Between 'Principles of Faith' and Pardes

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This paper discusses the terms 'principle of faith'/ 'principle' (*ikar*), 'foundation (*yesod*) of faith,' 'foundation of Torah, 'foundation of Judaism' and considers ways that the earliest Jewish philosophers used them in connection with the talmudic legend 'Four Entered the Orchard.' It demonstrates that Jewish philosophers in the Muslim period identified 'principles of faith' with a broad field of knowledge known as the 'Orchard' (*Pardes*).

Just as an 'Orchard' has no defined beginning or end, so these thinkers did not have one single, orderly, specific, finite list of principles. Rather, they saw the principles as domains that could be broadened and deepened; moreover, they could be reached from many directions and through various contexts. For those reasons the number of principles, their content, and their structure were determined by the context in which each thinker treated them, and by his purpose in each instance. R. Saadia Gaon discussed ten principles of faith in his commentary on *Shirat David* in correspondence with that chapter's interpretive needs, while in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* he divided the principles into ten chapters that enabled him to create a logical structure that would best resolve all the questions of faith that a Jew might have. Ibn Daud divided the second part of his book, *Emunah Rama*, into six principles to create a logical structure that would optimally respond to the problem of divine knowledge and human free choice. In the case of Maimonides, the principles in his Introduction to *Perek Helek* bear special significance: they are given halakhic status as the factors that determine who is part of the Jewish religion. Yet despite their importance, these are not the only principles of faith. Maimonides lists more of them in *Hilkhot yesodei ha-Torah* and other places. Hence, treatment of 'principles' by Jewish philosophers is a complex endeavor; it opens out into a large orchard of possibilities with many long and branching paths.