noahide who wants to fulfill one of the other commandments of the Torah so as to reap its reward is not prevented from fulfilling it properly” (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 10:10) and “even though gentiles are not bound by the commandments, if they observe some of them they are given some reward” (Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah, Terumat* 3:9). That would seem to be the case as well with respect to the negative commandments regarding forbidden foods, for some later writers suggest a source for Maimonides’ view in *Midrash Qohelet rabbah* 1:1, which says that “in times to come, the Holy One blessed be He will issue a decree inviting all who have never eaten pig flesh to come and claim their reward, and many gentiles who have never in their lives eaten pig flesh will come to claim their reward.” Nevertheless, it is very unlikely that Maimonides meant to say that in the time of the Messiah, all gentiles will want to fulfill, at all times, all of the Torah’s commandments related to forbidden foods.

⁷⁴ Following the meaning of “that which is permitted” in *Hilkhot Ma’akhalot Asurot* (3:14; 9:16; 14:16; 15:28; 16:1, etc.)

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Rabbi Hayyim Karlinsky, “*Ha-hazir ‘ve-hetero’ la-atid la-vo*” [The pig and its future “permissibility”], in *Shanah be-shanah* (5732 [1971-72]), pp. 243 et seq. See there page 254.

⁷⁶ See *Hilkhot Melakhim*, beginning of Chapter 9.

⁷⁷ A contrary view is taken by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Sorotzkin in his book *Rinat yitshaq* on Isaiah and Jeremiah (Telz Yeshiva, Wycliffe OH, 5758 [1997-98]). In the time of Messiah, he writes, the gentiles will want to convert but we will not accept them, and their status, accordingly, will be that of “resident aliens [*geri toshav*] who will take upon themselves more than the seven Noahide commandments.” And given that a resident alien “who wants to take on, at the beginning of his residence, commandments in addition to the seven [Noahide commandments] is bound by that commitment and is obligated thereafter to observe them.” (*Mishnah Berurah, Bi’ur Halakha*, sec. 304 according to the view of the *Magen Avraham*), “They would [therefore] be forbidden [to eat] forbidden foods and would accordingly eat that which is permitted, like a Jew.

In the journal “*Pa’amei ya’aqon*” (published by the *Pa’amei ya’aqon* Institute, Benei-Beraq), no. 2 (Tevet, 5750 [1989-90]), at p. 31 it refers to “the *siyyum* of Maimonides by our master Rabbi Moses Judah Leib Landau, may he live long,” on 7 *Tevet* 5750 (January 4, 1990), in which he, too, explained that when Maimonides said “they will accept the true religion [*dat ha-emet*],” “he meant that they would observe the seven Noahide commandments.” He added, however, that Maimonides’ reference to their “eating that which is permitted” means “they will not eat a limb torn from a living animal”—a form of food forbidden to a Noahide. He had difficulty explaining how that interpretation could be connected with the idea of eating “together with Israel peacefully,” and engaged in a lengthy casuistic treatment of the matter. In my opinion, “eating that which is permitted” does not allude to forbidden foods (not to those forbidden to Jews nor even to those forbidden to Noahides); indeed, Maimonides was not referring specifically to eating. He used that word only because it was used in the biblical verse he was explicating, and what he meant was that they would acquire all their needed possessions in a permissible manner and not through violence or force; accordingly, all of it would be done peacefully with Israel.

Indeed, if that were not the case, how would “peace” be pertinent here—is it impossible to eat forbidden foods in “peace” and tranquility? Rather, it must mean “eating” in a way that will not impair tranquility; that is, in a way that does not involve theft or robbery, violence or murder—the opposite of how the wicked of the nations of the world act before the days of the Messiah, which was compared to the conduct of predatory animals.⁷⁸

Finally, Maimonides’ specific use of the verb that denotes “eating” (as in “they will eat that which is permitted,” instead of, say, “they will benefit from that which is permitted”) is attributable to his being engaged, in the passage in question, in explicating the Scriptural parable that speaks of “the lion eating straw, like the ox.”⁷⁹

IX. The Meaning of *Dat ha-emet* elsewhere in the *Mishneh Torah*

Having established that in *Hilkhot Melakhim*, Chapter 12, the term “*dat ha-emet*” necessarily includes both “the Torah of Israel” and “the Torah of the Noahides,” we may infer that this sense of the term is not merely local and that throughout the *Mishneh Torah*, the term “*dat ha-emet*” should be construed broadly and not understood as merely a synonym for “the

Torah of Israel.” Instead, it should be taken to include “the law of the Noahides” as well, for that, too, is within the rubric of the true religion given by the Creator of the world to all its inhabitants.

“Dat ha-Emet” should be construed broadly, not merely a synonym for “the Torah of Israel.”

One may ask why Maimonides chose to use wording that includes both the Law of Israel and the Law of the Noahides (when speaking of the strengthening of religion and so forth) in only a few particular contexts: *Hilkhot Hamets u-matsah* (Laws of Leaven and Matsah) *Hilkhot Matanot evyonim* (Laws of Gifts to the Poor) *Hilkhot Hagigah* (Laws of the Festival Offering) (twice) and *Hilkhot Melakhim* (Laws of Kings). The answer may well lie in the preceding discussion: most of the term’s appearances are in contexts pertaining in one way or another to the king of Israel and his role. And even though the king is primarily engaged in tending to the needs of the Jewish people,⁸⁰ he is also involved, according to Maimonides, in influencing the Noahides, promoting universal religious and ethical conduct; particularly the observance of their

⁷⁸ See *Hilkhot De`ot* 5:7: “He should not shout or scream...like beasts and animals...; rather, his speech should be peaceful.”

⁷⁹ A similar interpretation appears in the discourses of Rabbi Joshua Shuib (published by Lev Sameiah Institute, Jerusalem, 5752 [1991-92]), *Parashiyot Be-bar* and *Be-huqqotai*. Rabbi Shuib writes that according to Maimonides, “these verses in Isaiah that refer to the wolf dwelling with the lamb and the lion eating straw like the ox are a parable for the wicked of our people [! – see above, n. 39], who will repent so that we all serve God, etc. For the lion nowadays is an insolent predator, but he will then repent and turn to eat straw.” See also *Guide*, the passage cited above, n. 10.

⁸⁰ See *Hilkhot Melakhim* 3:5 (MR, p. 217): “The king...shall be occupied day and night with the study of the Law and the needs of Israel.”

seven commandments. This is also implied from the fact that Maimonides includes the duty “to compel all human beings to accept the commandments enjoined upon the descendants of Noah”⁸¹ (and all the laws related to Noahides) in *Hilkebot Melakhim*.⁸²

Let us now go back and review all the passages in *Mishneh Torah* listed at the outset. Foremost among them is *Hilkebot Melakhim* 4:10 (MR, p. 218). Maimonides there wrote, concerning the king of Israel, that, “His sole aim and thought should be to uplift the true religion [*dat ha-emet*], to fill the [entire] world with righteousness...” The king’s role, then, is defined as “to fill the entire world”—including all the nations—with truth and justice. Consistent with that, Maimonides added that the king’s interest should be in exalting “*dat ha-*

“Dat ha-Emet” alludes as well to the religion founded on the belief in the existence of God and in His oneness

emet,” which encompasses both “the Law of Israel” and “the Law of the Noahides,”⁸³ in as much as both are part of the true religion given by the Creator of the world to all its inhabitants.

We may add that in the same *halakhab*, Maimonides wrote “The prime reason for appointing a king was that he execute judgment and wage war...to fight the battles of

God.” Previously in *Hilkebot Melakhim* (7:15; MR, p. 220), he wrote that “Once [a warrior] has joined the ranks, he should put his reliance upon Him who is the hope of Israel, their Savior in time of trouble. He should know that he is fighting for the oneness of God.”⁸⁴ He seems here to mean that through that war, “the throne of Israel is established and the religion of truth is upheld.”⁸⁵ It follows that the king, whose interest is in exalting *dat ha-emet*, wages war for the sake of the oneness of God. And that, in turn, provides support for the idea, noted above, that the expression “*dat ha-emet*” alludes as well to the religion founded on “the great principle on which everything depends,” namely, the belief in the existence of God and in His oneness.

Similarly, in *Hilkebot Hagigab* 3:1 (MR, p. 147), Maimonides writes of the commandment to assemble the nation and read before them “chapters of the Law which shall keep them diligent in the commandments and strengthen them in the true religion [*dat ha-emet*].” Inasmuch as “it is the king who reads in their hearing” (id., 3:3; MR, p. 148), Maimonides uses a term well suited to the role of the king, that is, to strengthen “*dat ha-emet*”—including the commandments given by God to all the inhabitants of the world.

As Maimonides notes [id., 3:3], one of the passages read during the foregoing *haqbel* assembly is the *Shema*—a passage that “sets forth the duties of acknowledging the Unity of God, loving Him, and studying His words.

⁸¹ Some authorities (e.g. *Sifrei de-vei rav*, on *Sifrei Deuteronomy*, *Parasbat Ki-Teitsei*, Deut. 21:14) are of the opinion, that according to Maimonides, “Moses was not commanded to compel all human beings unless they want to dwell with us”; q.v.

⁸² With regard to the King Messiah as well—the pinnacle of perfection in sovereignty—Maimonides noted (in *Hilkebot Teshuvah*) that he would influence all the nations of the lands; see above, Section IV.

⁸³ See also *Liqqutei Shihot* cited above, n. 44.

⁸⁴ See also Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, positive commandment 191, toward the middle of the section: “and this priest is known as the one anointed for war [*meshuah milhamah*]...and he adds to these [admonitions] additional [ones] that will rouse the people to war and make them willing to endanger their lives to promote and preserve the religion of God and to take vengeance on the fools who lack uprightness of polity. In neg. comm. 58, he adds: “...that they not flee or retreat in time of battle. For in this matter [that is, by waging the war], it is possible to fulfill the true belief [*emunat ha-emet*].” And cf. *Guide*, III:41 (Pines, vol. 2, pp. 566-567; italics in Pines): “[Scripture has said (Deut. 23:15)] *Therefore shall thy camp be holy; that He see no unclean thing in thee, and so on...* Accordingly everyone should have in his mind that the camp is *like a Sanctuary of the Lord*, and not like the camps of the *Gentiles* destined only to destroy and do wrong and to harm the others and rob them of their property. On the contrary, our purpose is to make people apt to obey God and to introduce order into their circumstances.”

⁸⁵ Maimonides’ terminology in *Hilkebot Matanot Eryonim* 10:1; MR, p. 135.

This is the great and essential matter on which all depends” (*Hilkebot Qeri’at shema* 1:2;⁸⁶ MR, p. 87). This is consistent with what I have suggested, to the extent that “*dat ha-emet*” alludes as well to the true belief on which religion is grounded.

We can similarly explain Maimonides’ statement (*Hilkebot Matanot evyonim* 10:1; MR, p. 135) that “the throne of Israel is established and the religion of truth [*dat ha-emet*] is upheld only through charity.” “The throne of Israel” is a biblical term, found several times in the Prophets and the Writings;⁸⁷ in each case, context suggests it is referring to the royal throne.⁸⁸ Accordingly, when Maimonides writes that “the throne of Israel is established and the religion of truth [*dat ha-emet*] is upheld only through charity,” he means that the Kingdom of Israel is meant to exert influence over all the world’s inhabitants, to fight for the principle of God’s unity, to fill the world with justice (as the *Mishneh Torah* teaches), and is established only through charity.⁸⁹ Given all that, it is clear that the term “*dat ha-emet*” in this *halakbab* likewise refers to all aspects of the

true religion given by the Creator of the world to all the world’s inhabitants.

Israel is meant to exert influence over all the world’s inhabitants, to fight for God’s unity and to fill the world with justice

Moreover, Maimonides’ remarks in several places suggest that the commandment of charity discussed in *Hilkebot Matanot evyonim*, id., which is “one of the commandments that depend on the correctness of inter-human relationships,”⁹⁰ applies as well to Noahides. Maimonides does not include “gifts to the poor” among the commandments that are obligatory for Noahides⁹¹ [differing in that from Ran⁹²]; nevertheless, ethical conduct in general, and acts of kindness and charity in particular, do pertain to all inhabitants of the world.⁹³

This is alluded to in the wording of the *halakbab* itself, for Maimonides wrote that “charity is the sign of the righteous man, the

⁸⁶ See also *Hilkebot Qeri’at shema* 1:4 (MR, p. 88):

We have a tradition that when the patriarch Jacob, residing in Egypt, gathered his sons about him in his dying hour, he earnestly charged them concerning the Unity of God and the way of the Lord in which Abraham and his father Isaac had walked. He questioned them, saying to them, “Possibly, my sons, there is some one among you who is unworthy, and is not at one with me on the doctrine of the Unity of the Creator of the world, in the same way as our teacher Moses charged the people in the words ‘Lest there be among you a man or a woman...whose heart turns away this day’” (Deut. 29:17). They all answered, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

⁸⁷ 1 Kings 2:4; 8:20, 25; 9:5; 2 Kings 10:30; 15:12; 2 Chr. 6:10, 16. Similarly, 2 Sam. 3:10; Jer. 33:17; 1 Chr. 22:10.

⁸⁸ See 1 Kings 1:46.

⁸⁹ See 1 Kings 10:9: “...to set you on the throne of Israel...therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.”

⁹⁰ Maimonides’ wording in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, beginning of *Pe’ab*.

⁹¹ In *Hilkebot Melakhim* 10:10, Maimonides cites the commandment to give charity as one that does not bind Noahides but that “they are not prevented from properly performing...If [a Noahide] gave charity, it is accepted from him.”

⁹² In his novellae on *Sanhedrin* 56b, Ran states that “Noahides, too, are obligated to give charity, and we find that they are punished for not doing so, as it is written (Ezek. 16:49), ‘neither did she [Sodom] strengthen the hand of the poor and needy’...Noahides are thus bound...by two positive commandments, namely, charity and....”

soul with appropriate attributes and appropriate wisdom regarding belief in the Creator, may He be blessed, is certainly included in the world to come.”

seed of Abraham our Father,”⁹⁴ citing the verse [Gen. 18:19], “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him to do righteousness.” The reference to “his household after him” calls to mind the statement in *Hilkhot Avodah zarah* 1:3 [MR, p. 74] that the “thousands and tens of thousands” of Noahides whom Abraham influenced and

turned to the way of truth “were the persons referred to in the phrase ‘men of the house of Abraham,’”⁹⁵ in whom he instilled the qualities of generosity and charity.⁹⁶

It remains for us to explain Maimonides’ statement in *Hilkhot Hamets u-matsab* 7:4 (concerning the telling of the Exodus story at

³ In a familiar passage, a student of Maimonides writes in his teacher’s name about the place of righteous gentiles in the world to come (*Iggerot ha-rambam*, Leipzig edition, p. 23; Responsa *Maharam Alashkar*, sec. 117): “Concerning your question about the nations of the world, know that the Merciful One desires the heart, and matters follow a person’s inner intentions, and the true sages, peace be upon them, accordingly said: ‘Righteous gentiles have a share in the world to come’—as long as they apprehended what it is proper for them to apprehend with respect to knowledge of the Creator, may He be blessed, and they improved their souls with sound attributes; and there is no doubt that one who improved his soul with appropriate attributes and appropriate wisdom regarding belief in the Creator, may He be blessed, is certainly included in the world to come.”

Moreover, in *Hilkhot De’ot* 1:7 (MR, p. 53), Maimonides wrote that “As the Creator is called by these attributes, which constitute the middle path in which we are to walk, this path is called the Way of God and this is what the patriarch Abraham taught his children, as it is said, [‘For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children...’] (Gen. 18:19; OJPS trans. substituted for that in MR).” “Walking the middle path” is not a Noahide commandment, as is plain from the end of *Hilkhot De’ot* 1:5 (MR, p. 53), where Maimonides says that “we are bidden to walk in the middle paths which are the right and proper ways, as it is said, ‘and you shall walk in His ways’ (Deut. 28:9),” thereby indicating that walking the middle path is one of the 613 commandments issued to Israel (and see *Sefer ha-mitsvot*, pos. comm. 8). Nevertheless, the passage in *Hilkhot De’ot* 1:7 quoted above suggests that walking in God’s paths—that is, improving one’s attributes so as to follow the middle path—is something desirable for Noahides as well, for Scripture says “I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him...”; as explained below in the text, this includes the Noahides.

Finally, note Maimonides’ comment in *Hilkhot De’ot* 1:3 (MR, p. 52): “To cultivate either extreme in any class of dispositions is not the right course.... If a man finds that his nature tends or is disposed to one of these extremes, or if one has acquired and become habituated to it, he should turn back and improve, so as to walk in the way of good people, which is the right way.”

⁹⁴ See also *Hilkhot Aveil* 14:2 (MR, p. 214), referring to hospitality: “It is a practice which Abraham our Father instituted, and the act of kindness which he exercised. See also *Hilkhot Anadim* 9:8 (MR, p. 177): “The children of our father Abraham, however, i.e., the Israelites, upon whom the Holy One, blessed be He, bestowed the favor of the Law and laid upon them statutes and judgments, are merciful people who have mercy on all.” And see *Hilkhot Melakhim* 10:7 (end): “for only one who maintains his religion and his straight path is of the seed of Abraham.”

⁹⁵ This is evident as well from Maimonides’ statement in his letter to Obadiah the Proselyte (discussed above in section III) that “Abraham our Father...ordered his sons and the members of his household after him to keep the ways of the Lord forever, as it is written, ‘For I have known him to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice’ (Gen. 18:19). Ever since then whoever adopts Judaism and confesses the unity of the Divine Name, as it is prescribed in the Torah, is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father, peace be with him. These men are Abraham’s household, and he it is who converted them to righteousness” (MR, p. 475).

See also *Guide* III:24 (Pines, vol. 2, p. 502; italics in Pines): “Abraham our Father was the first to make known the belief in Unity, to establish prophecy, and to perpetuate this opinion and draw people to it. It says *For I have known him, to the end that he may command...*”

It may be noted as well that Maimonides’ words appear to be based on a clear statement in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 57b) that the verse “to the end that he may command” refers to the Noahides; see id.

⁹⁶ Taken together, the four texts (*Hilkhot De’ot*, *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah*, *Hilkhot Matanot evyonim*, and the letter to Obadiah the Proselyte) suggest that Maimonides interpreted the verse as follows: “that he may command” refers to Abraham our Father; “his children and his household after him” refers to all who follow in his path; “that they may keep the way of the Lord” refers to taking the middle path; and “to do righteousness and justice” refers to proper fulfillment of the commandment to give charity.

the Seder, which is to begin with shame and conclude with glory) that “he concludes with the true religion [*dat ha-emet*], that God drew us close to Him, distinguished us from those who stray, and drew us close to His Unity.” In this *halakbab*, Maimonides is not speaking of the king or of anything related to governance; still, it is fitting here as well that he use an expansive term encompassing the fundamentals of belief that pertain to all inhabitants of the world.

The reason is that Maimonides is here telling how “at the beginning our ancestors worshipped idols, but now God has drawn us close to His service.” In contrast to “our ancestors in the time of Terah and earlier,” we have been “drawn close to God, distinguished from those who stray.”

This being “drawn close” to the Unity of God began as early as the time of Abraham our Father,⁹⁷ as Maimonides says in *Hilkebot Avodah zarah* 1:3 (MR, pp. 73-74): “[Abraham our Father] attained the way of truth [*derekeh ha-emet*], apprehended the correct line of thought, and knew that there is one God, that He guides the celestial sphere and created everything, and that among all that exist, there is no god besides Him. He realized that men everywhere were in error....And so it went on with ever increasing vigor among Jacob’s children and their adherents till they became a nation that knew God.”

Since Maimonides, in the section of *Hilkebot Hamets and matsab* quoted above, was speaking of drawing close to God’s Unity in the time of Abraham our Father, he properly chose to use the term *dat ha-emet*, which is well suited to that period and alludes as well to the principles of the faith, the principle of all principles—the belief in His Unity, may He be blessed.⁹⁸

X. Summary and Conclusion

The expression “religion of truth” (“*dat ha-emet*”) refers to the “religion of Moses,” encompassing both “the Law of Israel” and the “Law of the Noahides”; both of them were “commanded by God in the Torah”—the one Torah—given to us through Moses our Teacher at Mount Sinai.

The words “*dat ha-emet*” mean “the religion truly given by God” or “the religion that shows us the way of truth” or (combining the two) “the religion truly given by God, which shows us the way of truth.” The words may also refer to the true belief, which is the foundation of religion.

Be that as it may, the expression “*dat ha-emet*” is used to describe the entire Torah and all the commandments revealed by God through Moses our Teacher (parts of which had already been given via the prophets who preceded the giving of the Torah at Sinai). That religion includes “the ways of truth” (*darkehei ha-emet*)

⁹⁷ This is not to say that Maimonides’ point here is limited to the beginning of Israel’s being drawn close to God, in Abraham’s time; he appears to refer to the continuation of that process in Moses’ time as well. In the *Commentary on the Mishnah (Pesahim 10:4)*, treating the same issue, Maimonides writes that “he begins with shame, telling how, before the coming of Abraham, we were apostates and idolaters, yet God chose us as His portion” That “choosing of us by God” clearly means to the choosing described in *Hilkebot Avodah zarah* 1:3 (MR, p. 74): “After Moses had begun to exercise his prophetic functions and Israel had been chosen by the Almighty as His heritage, He crowned them with precepts and showed them the way to worship Him.” That is the election for which Israel was destined.

⁹⁸ The passage in *Hilkebot Sanhedrin* discussed earlier, in section II, should then be read (consistent with the more frequently found version) “*torat ha-emet*.” Alternatively, we might say that the reason for specially honoring the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is that they believe in the principles of religion (consistent with Maimonides’ comment in *Hilkebot Rotsaiah*, cited above, n. 38). In view, however, of the foregoing conclusion that in *Mishneh Torah*, *dat ha-emet* alludes to the principles of belief that pertain to all, we may say that at present, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are those who constitute “the community of those who profess the Unity” (*Guide*, I:53, Pines, vol. 1, pp. 122; also I:75, Pines, vol. 1, p. 224) and are accordingly worthy of special deference.

discovered by Abraham our Father and proclaimed by him throughout the world as well as the commandments issued to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc.⁹⁹ and it is the

religion that was bolstered by the righteous kings of the House of David over the years and will be exalted by the King Messiah, may he speedily be revealed,¹⁰⁰ may that be God's will.

⁹⁹ In Maimonides' words (*Hilkhot Avodah zarah* 2:4): "The entire Torah, all the prophets, and everything commanded to the prophets from Adam to the end of the time."

¹⁰⁰ See *Hilkhot Parah adumah* 3:4. See also *Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin* 10:1.