



I Believe

Topic

Mitzvot and Middot

Grade Level(s)

5th – 12th

Big Ideas

- Common beliefs hold communities together.
- People can be part of a community even when they agree with only some of the core beliefs of the community.

Relevant Vocabulary

עֲקָרֵי אֱמוּנָה (Ikkarei Emunah)	Principles of Faith
רמב"ם (Rambam)	The acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides
הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא (Ha'olam Haba)	The World to Come (Note that this is not necessarily Heaven.)

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Understand Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith
2. Develop their own set of principles that they believe
3. Try to find common ground with others based on their set of principles

Materials / Technology Needed

- Recording of an "I Believe" statement. Examples include:
 - [Martin Luther King, Jr., Nobel Price Acceptance Speech](#) ("I Believe" section begins at 6:23; text of speech can be found on the [Nobel Prize website](#))
 - [Just Like Pastrami](#) (Lee Shulman)
 - [I Believe](#) (Dolly Parton)
 - Remember to review all outside materials before playing them for students both for familiarity and to make sure they are appropriate for the particular audience.
- Rambam's 13 *Ikkarei Emunah*; see [here](#) for a concise version from the traditional daily liturgy.

Background for Teachers

When it comes to defining faith, Jewish thinkers have been trying for at least two millennia. The 10th-century thinker Saadia Gaon wrote an entire book, *Emunot ve'Deiot* (Beliefs and Ideas), about his ten principles of faith, with one chapter devoted to each principle. The 15th-century thinker Rabbi Joseph Albo proposed three main principles (God's existence,



I Believe

divine origin of the Torah, and divine reward and punishment) with secondary principles below them in his *Sefer ha'Ikkarim* (Book of Principles). Many others have weighed in about what the core principles of faith are.

Over time, the definition that gained the most traction is probably that of Rambam, who put forth [13 Ikkarei Emunah](#) in his commentary to Mishnah *Sanhedrin*. In a discussion about *Ha'olam Haba*,* Rambam puts forth the 13 principles that one should believe to be Jewish. While Rambam's *Ikkarei Emunah* did not gain immediate widespread acceptance, they eventually became accepted by large segments of the Jewish population. Many *siddurim* contain a [recitation of the major points](#) of Rambam's *Ikkarei Emunah* (stated as "I believe with complete faith..."), and the popular liturgical song [Yigdal](#) is a line-by-line restatement of the 13 Principles.

The advent of the Enlightenment in the 19th century renewed the debate about core principles, but the goal to define core Jewish principles remains.

*The tenth chapter of Mishnah *Sanhedrin* begins with a discussion about *Ha'olam Haba*, and the gemara then has a lengthy discussion about what exactly is *Ha'olam Haba*. While the idea of the world-to-come is ripe for deep discussion, it is a topic outside the purview of this activity.

Description of Activities

1. Play or recite an "I believe" statement for students. (See Materials Needed for examples.)
2. Ask students what the speaker, singer, etc. is trying to convey through their words.
3. Explain that Rambam (Maimonides) put forth 13 *Ikkarei Emunah* about Jewish belief nearly 1000 years ago. (See Background for Teacher for more information to include based on the ability of the students.)
4. Point out that many *siddurim* include Rambam's 13 *Ikkarei Emunah* as part of the post-service morning readings. There, the principles are recited as a series of statements that begin "I believe with complete faith..."
5. Share Rambam's 13 *Ikkarei Emunah*.
6. Possible Discussion Points:
 - a. Why do you think Rambam would feel a need to put forth/define 13 principles of faith?
 - b. How many of these principles do you think one needs to believe in order to be Jewish?
 - c. Which principle resonates most with you? Which one resonates least? Why?



I Believe

7. Students develop their own set of principles in which they believe. This should be done individually.
 - a. Depending on the level of the students, this step could be preceded by a short discussion about how being Jewish influences their principles and/or whether their Jewish principles are inextricable from the general principles by which they live their lives.
 - b. Multiple Intelligences Option: Students choose the medium by which they transmit their principles. Students might choose to compose a song, write a poem, develop a slide deck, record a how-to video, etc.
8. Students share their principles with classmates.
 - a. In pairs, students share their principles with each other and discuss what drives them. Students should take note of what principles they share in common. If there is time, students rotate and share with others.
 - b. If doing this remotely, send pairs of students into breakout rooms.
 - c. If doing this in person, students sit across from each other.
9. As a class, share which principles students found they have in common.
 - a. Create a private social post where students who are comfortable doing so can share their songs, decks, videos, etc.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Students make a list of “I believe” statements.
- Students represent one important principle in which they believe through their own chosen art form.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Students compare different translations of *Yigdal* and evaluate how the different translations demonstrate the principles of the translators. Some examples can be found at:
 - [Reform Judaism](#)
 - [Sefaria](#)
 - [Siddur on the Hill](#)
 - [Siddur Lev Shalem](#) (See page 58)
- Students examine the core beliefs of different modern movements and compare them to those of Rambam and of themselves.



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