The second command is the belief in [divine] unity, meaning, that we believe that the One who activates all existence and is its Primary Cause is one, and this is what He, may He be exalted, said, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Devarim 5:4).

After listing as the Torah's first commandment the belief in the Creator, Maimonides proceeds to point to the belief in divine unity, the oneness of God, as the second of the Torah's mitzvot. As is the case regarding the first mitzva, Maimonides returns to this obligation in the opening chapter of Mishneh Torah, where he discusses the doctrine of divine unity and writes, "Knowing this matter constitutes an affirmative command" (Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah 1:7). Maimonides' definition of this mitzva is subject to the same discrepancy that, as we discussed in the previous shiur, emerges from his discussions of the commandment to believe in a Primary Cause. Here, too, he speaks in Sefer Ha-mitzvot – at least according to the prevalent Hebrew translation – in terms of belief, whereas in Mishneh Torah he defines this obligation as requiring that one "know" the doctrine of divine unity. Once again, Rabbi Yosef Kapach, in his commentary to Mishneh Torah, makes note of the fact that the Arabic word employed by Maimonides in this context in Sefer Ha-mitzvot, itakad, is more precisely translated as "knowledge," rather than "belief." Hence, he concludes that Maimonides refers to the knowledge of this precept through philosophical thought, rather than a sort of blind faith or intuitive conviction.

Further evidence of the fact that Maimonides defines the mitzva as "knowledge" of this precept, rather than simple belief, may be drawn from the verse he cites as the Biblical origin of this mitzva. According to Maimonides, the Torah introduces this obligation with the famous verse, "Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokenu, Hashem Echad" – "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." In order to understand how Maimonides interpreted this verse as introducing this obligation, we must examine his comments in the Guide for the Perplexed (1:45), where he identifies the various possible meanings of the verb sh.m.a. ("hear"): "Sh.m.a is used homonymously. It signifies 'to hear,' and also 'to obey'… The verb also signifies 'to know' ('to understand')." It seems likely that in approaching the verse "Shema Yisrael," Maimonides understood shema in accordance with the third of the possible meanings he listed in the Guide, denoting knowledge or comprehension. Thus, he defines this mitzva as requiring that we not simply believe or accept the notion of God's oneness, but rather "know" it in the sense of comprehending its underlying rationale.

Indeed, in his presentation in Mishneh Torah, Maimonides not only codifies the basic obligation, but also elaborates on its philosophical underpinnings:
This Deity is one; He is not two or more than two, but rather one, whose oneness is like no other singular entity among all creatures on earth… Had there been multiple deities, they would have body and physical mass. For things subject to counting that are of equal existence differ from one another only in accidents that occur to bodies and physical entities. And if the Creator were a body or physical entity, He would have an end and limit, for there cannot be a body with no end. And anything whose body has an end and limit — its power has an end and limit. And our God, blessed be He, since His power is boundless and unending, for the sphere constantly turns, His power is not the power of a body. And since He is not a body, the accidents of bodies cannot occur to Him such that He could be distinct and separate from another. It is therefore impossible that He can be anything other than one.

In essence, Maimonides proves the oneness of God from the constancy of the galaxy's motion. This constancy proves God's omnipotence, that His might is not limited in time or substance. Unlimited power necessarily signifies incorporeality, and an entity that can be counted as one of several of its likeness is, by definition, corporeal. Said otherwise, divine omnipotence proves divine incorporeality, and divine incorporeality precludes the possibility of multiple divine beings.

That Maimonides delves into the philosophical basis of this belief — albeit in rudimentary terms, so that it could be understood by all — perhaps reflects the fact that the mitzva requires not merely the blind acceptance of this doctrine, but also understanding its rational basis. In this way one "knows" — rather than simply "believes" — the doctrine of divine unity.

Sources in Rabbinic Literature

Returning to Sefer Ha-mitzvot, Maimonides claims that there is ample evidence in the writings of Chazal to the notion of a separate obligation to accept the principle of God's unity:

You will find them [the Sages] saying in many Midrashim "in order to affirm the oneness of My Name"; "in order to affirm My oneness," and many like this. They mean in this statement that He indeed released us from slavery and performed for us the kindness and favors that He did on the condition of the belief in unity, for we are obligated in this.

Maimonides discovered many Midrashic passages to the effect that God freed Benei Yisrael from bondage and assisted them as He did primarily in order that they affirm the belief that He is one, in contradistinction to the polytheistic beliefs prevalent in the ancient world. These references in Rabbinic literature indicated to Maimonides that Chazal considered this belief one of the 613 mitzvot.

Unfortunately, as noted by Rabbi Yerucham Perlow (in his commentary to Saadia Gaon's poetic listing of the commandments) and Rabbi Kapach, these Midrashic passages are nowhere to be found in currently available texts. Although Maimonides attests to
having come across many such passages, these more recent scholars were unsuccessful in finding these sources.

Rabbi Menachem Krakowsky, in his work *Avodat Ha-melekh* (a commentary to the *Mada* section of *Mishneh Torah*), suggests a possible Talmudic source from a passage that appears in Masekhet Berakhot (6a) and Masekhet Chagiga (3a):

The Almighty said to Israel: You made Me a singular entity in the world, so I will make you a singular entity in the world. You made Me a singular entity in the world, as it says, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Devarim 5:4); and I will make you a singular entity in the world, as it says, "And who is like Your nation, Israel, a singular nation in the earth!" (Divrei Hayamim I 17:21).

Though this Talmudic passage falls short of providing actual proof of an obligation of belief introduced by the verse "Hear, O Israel," it at very least describes this declaration as achieving the goal of affirming God's singularity. Maimonides perhaps understood this to mean that "Hear, O Israel" introduces an obligation to subscribe to this doctrine.

"Oneness"

Rabbi J. David Bleich, in his work on Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith, *With Perfect Faith* (p. 107), clarifies that when Maimonides speaks of the "oneness" and "unity" of God, he refers to a concept far more profound than the negation of polytheism. Of course, the belief that God is one necessarily precludes the possibility of multiple divine beings; but this doctrine, which the Torah obligates us to accept, involves as well the precept that God is not a composite being. As Maimonides writes in *Mishneh Torah*, we must believe that God is one "whose oneness is like no other single entity among all creatures on earth." We must acknowledge not only that there is no other deity, but also that God's essence, unlike that of any creature in the universe, is inherently indivisible and cannot be conceived of as incorporating multiple components.

Maimonides spells out this point more clearly in postulating the belief in divine unity as the second of his thirteen principles of faith, in his *Commentary to the Mishna* (introduction to the tenth chapter of Masekhet Sanhedrin):

The second principle – the unity of God, meaning, that we believe that He who is the Primary Cause is one, and is not one pair, or one species, or one person that can be divided into many ones, and not one like a simple body that is numerically one, but that is subject to endless division. Rather, God is one in a oneness of which there is nothing similar. This second principle is indicated by what is said, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

Maimonides elaborates further on this philosophical doctrine in the first section of his *Guide for the Perplexed* (chapters 50-60), where he addresses the issue of divine attributes. His basic argument is that when an attribute is assigned to a given entity, that attribute – unless intended as simply a definition, which in any event is impossible in the case of God – is "superadded to its essence," it becomes part of that entity without comprising its essence. As Maimonides writes, "…for everything superadded to the
ence of an object joins it without forming part of its essential properties." For this reason, he asserts, one cannot ascribe any attributes to God, given the pristine "oneness" of the divine essence.

Amidst this discussion, we find several passages in which Maimonides expresses his definition of the concept of divine unity:

There cannot be any belief in the unity of God except by admitting that He is one simple substance, without any composition or plurality of elements; one from whatever side you view it, and by whatever test you examine it; not divisible into two parts in any way and by any cause, nor capable of any form of plurality either objectively or subjectively…

(Section 2, chapter 50)

Therefore we, who truly believe in the Unity of God, declare, that as we do not believe that some element is included in His essence by which He created the heavens, another by which He created the [four] elements, a third by which He created the ideals, in the same way we reject the idea that His essence contains an element by which He has power, another element by which He has will, and a third by which He has a knowledge of His creatures. On the contrary, He is a simple essence, without any additional element whatever…

(Section 2, chapter 53)

Thus, God is "one" not only in the sense of the exclusion of any other divine force, but also in the sense of the intrinsic indivisibility of His essence. Maimonides therefore concludes that one cannot speak affirmatively of a divine attribute. One can describe God only in terms of the actions He performs, or through negative attributes, by describing what He is not, rather than what He is.

**Divine Unity and Other Mitzvot**

Among the common issues that arise when studying *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* or other listings of the commandments is the seemingly superfluous inclusion of two closely-related *mitzvot*. This question has indeed been asked regarding this second *mitzva* in Maimonides' list, in two forms. Some writers wondered why the belief in divine unity is not subsumed under the first *mitzva* listed by Maimonides, the belief in God's existence. If one must believe in a Supreme Being, it stands to reason that this obligation necessarily entails as well the acknowledgment of this Being's singularity. It could easily be argued that the belief in multiple supreme beings *ipso facto* means the belief in no supreme beings; the very concept of a "God" presumably necessitates His unmatched strength and stature.

This answer is likely resolved in light of the point we made in the previous section, namely, that this obligation consists of more than the rejection of polytheism. God is "one" not only in the sense of unmatched divine power, but also in terms of His very essence and nature, as discussed above. One could, in theory, isolate this belief from the belief in God's very existence, and acknowledge the existence of a divine being that is not "one" in the sense of absolute indivisibility. The second *mitzva*, then, adds the
belief in the incorporeal nature – and hence indivisibility – of the divine essence, beyond
the recognition of God's very existence.

More obviously, perhaps, a careful reading of Maimonides' presentation of the
first *mitzva* clearly demonstrates that it demands the belief not in a "Supreme Being," but
rather in a Creator, a Primary Cause. One who reads only the first entry in *Sefer Ha-
mitzvot* might initially conclude that the universe could have, conceivably, been created
by multiple forces. The second *mitzva* is thus necessary to clarify that the Creator whose
existence is affirmed in the first *mitzva* is singular and unmatched.

The second, and even less compelling, challenge raised against the enumeration
of this *mitzva* involves the tenth *mitzvat asei* in Maimonides' list – the obligation of
keri'at shema (the *shema* recitation). The work *Sefer Ha-batim* cites an anonymous
scholar who questioned why Maimonides deemed divine unity and the *shema* recitation –
through which one affirms this belief – as worthy of separate entries in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot.*
(This issue is also discussed by Rabbi Yerucham Perlow, in his commentary to Saadia
Gaon's listing of the commandments, *mitzva* 2.) If the *shema* recitation serves as a verbal
expression of the belief in divine unity, why would Maimonides list it as a separate
obligation?

The answer, of course, is that Maimonides distinguishes between a constant,
deep-seated conviction, and a formal recitation. This point becomes especially clear
when we consider the context of this entry in the beginning of *Sefer Ha-mitzvot.* The first
four commandments Maimonides enumerates – belief in a Creator; belief in unity; love
of God; and fear of God – all involve overarching mindsets and/or goals that must remain
with a person at every moment throughout his life. The *shema* recitation, of course, is a
specific, ritualistic obligation that obtains only at specific periods. It should also be noted
that Maimonides extracts these two obligations from two different verses: the belief in
unity, as discussed, emerges from the verse of "*Shema Yisrael,*" whereas the requirement
to recite *shema* stems from a later verse – "*ve-dibarta bam*" ("you shall speak in them" –
Devarim 6:7; see *mitzvat asei* 10 in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*). Hence, these two *mitzvot*
justifiably earn two distinct entries in Maimonides' listing of the commandments.

**Sefer Ha-mitzvot and the Thirteen Principles**

Before concluding, a comment is perhaps in order regarding the relationship
between the first two commandments listed in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* and Maimonides' famous
enumeration of the "thirteen principles of faith" in his *Commentary to the Mishna.*
Although in his *Commentary* Maimonides lists thirteen beliefs that a Jew must accept,
only the first two principles – the belief in a Creator, and the belief in divine unity –
earned entries in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot.* True, it may be argued that at least two other of the
thirteen principles are indirectly referred to in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot.* As we have seen, the
belief in divine unity, as Maimonides presents it, is inextricably bound with the belief in
divine incorporeality, the third of the thirteen principles; recall that in *Mishneh Torah*
Maimonides proved the oneness of God from the fact that only a corporal being can be
counted as one of any number of similar entities. And he lists as the 172nd *mitzvat asei*
the command to obey the instructions of a prophet, which of course requires the belief in
prophecy – the sixth of the thirteen principles. But in any event, the question arises, if, as
Maimonides very clearly establishes in his *Commentary to the Mishna* (and reaffirms in
later writings; see Hilkhot Teshuva 3:6-9, and Treatise on Resurrection), a Jew must believe in these thirteen fundamental principles, why does he not afford them entries in Sefer Ha-mitzvot?

For one thing, as we discussed, it is likely that Maimonides does not include in his list any commandments to "believe" at all. According to many scholars, the first two mitzvot require "knowing" the doctrines of God's existence and His oneness, which presumably refers to inquiry and contemplation, rather than simple belief. As we saw, Maimonides may have accepted the position of the Behag, as understood by Nachmanides, that beliefs cannot be included in the list of commands, since belief must precede, and is in fact a prerequisite for, the divine commands. The first two mitzvot enumerated by Maimonides obligate the Jew not to believe, but to strive for "knowledge," to the point where these two fundamental tenets are perceived and recognized as incontrovertible facts, rather than belief.

If so, then we can easily distinguish between the first two commandments and the thirteen principles of faith. Maimonides demands belief in all thirteen principles as a necessary prerequisite to Torah observance; they therefore cannot be categorized as commands. The first two commandments, which Maimonides extracts from the verses, "I am the Lord your God" and "Hear, O Israel, the Lord…is one," respectively, require arriving at the "knowledge" of these axioms, beyond mere faith.

In truth, however, there is a far more obvious reason why Maimonides does not include all thirteen principles of faith in Sefer Ha-mitzvot. In the second of the fourteen rules (commonly known as shorashim, based on Ibn Tibon's Hebrew translation) that Maimonides establishes as his system for determining the 613 commandments, he clarifies that this list includes only those commands to which the Torah refers explicitly. The scores of laws that are extracted through the process of rabbinic exegesis, a system of interpretation based upon the shelosh esrei midot (thirteen exegetical tools), do not earn inclusion in this list. According to Maimonides, when the Talmud speaks of 613 Biblical mitzvot, it refers to commands that emerge clearly and immediately from the text, not those that are inferred only through complex, intricate textual analysis.

It is plainly obvious, then, why Maimonides does not list all thirteen principles of faith as commandments in Sefer Ha-mitzvot. He lists only those two principles – belief in God and in divine unity – that are, at least in his view, clearly stated in the Torah. Thus, the absence of explicit mention of the other eleven articles of faith in Sefer Ha-mitzvot in no way diminishes from their importance or stature as required theological tenets, and certainly gives no indication of any change in Maimonides' attitude towards Jewish dogma. As he writes in presenting the second rule in the introduction to Sefer Ha-mitzvot, there are many full-fledged Torah laws, which Halakha treats with all the severities entailed in Biblical obligations, as opposed to rabbinic enactments, that he does not include in Sefer Ha-mitzvot because they are not presented explicitly in the Torah. Just as these laws are of no less importance and stature than those that earned inclusion in Maimonides' listing of the commandments, so is the acceptance of all thirteen principles of faith, and not merely the first two, required of all Jews as the basic tenets of Jewish dogma.