



Congregation
Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem
TIFERETH JERUSALEM • BETH DAVID
BETH YITZCHOK • KEHAL YESHURIN

The Great Jewish Books Course: Maimonides

Rabbi Eric Grossman

Lecture Outline

1. Maimonides the Man
 - a. A Contemporary Window
 - b. A Brief Biography
2. Excursus on Great Books
3. The Pre-Maimonidean World
4. The Maimonidean Revolution
5. The Commentary on the Mishna: A Very Good Book
 - a. A Principled Stance
6. From 13 to 14: The *Yad HaChazakah*
 - a. Order from Chaos
 - b. A New World Order and Foundation
 - c. The Golden Rule Revisited
7. Maimonides and Your-monides
 - a. The Many Maimonideses
 - b. Maimonides as Mirror
8. “And the Wise will be Silent”
 - a. Maimonides and the Esoteric Tradition
9. The Guide of the Perplexed
10. The Prophet, The Philosopher, and The Lawgiver
 - a. Maimonides Midrash on the Origin of the Law

Biography Timeline (Most Dates Approximate)

- 1135** Born in Cordoba, Spain
- 1148** Flees Cordoba and wanders in Spain, settles in Fez, Morocco
- 1165** Publishes **Commentary on the Mishnah** he began at age 23
- 1166** Travels to Israel
- 1168** Settles in Fustat, Egypt
- 1170** Begins compiling **Mishneh Torah** (completed in 1180)
- 1171** Appointed the Nagid of the Egyptian Jewish community
Brother David drowns when his ship sinks en route to India
Takes up medicine, appointed court physician to the Grand Vizier Alfadhil
- 1190** Writes **Guide of the Perplexed**
- 1204** Dies and is buried in Tiberias



משה ברוב מיטנע



Summary of the 13 Principles

- 1 The Belief in the existence of the Creator, be He Blessed, who is perfect in every manner of existence and is the Primary Cause of all that exists.
- 2 The belief in God's absolute and unparalleled unity.
- 3 The belief in God's incorporeality, nor that He will be affected by any physical occurrences, such as movement, or rest, or dwelling.
- 4 The belief in God's priority to all other beings and creation *ex nihilo*.
- 5 The imperative to worship Him exclusively and no foreign false gods.
- 6 The belief that God communicates with humans through prophecy.
- 7 The belief that the prophecy of Moses our teacher has priority.
- 8 The belief in the divine origin of the Torah.
- 9 The belief in the immutability of the Torah.
- 10 The belief in divine omniscience and providence.
- 11 The belief in divine reward and retribution.
- 12 The belief in the arrival of the Messiah and the messianic era.
- 13 The belief in the resurrection of the dead.

The Great Books: Maimonides

Sources

1. **Mishneh Torah, Overview of Mishneh Torah Contents 1:1-6**

I have seen fit to divide this work into fourteen books.

FIRST BOOK. I include in it all the precepts which constitute the very essence and principle of the faith taught by Moses... I have called this book: the Book of Knowledge.

SECOND BOOK. I include in it all the precepts which are to be continuously observed, and which we have been bidden to keep, in order that we may always love God and be ever mindful of Him... I have called this book: The Book of Love.

THIRD BOOK. I include therein all the precepts to be fulfilled at stated periods, such as Sabbaths and Festivals. I have called this book: The Book of Seasons.

FOURTH BOOK. I include therein the precepts that refer to marital relations... I have called this book: The Book of Women.

משנה תורה, תוכן החיבור א':א'-ו'

וראיתי לחלק חיבור זה לארבעה עשר ספרים:

ספר ראשון. אכלול בו כל המצוות שהן עיקר דת משה רבנו... וקראתי שם ספר זה ספר המדע.

ספר שני. אכלול בו המצוות שהן תדירות, שנצטוונו בהם כדי לאהוב את המקום ולזכרו תמיד... וקראתי שם ספר זה ספר אהבה.

ספר שלישי. אכלול בו כל המצוות שהן בזמנים ידועים – כגון שבת, ומועדות. וקראתי שם ספר זה ספר זמנים.

ספר רביעי. אכלול בו המצוות של בעילה – כגון קידושין וגירושין, וייבום וחליצה. וקראתי שם ספר זה ספר נשים.

2. **Mishneh Torah, Foundations of the Torah**
1:1-5

משנה תורה, הלכות יסודי התורה
א' א'-ה'

(1) The foundation of foundations and firmest pillar of all wisdom is, To know that there is a First Being, that He caused all beings to be, and that all beings from heaven and earth, and from between them, could not be save for the truth of His Own Being.

(א) יסוד היסודות ועמוד התקמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון. והוא ממציא כל נמצא. וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו:

(2) Thus, supposing that He is not, none else could have been called into existence.

(ב) ואם יעלה על הדעת שהוא אינו מצוי אין דבר אחר יכול להמציאות:

(3) Conversely, supposing all other beings, save He alone, non-existent, His Being alone remains; for, He does not cease to be because of their non-existence, as all beings are dependent upon Him, but He, blessed is He! is not dependent upon them nor upon a single one of them; therefore, the truth of His Being is incomparable to the truth of any other individual being.

(ג) ואם יעלה על הדעת שאין כל הנמצאים מלבדו מצויים הוא לבדו יהיה מצוי. ולא יבטל הוא לבטולם. שכל הנמצאים צריכין לו והוא פרוף הוא אינו צריך להם ולא לאחד מהם. לפיכך אין אמתתו כאמתת אחד מהם:

(4) This is as the prophet says: "But the Lord God is the true God" (Jer. 10.10); He alone is the Truth, and no other being possesses a truth similar to His Truth, even as the Torah says: "There is none other like unto Him" (Deut. 4.39), meaning, there is no other true being, besides Him, like unto Him.

(ד) הוא שהנביא אומר (ירמיה י') "וה' אלהים אמת". הוא לבדו האמת ואין לאחר אמת כאמתתו. והוא שהתורה אומרת (דברים ד לה) "אין עוד מלבדו". כלומר אין שם מצוי אמת מלבדו כמותו:

(5) This Being is the God of the universe, Lord of the whole earth, who guides the sphere with an infinite force, a force of perpetual motion; for the sphere revolves continuously, which would be impossible without some one causing it to revolve; and it is He, blessed is He! Who causes it to revolve without hand and without body.

(ה) המצוי הזה הוא אלהי העולם אדון כל הארץ. והוא המנהיג הגלגל בכח שאין לו קץ ותכלית. בכח שאין לו הפסק. שהגלגל סובב תמיד ואי אפשר שישב בלא מסבב. והוא פרוף הוא המסבב אותו בלא יד ובלא גוף:

3. Mishneh Torah, Human Dispositions 2:2

משנה תורה, הלכות דעות ב' ב'

TEMPER He who is of a hot temperment should be taught to demean himself this wise: If he be smitten and cursed, he must not feel the insult at all. and follow this way a long time until anger will be completely rooted out from his heart.

מי שהוא בעל חמה אומרים לו להנהיג עצמו שאם הבה וקלל לא ירגיש קלל. וילך בדרך זו זמן מרבה עד שיתעקר החמה מלבו.

PRIDE/HONOR And he who was arrogant should accustom himself to a life of extreme self-abasement by occupying the lowermost seat of everybody, and dress in such rags which shame those that wear them, and do such in like matters until the haughtiness of his heart will be rooted out of him, **when he will return to the middle-way, which is the good way.**

ואם הנה גבה לב ינהיג עצמו בבזיון הרבה וישב למטה מן הכל וילבש בלויי סחבות המבזות את לובשיהם וכיוצא בדרך אלו עד שיעקר גבה הלב ממנו ויתזר לדרך האמצעית שהוא דרך הטובה.

And this line he should follow in all the rest of his tendencies... until he may return to **the good way, which is the middle-standard in each and every tendency.**

ולקשיחזר לדרך האמצעית ילך בה כל ימיו. ועל קו זה יעשה בשאר כל הדעות... עד שיתזר בו לדרך הטובה והיא מדה בינונית שפכל דעה ודעה:

4. Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics 4:4,5

PRIDE/HONOR Where there is excess and defect, **there is also an intermediate**; now men desire honour both more than they should and less; therefore it is possible also to do so as one should; at all events this is **the state of character that is praised, being an unnamed mean** in respect of honour. Relatively to ambition it seems to be unambitiousness, and relatively to unambitiousness it seems to be ambition. This appears to be *true of the other virtues also.*

TEMPER Good temper is a mean with respect to anger...The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised.

5. **Guide for the Perplexed, Introduction, Prefatory Remarks 7**

If an author were to explain these principles in writing, it would be equal to expounding them unto thousands of men. For this reason the prophets treat these subjects in figures, and our Sages, imitating the method of Scripture, speak of them in metaphors and allegories...

We are like those who, though beholding frequent flashes of lightning, still find themselves in the thickest darkness of the night. On some the lightning flashes in rapid succession, and they seem to be in continuous light, and their night is as clear as the day. This was the degree of prophetic excellence attained by (Moses) the greatest of prophets...

6. **Guide for the Perplexed, Introduction, Prefatory Remarks 9**

...the words of the holy Law are pearls, and the literal acceptance of a figure is of no value in itself. They compare the hidden meaning included in the literal sense of the simile to a pearl lost in a dark room, which is full of furniture. It is certain that the pearl is in the room, but the man can neither see it nor know where it lies. It is just as if the pearl were no longer in his possession, for, as has been stated, it affords him no benefit whatever until he kindles a light...

The wise king said, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in vessels of silver" (Prov. 25:11)...The word *maskiyot*... denotes "filigree network"--i.e., things in which there are very small apertures, such as are frequently wrought by silversmiths...



7. **Guide for the Perplexed, Part 1 15:3**

The verb *nazab* has several meanings: in some instances it signifies "to stand or "to place oneself," as "And his sister stood (*va-tetazzab*) afar off" (Exod. 2:4); "The kings of the earth set themselves" (*iyazzebu*) (Ps. 2:2); "They came out and stood" (*nizzabim*) (Num. 16:27). In other instances it denotes continuance and permanence, as, "Thy word is established (*nizzab*) in Heaven" (Ps. 119:89), i.e., it remains for ever.

Whenever this term is applied to God it must be understood in the latter sense, as, "And, behold, the Lord stood (*nizzab*) upon it" (Gen. 28:13), i.e., appeared as eternal and everlasting "upon it," namely, upon the ladder, the upper end of which reached to heaven, while the lower end touched the earth. This ladder all may climb up who wish to do so, and they must ultimately attain to a knowledge of Him who is above the summit of the ladder, because He remains upon it permanently. It must be well understood that the term "upon it" is employed by me in harmony with this metaphor. "Angels of God" who were going up represent the prophets. That the term "angel" was applied to prophets may clearly be seen in the following passages: "He sent an angel" (Num. 20:16); "And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim" (Judges 2:1). How suggestive, too, is the expression "ascending and descending on it"! The ascent is mentioned before the descent, inasmuch as the "ascending" and arriving at a certain height of the ladder precedes the "descending," i.e., the application of the knowledge acquired in the ascent for the training and instruction of mankind. This application is termed "descent," in accordance with our explanation of the term *yarad* (chapter x.).



8. **Mishneh Torah, Foreign Worship and Customs of the Nations 1:2**

משנה תורה, הלכות עבודה זרה וחוקות הגויים א'ב'

And, on this path the world continued its course of circuitry until the birth of the firmest **pillar** of the world, Abraham our father.

...ועל דרך זה היתה העולם הולך ומתגלגל עד שנולד עמידו של עולם והוא אברהם אבינו:

9. **Mishneh Torah, Foreign Worship and Customs of the Nations 1:3**

As soon as this giant was weaned he commenced to busy his mind, in his infancy he commenced to think by day and by night, and would encounter this enigma: How is it possible that this planet should continuously be in motion and have no leader—and who, indeed, causes it to revolve, it being impossible that it should revolve itself?

After he came to this comprehension and knowledge he started to confute the sons of Ur of the Chaldeans, and to organize disputations with them.

When the people who congregated about him asked him concerning his preachments, he replied by imparting knowledge to each and every one according to his mentality, to the end that he was able to turn him to the path of truth, until there congregated about him thousands, even tens of thousands...

So did the movement advance intensely among the sons of Jacob and their followers that the world saw a God-knowing nation called into existence, until Israel spent a long time in Egypt, when they turned to be instructed in their practice and to worship the stars as they did...

In but a short space of time, the root which Abraham had planted would have been uprooted, and the sons of Jacob would have turned to the universal error and wandering; save because of the Lord's love for us, and because He observes the oath of covenant with Abraham our father, He appointed Moses our Master lord of all prophets, and made him His messenger. After Moses our Master was endowed with prophecy and the Lord chose Israel as an inheritance, He crowned them with commandments...