

Few vestiges of acquaintance of these philosophers with Kabbalah can indeed be detected in their writings.<sup>87</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The Andalusian *internationale* in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>88</sup>, the Berlinese 'enlightened' Jewish elite in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and even, thinkers like Hermann Cohen and Isaiah Leibowitz and their followers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all learned audiences, turned to Maimonides' thought as a major source of inspiration, and for helping them to graft contemporaneous philosophical stands as the only 'true' Judaism.<sup>89</sup> This return enhanced the status of the medieval thinker in the general economy of Jewish thought. However, also many authors close to Kabbalistic thought, regarded the study of Maimonides' thought as a necessary prelude for the proper understanding of Kabbalah. In this context the name of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seminal figure, Rabbi Abraham Yitzhaq ha-Kohen Kook should be mentioned. A mystic too, he too claimed that it was providential that Maimonides wrote his books before the books of Kabbalah surfaced, thus preventing an anthropomorphic, and according to him also a faulty, understanding of Kabbalistic imagery.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the enigmatic nature of some aspects of Maimonides' thought facilitated the adoption of his views to a variety of intellectual camps, thus broadening the audiences that relied on his writings. Maimonides' images in Jewish culture transcended even the great achievements that he indeed achieved in his oeuvre.

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87. See Allison P. Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1995), and M. Idel, "Deus sive Natura, The Metamorphosis of a Dictum from Maimonides to Spinoza," *Maimonides and the Sciences*, eds. S. Cohen and H. Levine, (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 2000), pp. 87-110.

88. For the importance of the Andalusian background from the dissemination of Maimonides' thought see Idel, "Maimonides' "Guide of the Perplexed" and the Kabbalah," pp. 197-199.

89. See Warren Zeev Harvey, "The Return of Maimonideanism," *JSS*, vol. 42, 3/4 (1980), pp. 249-268

90. "Ha-Rambam" in ed. I. L. Maimon, *Rabbenu Moshe ben Maimon*, (Jerusalem, 1935), pp. 1-6 (Hebrew).

## MAIMONIDES' DIALECTIC AS A JEWISH LAW-MAKER AND PHILOSOPHER

ȘLOMO LEIBOVICI-LAIȘ

An old piece of advice asks that we begin by paying homage to our hosts. Allow me to salute this conference on behalf of the World Cultural Association of the Romanian-born Jews – ACMEOR and of the Centre for the Research of the Romanian Jews' History in Tel Aviv and to express our great appreciation for the academic activity that this university has carried out in studying the history of the Romanian Jews.

All the volumes published after the annual conferences of the Dr. Moshe Carmilly Institute of Babes-Bolyai University are in our library so that researchers can use them in their work.

I would like to wish this conference every success and to assure you of our willingness to cooperate with this Institute.

And now, if you allow me, I would like to begin my presentation.

The topic of my presentation requires a longer and more thorough introduction, but, as the time I have at my disposal is rather short, I would like to apologise from the start for its brevity.

In order to know Maimonides's complex and challenging personality, who is considered both worldwide and in Romania – see Mircea Eliade – as the greatest medieval philosopher, please allow me to make a brief presentation of his biography. Knowing his turbulent life and his multiple interests, his work appears much more accessible to us.

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, RAMBAM for short, known in the non-Jewish world as Maimonides, was born in 1135 in Cordoba, Spain, the son of Dayan Rabbi – a judge of the rabbinical court – named Maimun ben David, a known scholar who became his son’s tutor in Judaic writings. Maimonides proved to be a prodigious pupil; during the period known in Spain as *Tor ha-Zahav*, the Golden Period, when the various nations lived in harmony, Maimonides had the opportunity of knowing the dominant cultural framework, learning all he could from whomever he could, also getting training in the field of medicine. But this peaceful period ended with the Almohade invasion – an extremist Muslim sect – which forced the entire population to convert to Islam, while the Maimuns were compelled to flee to Morocco, where they settled in Fez when Maimonides was only 13 years old. Shortly afterwards, the Almohades reached Fez and, following a miraculous escape, Maimonides and his family sailed to Accra-Acco, in the Holy Land. Various biographers argue that Maimonides became acquainted with the Kabbalah in Jerusalem and Hebron, but reason is what counts first and foremost to Maimonides, an aspect that is evident throughout his writings. After the death of his father, not long after reaching the Holy Land, Maimonides and his brother David, who supported his family through the precious stones trade, left for Egypt.

Maimonides, preoccupied by the question why the people who gave the world monotheism and the Ten Commandments was so persecuted, in his constant search for Truth, read everything he could find.

That is how he came to know the Arab philosophy and, via Al-Faradi and Avicenna, Greek philosophy as well, namely Plato and Aristotle.

After the death of his brother David, who was the family caretaker, in a shipwreck and following the loss of his fortune forced Maimonides to earn his own living. For Maimonides, who was committed to the Talmudic advice that one should not turn the Torah, Moses’s teaching, into an axe – for Maimonides considered the Rabbinat to be a calling, not a profession – he took up medicine as a profession. Soon, his good reputation as a doctor preceded him and the Sultana Salah-a-Din, worried about the health of the heir to the throne, gave him a considerable annual salary, which enabled him to dedicate himself to study.

In Maimonides’s times, the head of the rabbinat – the title of *Naghid* – was bought from the Sublime Porte, as we know from Romania’s history

too, when the Fanariotes bought their provinces. Maimonides’s erudition and the fact that the Jewish population in Egypt and in other parts of the Empire addressed him in matters of Judaic jurisprudence – even before he was formally acknowledged as a rabbi – determined the Sultan to appoint him *Naghid*, the head of the Jewish community, a position he held, with some interruption, until his death in 1204.

This short biography reveals us Maimonides’s three major preoccupations, three domains that formed an indivisible whole. The Judaic law, philosophy and medicine are intertwined for Maimonides in his continuous and unremitting search for truth. Maimonides wrote works in all these three fields – and if we were to present his rich bibliography, we would go much over the time limit of this presentation. I would only like to make reference here to his most important works, those works that define his thought.

Maimonides was a profoundly religious man. The letter of the law was supposed to be respected in every aspect, but that did not mean that one should give up understanding it. His efforts to understand the law are expressed through his various writings in the field of the Judaic codex, as well as in his exegetic works, both of which are studied nowadays.

I would only like to make reference here to two of his most important works in the field, and, should there be any questions, I shall also enumerate the others.

First of all, we have his monumental work, *Mishne Torah*, which took him ten years to complete; the title literally means *The Repetition of the Torah*, or, as it became known in the Jewish tradition, *Yad ha-Hazaka*, the Strong Hand, in other words, *dura lex, sed lex*. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet also serve as numbers, the letter *yod* is ten and the letter *dalet* is four, *yad* is 14 and it refers to the 14 volumes of this fundamental piece of Judaic legislation.

*Yad ha-Hazaka* is in fact an encyclopaedia of laws, commandments and norms of behaviour. It is not only a complete collection, but also a profound analysis of what is expected from a Jew. The work organises all the jurisprudence contained in the Talmud and its commentaries, while at the same time highlighting the idea that the Judaic codex is a complement of the laws of nature. The hundreds of editions of this work that were printed and revised throughout the years have been affected by the copying mis-

takes and the constraints of censorship. A complete edition, based on a Yemenite manuscript, was published only recently. The 1300 pages in encyclopaedic format and the over 1000 chapters nowadays allow the researchers to know Maimonides's authentic text.

Maimonides himself characterises his great codifying work as follows: "Those who believe in the greatness and the mercy of God know that the commandments were given in order to improve the human being, so that our attempt to find the reason for a given commandment is welcome, regardless of whether our limited mind can grasp its motivation or not. Man cannot understand everything, for lack of knowledge or because of his limited thinking. The very search for truth has its own role".

This work was followed by *Sefer ha-Mitzvoth*, translated as *The Book of Commandments*, the organised codification of the 613 commandments that the Jewish people need to obey. These commandments require obedience not from the Jew, but from the Jewish people who is required to observe these laws, because they do not refer only to certain people, for example Cohen or Levy or to certain situations, such as whether one is in the Holy Land or not, so that one man alone cannot accomplish them all.

The importance of these legislation works is given by the fact that Maimonides did not confine himself to the scholastic or the dogmatic aspects of learning, but tried to uncover its hidden elements, its philosophy, in other words. This is what he tried to do in all his exegetic or legislation works. *Mishne Torah* was met with criticism and even opposition including from those who adopted his halakhic positions contained in the Judaic Codex. They feared the influence of his thinking on those who were not initiated. Nevertheless, this very important work has remained to this day the quintessence of the Judaic Codex.

His position as a profound thinker meant that he saw medicine not just as a profession of healer but also a way of saving lives. Let us not forget that everything Maimonides wrote in this field was revolutionary for his time, the 12<sup>th</sup> century. For him, Medicine was an integral part of Philosophy, both an art and a science, which provides a balance to life and the guiding principle of his medicine was the close connection between the physical and psychological.

Maimonides's advice given in writing to his high-rank patient, the heir to the throne, became famous medicine treatises, translated in several lan-

guages and present us with a wide range of medical problems, many of them discussed there for the first time, some of them revisited in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as sensational discoveries after having been forgotten for centuries.

Without going into details, as the chapter of medicine in Maimonides's scientific activity requires a special presentation, the very mentioning of the topics of the medicine and scientist Maimonides will give us some idea to the extent of these preoccupations. Mosad ha-Rav Kook from Jerusalem reprinted these treatises in Hebrew, which tells us that Maimonides was preoccupied by asthma, haemorrhoids, conjugal life, poisons – with special focus on snake bites and their antidotes -, hygiene, which he greatly valued, epilepsy – describing its two states, the operable and inoperable one, surgery, diet – giving advice that is still viable today, the mutual influence between depression and constipation, the importance of callisthenics. He wrote a *Book of Medicines* – what we would today call Pharmacopeia, giving indications for over 2000 types of medicines with a remarkable focus on the patient's state of mind, in other words, psychosomatics. An Arab poet contemporary to Maimonides – the source I am using does not mention his name – dedicated a poem to him which I would like to quote:

*Galenus healed the body,  
Maimonides healed the body and the soul  
His knowledge took his reputation  
As medicine of his time far away  
He knew how to soothe  
The pains of illiteracy  
If the moon had fallen into his hand  
He would have healed the spots on its face.*

To Maimonides, medicine was not just a tool for healing, but a noble mission of saving lives. He developed an entire philosophy in his treatises regarding the interdependence between the physical and the psychological, this idea being well ahead of its time. Speaking of his medical work, I would like to mention here *Pirkei Moshe* – translated as *Moshe's Chapters* – a critical presentation of everything that had been written until then in the field, as well as the Oath of the Jewish doctor – a completion of the Hippocratic oath – which speaks of his profound faith. The medical ethics and the doctor-patient relationship are basic elements in Maimonides's system of

treatment which he attributes to the teachings of the Talmud. Maimonides's opinion as far as medicine is concerned is that he who does not take care of his health sins in front of nature and God.

Maimonides wrote his first philosophy book when he was 16. The title of the book, *The Words of Logics*, was a sort of introduction to philosophy, focusing on Aristotle's logic as it was inherited by the Arab philosophers and was designed for the beginners in philosophy.

For 20 years, Maimonides wrote works in all the other fields. The long break between his first philosophical work and his major philosophical book, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, is explained by the fact that Maimonides decided to dedicate his time to his work on Judaic codification but also to completing his philosophical knowledge and even grow more mature before preaching philosophy to others.

*The Guide of the Perplexed* is written – perhaps under the influence of Plato's *Dialogue* – in the form of an exchange of questions and answers with one of his disciples. Regardless of whether the pupil was Joseph ben Jehuda ibn Aquino or Joseph ben Jehuda of Morocco, or even if his writing is addressed to a virtual disciple, Maimonides explains in the book's introduction that its main purpose is that of highlighting the unity between religion and philosophy; although they appear to be in contradiction, he sees philosophy as the main way for one to reach the understanding of divinity.

We need to keep in mind the fact that the period when Maimonides lived was marked by two crises. One was the internal crisis of the Jewish society, the weakening of the Babylon Gaons, who were considered the masters of interpreting the Judaic laws and the second, an external one, the growing influence of Greek philosophy.

Maimonides was aware of the fact that many Jews were confused and he considered himself called upon to dispel this confusion. Maimonides's philosophy is based on the belief that the truth lies in the Torah and that, by studying the tradition passed on by the Patriarch Abraham and especially by Moses's teachings, including the tradition of the prophets and of the Kabbalah, we are on the right way to reaching truth.

Considering that these sources were only passed on to the initiated few and could have been used for evil purposes, Maimonides took up the dichotomist path formed by the Judaic Codex on the one hand and *The Guide of the Perplexed* on the other, as a common basis between philosophy

and faith, as, in my humble opinion, Maimonides was primarily a philosopher of the faith. To Maimonides, religion is only a means of expressing faith in a concrete way, which was his primary preoccupation. Maimonides identifies truth with science, both being means of knowing the Divinity. This is beginning and the ending of his philosophical work.

Maimonides is considered a neo-Aristotelian. Neo, because, although Maimonides appreciated Aristotle as the leader of the philosophers and adopted his ideas on Physics, but unhesitatingly rejected the Aristotelian position on Metaphysics. Unlike Aristotle and his disciples, who do not see God as the source of matter, Maimonides in his deep faith argues that God is the source of all sources, including matter. Maimonides adopted Aristotle's idea that man can only become accomplished within society – namely the state – but, for Maimonides, the basis of the Jewish state is the faith and its expression through dogmas and commandments which determine man to aspire towards an ideal society.

Maimonides was preoccupied by the way in which the Divinity can be explained, the way in which man can grasp it with his limited understanding as opposed to the indescribable greatness of the Divinity. The dichotomy between finding a worldly explanation of the commandments and the express demand that all things prescribed must be carried out precisely finds a common denominator in the fact that the strict observance of the religious duties is marked by the sign of the Divine, which, in Maimonides's opinion, represents the essence of the individual's life and ensures the stability of society and the world. To Maimonides, the ideal man is the one in whom idea and intelligence are on the same level, one that knows it cannot grasp the Divinity because human thought is antropomorphus. Man's notion of God is only the one gained through experience and thoroughness, which lead man to Faith. The various names given to the Divinity are a result of man's limited thinking and Maimonides takes up the words of the Talmud sages, his predecessors, - דברה תורה בלשון בני אדם - namely the Torah speaks to men in their tongue.

Maimonides wonders whether philosophy runs parallel with faith as lines that never meet or whether philosophy – namely profound thinking strengthens faith and brings one closer to the understanding of revelation. Maimonides's philosophy, a combination of science and faith sees both as man's salvation. The rational science temperate the extremes and can help

eliminate fundamentalism and intolerance. The synthesis between faith and science is the path to the illumination of human thinking. The confrontation with the scientific discoveries is positive, it enriches the teaching of Jewish sources and enlightens thinking. Maimonides's philosophy places itself on the axis between natural science, physics, and theosophy. He starts out from the premise of one's faith in God and explains that both the physical phenomena and the process of philosophical thinking have the same root. There is no contradiction between science and faith in Maimonides; on the contrary, the true path to understanding is the unity of thought. He tended to combine revelation and reason, faith and science with the purpose of ennobling the human being.

Nowadays, when theories that seemed to be in contradiction to faith are being revised and the research on the universe approaches the descriptions in the Bible, although using different notions, Maimonides's opinion is not only timely but it is also confirmed. Maimonides presents a precise axis which requires a profound knowledge of the science combined with the knowledge that everything comes from the Creator.

After having made this presentation of Maimonides, the question remains why the Jewish and non-Jewish scholars characterised his writings as being contradictory. For instance, the scholar Rabbi Iaakov Emden of Prague wonders "who can believe that both works, *Yad ha-Hazaka* and *The Guide of the Perplexed* are written by the same author?". Or Mircea Eliade's presentation, namely that "the apparent lack of unity in his work has given rise to unimaginable controversy, the Maimonidean thought is marked by an insurmountable dichotomy. On the one hand, his exegetic and legal works, on the other, the metaphysics articulated in *The Guide of the Perplexed*". There are other similar opinions, but I will not bring further examples for now.

The answer to this question is provided by Maimonides himself. In the introduction to *The Guide of the Perplexed* he warns us that he deliberately introduced seemingly contradictory statements so that the non initiated could be misled and enumerates seven such contradictions.

But, as Maimonides concludes in *The Guide*, "The philosopher needs to have a thorough knowledge of the subjects he studies, to delve into them so that he could understand their true meaning beyond apparent contradictions".

Maimonides's commentators have found four reasons for these so-called contradictions, but I would not like to speculate on them in the light of Maimonides's words in the above quoted Introduction.

By comparing *Yad ha-Hazaka*, his main work as a law-maker, to the *Guide of the Perplexed*, his main philosophical work, we constantly come up against the Maimonidean dialectics. I would like to mention only one example which has caused many discussions between Maimonides's supporters and contesters. In *Yad ha-Hazaka*, Maimonides indicates all the commandments connected to bringing sacrifice to God on an altar with the precise indication that they be carried out exactly with no change whatsoever, while in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides explains the commandments connected to sacrifice as being meant to familiarise the Jew with sacrificing cows, sheep and grains instead of human lives, as the idolaters used to do by bringing their children as sacrifice to the god Molokh and goes so far as to cite the words of God from the prophets: "Do I need your sacrifices?" Maimonides himself explains this dichotomy in *The Guide of Perplexed*: we, as humans, cannot grasp God's will and we cannot claim to understand the reasons for his commandments. We can only try to find explanations, but we are bound to respect the commandments as they were given to us.

And one more example. Maimonides's dialectic is also visible in the way that the Divinity is perceived. Maimonides is strongly opposed to attributing God any kind of adjectives, but at the same time shows understanding towards the man who, when speaking to God, uses attributes that lead to anthropomorphism.

Professor Andrei Marga, in his book *Religion in the Age of Globalisation*, argues that "with regard to the world and man, we should find a new kind of cooperation, a more meaningful one, both critical and dialogic, between theology and modern philosophy". Whoever knows Maimonides's work knows that, 800 years ago, this great thinker supported this dialogue. Professor Marga quotes philosophers like Hegel, Küng and especially Rosenzweig – the first and the last being influenced by Maimonides to some extent – and I am inclined to believe that, while the philosophers quoted display a hesitant faith or an apologetic position, Maimonides gives us a coherent philosopher stemming from an unshakeable faith.

Maimonides introduced science into theosophy and theosophy into sci-

ence. *The Guide of the Perplexed* is not easy for the non-initiated. The apparent contradictions require a careful reading and a deep knowledge of the Jewish culture, including the general, scientific culture. That is why we have a recommendation in Jewish tradition that one should not approach it before the age of 40, not before gathering a wide range of knowledge and the life experience that will lead one to maturity. This recommendation comes from Maimonides himself: "Metaphysics is a field that requires thoroughness beyond appearance and, in order to apply oneself to it, it is necessary that one guides oneself according to the rules of the Haghiga treatise in the Talmud, namely thorough knowledge, wide understanding, one should not a priori reject what seems incomprehensible at first sight". Maimonides warned those who wanted to study his work, invoking five reasons for this warning:

1. The difficulty of correctly intuiting his ideas – he brings as example the man who walks into the sea, if he knows how to swim, he can extract pearls from the bottom of the sea, but if he does not, he will drown.
2. No gifted man can reach the true sense before having the necessary training.
3. Human nature tends to reach its aim quickly, without being willing to work hard to attain it. You cannot go directly to metaphysics without having mastered logics, physics and the natural sciences.
4. The study and the practice of ethics is crucial and this cannot be achieved before a more mature age, when man has reached a balanced thinking.
5. Man should detach himself from routine preoccupations that derail him from the purity of thought.

Maimonides did not confine himself to metaphysical faith, he was inclined towards a rational faith. To him, the reason that man is endowed with is a divine gift and a means to accomplish the destiny of man on earth. For instance, strength without spirit is dangerous. Only reason combined with faith lead to a rightful use of force. Knowledge, continuous learning, is the path to reach them. In Maimonides's ethics, truth is the path for the man endowed with integrity. Whoever strays from the truth deserves the pun-

ishment of living forever in falsity. Truth and lies do not confront each other – they are two elements that have nothing in common.

Maimonides's ideas were met with rather strong opposition, both in the Orient where dogmas were dominant, along with the opinion that they do not need to be explained, and in Western Europe, where Jewish philosophy had not pre-Maimonidean roots and where his ideas were perhaps ahead of their time. However, even these opponents regarded Maimonides as a great scholar and based their jurisprudence on the Judaic Codex.

Throughout the years, Maimonides's works have continued to have a growing impact in the fields of Jewish legislation, philosophy and even medicine. They have given direction to human thought. Maimonides was the grand master of legislation and philosophy both for Jews and non-Jews. Maimonides remained in the Jewish conscience the great and unshakeable believer. The 13 Maimonidean credos are printed in every Sidur – prayer book – and the religious Jew utters them every day during prayer.

In Judaism, no one has reached such unanimous appreciation as Maimonides, the one who remained in the people's conscience with the words ממשוה עד משה לא קם כמשה, namely from Moshe Rabbi Moses and to Moses Maimonides, there has never been anyone like Moshe. One could not find a better way to conclude the presentation about this illustrious scholar whose important works are studied even today.

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- On drugs – antidote for snakebites
- Healthy living – Maimonides's most important medical treatise, it includes psychosomatics, the influence of drugs, haematology, policitemy, surgical indications, diabetes
- The decisive article with behavioural advice for the patient
- The article on sexuality – the conjugal life
- The book of medicines – pharmacopeia with a short description of over 2000 medicines
- On the end of life, pato-physiology

### Answers to questions:

In the fight against idolatry, the One and the Multiple are not contrary notions to Maimonides when they refer to God. In other words, He, the one and only, is everywhere and in all things, at one and the same time.

The alternation between Physics and Metaphysics in Maimonides's writings is nothing but the illumination of the palpable through the hidden things, to use a Maimonidean term. In the preface to *The Guide of the Perplexed*, he asks for a thorough analysis of the earthly phenomena, as he sees them as an indestructible whole, together with the spiritual ones.

Maimonides's impact was felt in all fields.

The posthumous commentaries on Maimonides's philosophical opinions have caused disputes, they are filled with contradictions, considering the diversity of the pagan, Islamic and Christian sources, as well as the di-

versity of opinions inside the Jewish world. The disputes between rationalists like Rabbi Joseph ibn Caspi and Rabi Itzhak Albaleg and kabbalists like Rabbi Abraham Abulafia and Rabbi Joseph Gigaktilia are well known. Additionally, they all saw themselves as spiritual disciples of Maimonides.

Critics, some of them very harsh, like Rabbi Lewy ben Ghershon – RALBAG and Rabbi Hasday Crescas, were also present, as were scholars who regarded Maimonides as a successor of sages like Itzhak Israeli, Rabbi Saadia Gaon, rabbi Behayeï ibn Pakuda, Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol, Rabbi Avraham bar-Hyia, Joseph ibn ha-Zadik, Rabbi Iehuda Halevy, all considered neo-Platonians, as well as of his predecessor, Avraham ibn Daud, who was considered closer to Aristotle.

Maimonides's impact is felt in exegetes like Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra and Rabbi Itzhak Abarbanel, as well as in other periods, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment in philosophers like Mendelssohn, Nahman Krochmal with the paraphrase MOREI NEVOKHEI ha-ZMAN, *The Guide of Perplexed Now* and even in Shlomo Maimon. They all saw themselves as neo-Maimonideans. Maimonides and his work continued to influence Jewish thought until modern times and it is felt in ŞADAL- Şmuel David Luzatto, Samson Rafael Hirsch, Herman Cohen, Frantz Rosenzweig and Alexander Şafran.

Maimonides was a preoccupation for many philosophers, among whom Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, who saw him as the one who gave the world “a theist Aristotle”, as well as for Hegel, Levinas and Eliade.

Two years ago, I took part in Israel in eight consecutive symposia organised by the University of Tel Aviv. Every symposium was dedicated to a different book of Maimonides and the best researchers of all the Israeli universities came up with interesting perspectives on this great thinker.

Several writers and historians were preoccupied by his strong personality. Maimonides is quoted in Romania by Nicolae Iorga, Al. Odobescu. Maimonides was translated into Romanian by B. Bazal-Derera, Mihai Leta and Dumitru Hîncu, to mention only those that I know of. Madeea Săşină (Madeea Axinciuc) defended a doctoral dissertation on Maimonides.

Every century, Jewish and non-Jewish scholars reiterated the importance of Maimonides's work especially in the fight against heresy. However, we cannot forget about those extremist enemies who had his books burnt. Among them, Jews and non-Jews, we find Franciscans and Dominicans.

The church establishment was afraid of the ideas of this great philosopher.

After his death, there was a period of separation in Judaism between Maimonides's supporters and his critics. Over time, his comprehensive work has convinced everybody, Maimonides being considered the great believer and the great philosopher of Judaism.

The dispute between Maimonides's critics and his supports includes many details, even some anecdotes. Gaon Rabbi Eliahu from Vilna, the greatest Jewish scholar of the past few centuries, referring to the denial of the existence of demons in Maimonides, although their existence is mentioned by the Talmud, said “Cursed be his philosophy that misled him”. As far as the Judaic Codex is concerned, the Gaon unhesitatingly adopts Maimonides's halakhic decisions. On the other hand, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Morgenstern, the great rabbi of Kotsk, considered the Philosopher Rabbi, replied “Demons existed in the time of the Talmud, but since Maimonides proclaimed that they do not exist, the Heaven sanctioned this and they do not exist”.

Maimonides the rationalist had similar ideas with regard to dreams, amulets, witchcraft, which he considered as stemming from sources alien to Judaism, negative influences that had nothing to do with Judaism.

Many have wondered why Maimonides regarded the Aristotelian philosophy as the philosophy of truth – the answer is to be found in Maimonides's words, who wanted to believe and was even convinced that the source of Aristotle's philosophy was the philosophy of prophets.

Nature, through its immanence, is the expression of Divine will. Man's will and his freedom of thought, regardless of what man thinks, only move within the boundaries of supreme will. (Einstein, when asked if he believed in the existence of God, replied: ‘if there hadn't been a Creator, who set the laws of nature once and for all, then how could I have compressed the universe in a short equation?’).

The existence of man is in itself a proof of the existence of God. According to Jewish sources, the birth of man is the consequence of the union between a man and a woman in the presence of the divine. This explains why some women become pregnant and give birth to a child, while others remain barren.

The difference between philosopher and prophet is that, while the philosopher tries to learn physics and metaphysics out of intellectual curiosity

or to prepare to influence people into knowing these subjects, the prophet spreads the knowledge of the supreme will, the creator of the entire universe, in order to know how to satisfy the Divine will and to improve creation. In Maimonides's view, the prophet philosopher is the ideal leader, expressed in the figure of Moses, considered by Maimonides as the greatest leader in history.

The philosophical explanation that Maimonides gives to the notions of 'pay' and 'reward' has a psychological aspect. Any man would naturally expect to pay for his bad deeds and to be rewarded for a good deed. The Talmud, in the Kidushin Tractatus, folio 39, says, שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא לכא, there is no reward in this world. The good deeds need to come from a person's ethical sense if one is to be considered a human being. The payment for a bad deed is absolutely necessary, otherwise the order of society would be disturbed and life would be made impossible.

Unlike Aristotle, on the one hand, and the Arab philosophy thinking of the Khalami, the Talkers or the Dissenters, on the other, Maimonides, devoted to Moses's teaching, argues that everything that takes place in the universe, including with and to people, confirms the Divine laws. Man is endowed with free will and bears the consequences of his own deeds, as he chose to accomplish them.

Maimonides presents a profound analysis on the book of Job, where he thought he had found the philosophy of the relationship between man and God, including with regard to the issue of pay and reward.

As opposed to Aristotle, Maimonides believes in providence but insists on the fact that man is able to choose, otherwise it would mean releasing him from responsibility. This reminds me of the Hasidic anecdote about heaven and hell. Both are to be found in the same place. For the righteous, the place is Heaven, as they spend all their time learning, which gives them a continuous intellectual satisfaction. For the sinners, the place is Hell, because for them learning is a torment.

Prophecy – besides being connected to certain natural qualities – requires uninterrupted training and a complete devotion to God, in whose service it preaches. It calls for a great imagination, rationality and profound thinking, in other words, philosophy. Imagination cannot be separated from matter. Seeing, hearing, taste may belong to the imagination, but the mind may see them through the filter of logic.

Maimonides (like Nahmanides) considers that loving God is one of the 613 commandments of the Judaic Codex. The imposition of a feeling, an emotional attribute, as an order that needs to be fulfilled has stirred many controversies. Maimonides dedicated many chapters to the study of this topic which he analyses from a logical point of view. In order to love God, man is called upon to dedicate himself to study and introspective meditation. By contemplating nature and all its creatures, man can only feel indebted to the One who created this world, with its beauty and bounty, thus reaching the love of the Creator.

At the same time, Maimonides asks that man should fear God. The combination of love, fear and respect is the recommended way of behaviour.

Lacking the necessary physical and intellectual tools to grasp divinity with our limited mind, we are forced to appeal to denial. God is not an entity comparable to something that human understanding can provide as example. In the Zohar, the first book of Kabbalah, God is named אין –Ain – the ultimate negation, or the Unseen, or also called סוף־סוף Ein Sof, namely the Infinite. Maimonides presents this negation as the Indescribable.

(The German philosopher Rudolf Otto formulated this as "das ganz Andere", in a particular translation).

Maimonides sees the Torah as the ideal constitution for the organisation and governing of a state or a society because the Torah leads to truth. Man's logic is relative – the Divine Law is immanent. Obeying the law ensures man's good behaviour and provides the possibility of an ideal society. And even if apparently we find a contradiction between law and philosophy which requires the supremacy of logic, supreme logic requires a strict obeying of the law.

God's perception cannot be qualified in time and space, because He is outside these notions. Between man and God there is the void. God is, after all, imperceptible and only by being aware of this can man get closer to God.

Maimonides's messianism is not utopian, but realistic. A human entity is endowed with faith, knowledge, ethics. Maimonides's dialectical position in perceiving Divinity is based on the verse סור מרע ועשה טוב "Stay away from evil and do good". By distancing yourself from evil, you did well. One should eliminate the human attributed from the conception of God, be

inclined towards an abstract thinking on the immanence of the All-creating and All-powerful.

Astrology played an important role at that age. Maimonides was critical towards astrology. For Maimonides, the sources of determinism had different sources – the sources of faith. Indeed, man's life is conducted in a pre-determined and imposed framework, but his behaviour still influences the evolution of things. Maimonides adopts Rabbi Akiva's sentence, a Talmud interpreter, הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה, "Everything is predetermined, but you are free to choose the way". The Creator knows everything and he establishes everything. However, man has the possibility and even the duty to change the course of things.

The Midrash – the part of the Talmud that translates the verses in a way that is more accessible to man and his psychology – served Maimonides to explain the need for thoroughness: "a fountain close to the village was inaccessible to the villagers because it was very deep. A sage came, tied all the ropes together until the bucket reached the deep water".

He proceeded in the same manner when he wanted to warn those who venture into studying profound texts without the necessary skills. He quotes the Midrash, which tells about the attempt of four sages to enter God's garden. One of them dies, one went insane, one became a heretic and it was only Rabbi Akiva that came out unhurt. In other words, only the one who has both the thorough knowledge and the adequate psychological strength to survive the attempt.

Islam – the religion of the sword – as some of its supporters declare, basing this statement on prophet Mohammed's words, is, although unanimously acknowledged as a monotheist religion – diametrically opposed to Judaism whose supreme ideal was peace.

The title of his philosophical work, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, is inspired from the biblical notion that describes the state of those who came out of Egypt and were lost with regard to the future awaiting them – see the Exodus.

As the secrets of Divinity are hidden, it is the philosopher's duty to search them, to know them, to understand their intentions. The truth cannot be in contradiction to the teachings of the Torah. This is Maimonides's fundamental postulate in *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

Unlike Aristotle, for whom the world had always existed, Maimonides, in his great faith, conceives a world that is permanently renewed through God's will. The creation ex-nihilo is the proof of the Divine capacity to create or destroy worlds, as we find in the Talmud, שי עולמות, three hundred and ten worlds. In other words, the existence of the world or its destruction depend on the will of the Almighty. For Maimonides, the problem is not whether the universe was created or whether it is eternal. For him, the universe is the expression of the Creator's will and the duty of the philosopher is to try and decipher the meaning of creation.

Maimonides's Arab name was Abu Imram Musa ibn Maimun, ibn Abdallah. He was known under this name in the Arab world.

Maimonides's interpretation of the celestial world and his opinion that actually denies the physical presentations of the heavenly throne and other apparitions, even though some prophets or the Talmud folios mention it. For Maimonides, the celestial world is a world of the spirit, in the highest and purest sense of the word. According to him, the prophets used symbols and metaphors in order for everyone to understand them. "Maase Bereishit" – the creation of the world with its earthly elements and "Mase Mercava", the apparition of the heavenly throne are interpreted by Maimonides as the parallel between Physics and Metaphysics.

While Aristotle says that the purpose of learning is to know that we do not know, Maimonides believes that we always learn so that we should know how much we don't know.

Maimonides's position on divorce was amazing for his time. The right to file for divorce – according to him – belonged both to the husband and the wife, which was inconceivable for the environment in which he lived.

### Maimonides's epistles

Maimonides's fame as a great legislator in the Jewish world brought him questions from all over the realm. His responses show a great understanding of the situation of those in need of guidance, of comfort, of a clear answer they count on from a halakhic point of view.

The epistles he has left us represent true works of jurisprudence according to which many rabbinical figures guide themselves and quote them as bases of their own decisions.

The term 'epistle' is used because Maimonides himself used it (*Igheret* means letter or epistle).

The most well-known question were addressed to Maimonides from far away communities such as Yemen or from France, from Lunel and Marseille, as well as from particular individuals, like Obadia the proselyte. They deal with major issues that the Jews came up against in the hard exile life.

*Igheret Teiman*, in which Maimonides encourages his Yemen brothers to resist the pressures of converting to Islam; among other issues, it deals with topics of the messianic period. This answer proves that Maimonides is a great spiritual leader who fully understands the situation. One should not forget that the Yemenite Jews still conduct themselves according to Maimonides's instructions.

*Igheret Ovadia Ha-Ger*, in which Maimonides explains that, once converted to Judaism, there is no difference between someone who was born a Jew and the one who converted to Judaism. The proselyte who prays is not only allowed to use the phrase "Our God and our parents' God" but also the obligation of doing it.

*Igheret Hanehama*, an encouragement and at the same time a call for existence against the persecutions of the Muslim fundamentalists.

*Igheret Hasmad*, the epistle of the renegade, it provides guidelines for behaviour in critical times, when the Jews were forced to abandon their fathers' religion.

*Igheret Tehiat Hameitim*, Maimonides's opinions on the resurrection of the dead, including the analysis of some profound theological themes.

*Igheret el hachmei Marseille*, in which he analyses the situation of the Marranos, those Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity.

*Igheret el hachmei Luneille*, in which he vehemently opposes astrology.

All these epistles bear his philosophical mark, who knows how to speak to every public and every individual in a way that they understand.

### Maimonides the doctor

My late friend, Dr.Harden Ashkenazi, who originally came from Romania, the founder of neuro-surgery in Israel, told me during one of his visits how enthusiastic his students were when he told them about the great discovery of professor Cupper from Stockholm, who also came from Romania: Park-

inson disease, or perhaps epilepsy, which had been considered untreatable until then, can still be surgically treated in some cases, because there are two types of disease, an operable and an inoperable one.

At the time, Mosad Harav Kook books from Jerusalem published Maimonides's medical books in Hebrew and I advised him to order them. Harden – a great specialist in his field – was not very familiar with Hebrew, so we read together that respective chapter. He was very much surprised to see that Maimonides knew this secret 750 years ago. Afterwards, he told me about the reaction of his students and their respect for their great predecessor.

Maimonides was a very busy man whose many preoccupations left him no free time. As a palace doctor, he had no time for ordinary patients. Many legends were created around this topic. One of them is based on an epigram wrote by the well-known poet, exegete, astronomer and astrologer Abraham ibn Ezra, who, like Maimonides, was also from Spain. Ibn Ezra was very poor, while Maimonides, the Sultan's doctor and a vizier, had no material worries. Not being able to see Maimonides, ibn Ezra wrote

אשכים לבית השר,  
אומרים כבר רכב.  
אבא לעת ערב,  
אומרים כבר שכב.  
או יעלה מרכב  
או יעלה משכב.  
אויה לאיש עני  
נולד בלי כוכב.

*Early in the morning, at the vizier's house,*

*They told me he left.*

*I came to see him in the evening,*

*They told me he went to sleep*

*Or he is on the horse*

*Or he is in bed.*

*Alas, the poor man*

*Who was born under an unlucky star.*

Another anecdote with the same ibn Ezra. Not seeing patients, the people

would line up on the road between his home and the palace. Passing by, Maimonides would look at them and wrote prescriptions for all of them. Ibn Ezra, who was healthy but sceptical, decided to take revenge. He took his place in line, very curious to see what prescription he would get, especially since he was going to mock the famous doctor who gave prescriptions to healthy people. Reaching his place, Maimonides examined him, he quickly wrote a prescription and handed it to him, sending him to the pharmacy. The pharmacist glanced over the prescription repeatedly, opened his cash box and handed Ibn Ezra 5 ducats, saying that, however peculiar, that was what the master had written. Coming out of the pharmacy, Ibn Ezra marvelled at how great a doctor Maimonides was. Ibn Ezra lived between 1092 and 1164.

#### The fourteen chapters of *Yah ha-Hazaka*

1. *The book of God's knowledge and uniqueness*
  2. *The book of God's knowledge* – prayers and ritual advice
  3. *The book of holidays* – Sabbath and the other holidays
  4. *The book of women* – marriage, divorce, obligations and waivers from certain commandments
  5. *The book of health* – what is allowed and not allowed in terms of food
  6. *The book of secretion*
  7. *The book of social obligations* – the 7<sup>th</sup> year, the jubilee, the taxes, the gifts
  8. *The book of the Temple rituals* – the rebuilding of the Temple, the public sacrifices
  9. *The book of individual sacrifices*
  10. *The book of hygiene* – pure and impure
  11. *Haematology*
  12. *Property* – selling and buying
  13. *Civil law*
  14. *The book of judges* – the Sanhedrin, the capital punishment, questioning and listening to witnesses, the laws of kings and war.
- Maimonides's conclusion was that the obeying of the commandments as they were prescribed brings man closer to God, it is the way to man's education and the path leading him to a blessed intimacy with God.

#### MAIMONIDES AND EUROPE (1138 -1204): A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

GÉRARD NAHON

The French Ministry of Culture and Communication has established the date of November 30, 1204, marking the finalising of Samuel ben Juda Ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* by Maimonides in Lunel, among the national French holidays. In truth, the year 1204 marks the beginning of the European fortune – not only French – of an author's work whom the Jews and the Christians called Moses of Egypt, because his *floruit* was accomplished in Egypt from 1165 until his death on December 13, 1204. Maimonides belongs to Europe, both through his birth and through his initial formation in Cordoba, as well as through the title of *ha-sefardi* attributed to him – which he added to the titles of his translator, Samuel Ibn Tibbon – and through his ever closer connections to Spain and the French Midi, despite the distances involved.

Nevertheless, the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the moment when one discerns a first renaissance of Europe, appears in the context of the history of Judaism as the century when the Almohade Empire systematically annihilated its major settlement in Northern Africa, a place that formed a foothold for the passage of the Tamud from Mesopotamia to the Western Europe. For Maimonides, this annihilation represented an indelible background which he projected onto the past, present and future history of the Jewish people.