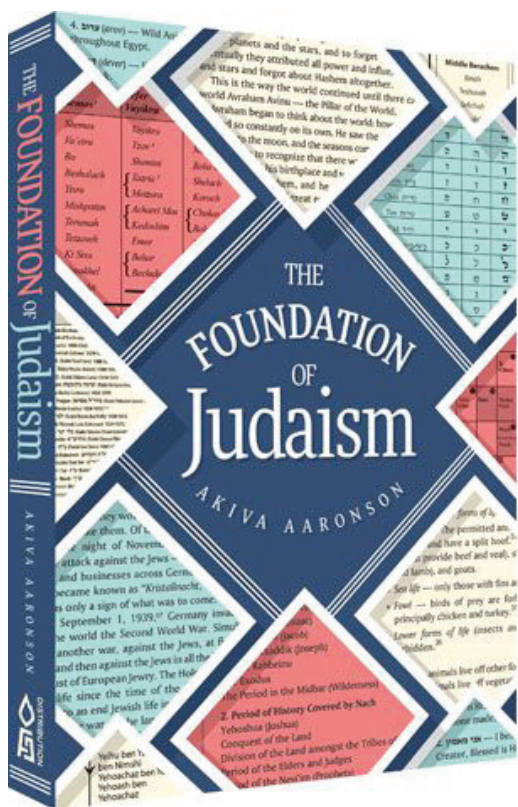




The Foundation of Judaism

By Rabbi Akiva Aaronson

The Written Word features reviews and synopses of newly-released English language seforim, books and biographies. Each week, Rabbi Chaim Serebrowski selects and reviews a recently published volume, sharing with Yated readers information about its content and the background of its author. Suggestions may be submitted by authors, publishers and distributors to thewrittenword@yated.com.



Book is primarily a work of history, *The Foundation of Judaism* is largely a foundational work.

The allure of *The Foundation of Judaism* lies in its concise, manageable format. Encyclopedic volumes can overwhelm laymen with their expansive size and heavy content, but *The Foundation of Judaism's* soft-covered 200 pages presents itself as a book that anyone can pick up and appreciate. The colorful cover and interactive charts draw readers to explore the content inside, and the unassuming book can become the tool that gives readers a taste of the crucial knowledge of Judaism, or a refresher for those already proficient in the principles of *Yiddishkeit*.

Despite the modest size and easy bright appearance of the book, *The Foundation of Judaism* contains a wide range of lessons and facts that are as interesting as they are important. The content includes the elementary tenets of *emunah* and basic *halacha*, as well as a diverse array of practical tidbits and factoids that can be useful for any *frum* person. As Rabbi Aaronson explains in his introduction to the book, his goal was to present a foundation, a platform upon which to grow. The information is the groundwork, the basics. Readers can use it as a catalyst to begin building their understanding or as a framework to organize their knowledge in a cohesive manner.

The information in the book is presented in seven primary chapters. The first chapter outlines the basic principles of *emunah*, beginning with the lineage of the Jewish people, *Mattan Torah*, the 13 *Ikkrim*, and the 6 *Zechiros*. This serves as an introduction for anyone seeking a window into Jewish understanding.

In the second chapter, Rabbi Aaronson presents key aspects of Jewish history, from the creation of the world and the first generations of mankind until the *geulah sheleimah*, touching on the *avos*, the periods of the *Botei Mikdosh*, and the various exiles that the Jewish people suffered through, both in Sephardi and Ashkenazi lands. Included are maps and charts that depict details in a clear and understandable manner.

The third chapter contains an introduction to *Lashon Hakodesh*. The chapter begins with an overview of the significance of the letters in written and oral form, followed by charts that can allow newcomers to learn the *Alef-Bais* in the various forms (*Ashuris*, print, *Rashi*, and script) and the *nekudos*.

The next chapter covers *tefillah*. Be-

ginning with the origins of *tefillah*, Rabbi Aaronson depicts the nuances of the daily *tefillos*, our obligations in *tefillah*, and the additions to *tefillah* at various times of the year. This chapter is graced with a number of graphs that outline the construction of *Shemoneh Esrei* and of each *tefillah*, as well as a chart of the additions to *tefillah* that are based on the calendar.

After covering *tefillah*, the book delves into the core of Torah study. Rabbi Aaronson lays out the differences between the Oral and the Written Torah, and an explanation of *Nevi'im* and *Kesuvim*. This chapter also contains an overview of how various *parshiyos* align with specific calendar points, and an outline and author of each *sefer* of *Nach*.

Chapter 6 portrays the transmission of Torah from generation to generation, outlining the *gedolei Torah* of each era. Rabbi Aaronson also included charts with a timeline of years of many of the primary *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, a handy reference on its own.

The seventh, and final, chapter gives readers an overview of the *halachos* of three fundamental areas: the Jewish calendar, *Shabbos*, and *kashrus*. These sections relay the most elementary concepts in a clear, understandable manner, allowing even non-affiliated Jews to get a grasp of some of the most central areas of Jewish life.

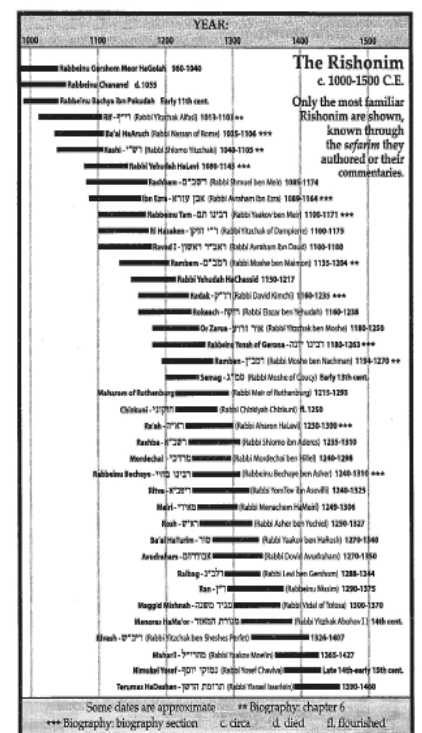
Each chapter of *The Foundations of Judaism* concludes with a synopsis of the main points, facilitating easy review. Additionally, numerous footnotes throughout the book add another dynamic to the subjects, with more extensive and noteworthy information, yet without impeding the clarity.

As an appendix to the book, Rabbi Aaronson wrote a section of biographies, highlighting the history of 23 *gedolei Rishonim* and *Acharonim*. This entertaining edition adds depth to our history for newcomers, and contains a plethora of information that many *yeshivaleit* may not know. It is a fitting conclusion to an informative book.

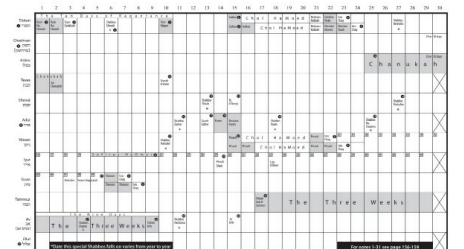
Included in the book is a laminated, double-sided card containing two of the most crucial charts referred to in the book. One side depicts the Jewish year, with the dates of each *Yom Tov* clearly marked. The other side contains an outline of the daily *Shemoneh Esrei*, pointing out specific changes and additions for different periods of the year.

While *The Foundation of Judaism* can be a critical asset to any *baal teshuvah*, it can be a valuable resource for *frum*-from-birth individuals as well, categorizing many fundamentals about *Yiddishkeit* in one, short volume. Additionally, schools in certain circles may find such a book helpful to supplement their curriculum, to give middle- or high-school children a foundation upon which to build their Jewish lives, presented

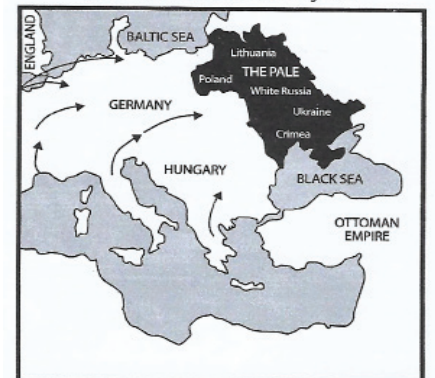
142 / The Transmission of Torah



The Jewish Year



Migration of Ashkenazi Jews over the last twelve hundred years



Most Russian Jews were forced to live in the Pale of Settlement. Between 1835-1914 over four million Jews lived there.

in an easy-to-read, bright volume.

The Foundation of Judaism is available in seforim stores or at Feldheim.com. More information can be obtained from the author's own website, akiva-aaronson.com, which also contains free downloads of useful material.