

# Judaism - Significant person: Moses Maimonides

## **BIOGRAPHY:**

- One of the greatest rabbi's to live
- *"If one did not know that Maimonides was the name of a man, one would assume it was the name of a university."* - Abraham Joshua Heschel.
- People of all religions and nations appreciated Moses
- Maimonides' full name was Moses Ben Maimon; the word ben means "the son of". He is known by the acronym of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon = Rambam.
- Born March 30, 1135 Cordoba, Spain. He died December 13, 1204 Egypt
- The guide of the perplexed (1190) one of the great philosophical statements of Judaism. (Moreh nevuchim)
- Called for a more rational philosophy of Judaism - he accommodated science, philosophy and religion.
- *"When I have a difficult statement before me... and can see no other way of teaching a well established truth except by pleasing one intelligent man and displeasing ten thousand foods. I prefer to address myself to one man and take no notice whatsoever of the condemnation of the multitude."*
- He took the Torah and 613 Mitzvah and published them in the "Sefer haMitzvo", otherwise known as the book of commandments
- Maimonides took the 5 books of the Torah and made them into a list
- He took "Judaism" and synthesised and purified it to 13 basic statements
- Within Judaism, there is no pope, hierarchy, etc. There is a rabbi (known as a teacher). Do not believe that the rabbi is closer to God as Jewish adherents. Because of this, Jewish adherents do not have to accept everything a rabbi says; they're teachers and thus they're just like us.
- These 13 statements are by Moses but do not have to be accepted by rabbi's because Moses was not a "God". These 13 statements include:
  - The existence of God
  - His unity
  - His spirituality
  - His eternity
  - God alone is the object of worship
  - Revelation through his prophets (God gave Moses the Torah on Mount Sinai)
  - God's law given on Mount Sinai
  - The immutability of the Torah as God's Law
  - God's foreknowledge of men's actions
  - Retribution
  - The coming of the Messiah
  - When the Messiah comes, there will be resurrection of the souls of the dead.
- 13 statements are part of the morning synagogue statements
- Some Jewish adherents may have difficulty in accepting the last two statements which does not make them any less
- Judaism believes it is a "*religion of deed, not creed.*"
- We must not expect anything from Jewish people
- You're Jewish if your mother is Jewish or if you convert
- Served as a leader of Cairo's Jewish community

- Karaite sect only accepts the written law and not oral because oral could be changed.  
Moses persuaded Jewish adherents that the Oral was still valid

#### Responsa literature:

- Maintained an extensive correspondence with scholars, students and community leaders
- Moses' answers given to common questions are written in this book, *e.g. Why do bad things happen to good people?*
- Prior to this, Jewish writings were written in Hebrew (people spoke to Aramaic)
- Moses made the religion accessible when he made the book in their language
- The Mishnah is part of the Talmud; it is the first book
- Maimonides took every word and wrote commentary on these words
- Maimonides' commentary clarified individual words and phrases, frequently citing relevant information in archaeology, theology or science
- By doing this, he married the scientific world and the Jewish world

#### Mishneh Torah

- He said it would guide people in every single situation
- He said that just by looking at the Torah and his book, people would be able to understand and they wouldn't have to spend time going through the Talmud
- Rabbi's did not take this well.
- Reaction was so bad that some people burnt his books because they thought people would not be educated
- A book that would guide Jews on how to behave in all situations just by reading the Torah and this code, without having to expend large amounts of time searching through the Talmud
- Mishneh Torah became the standard guide to Jewish practice
- Served as a model for the *Shulchan Aruch* (16th century code still regarded as authoritative by Orthodox Jews).

#### Year 11 content:

#### **What is the Torah???**

- Moses went up the mountain and was given the Torah in oral and written form. The oral Torah was difficult because it was meant to be passed on from the parents
- The oral tradition explained certain laws, *e.g.* Cooking meat and consuming it with milk
- The danger that parents and children would be separated resulted in writing the ORAL law. The Mishnah made up the first part and the Gamara made the second. Together, these formed the Talmud.
- Maimonides' influenced the non-Jewish world; much of his philosophical writings in the *Guide* where about God and other theological issues of general, not exclusively Jewish, interest. Thomas Aquinas refers in his writings to "Rabbi Moses," and shows considerable familiarity with the *Guide*
- The guide of the perplexed is considered to be a philosophical book

#### **TEACHINGS of RamBam:**

These are known as: The Golden ladder of charity (any charity is good but there are levels).

- **To give grudgingly** (this is the lowest form of charity), *e.g. When a person approaches you and tells you their kids are starving but they're annoying you and you want to get rid of them so you give them money. You don't want to but you still gave.*

- **To give out of the kindness, but less than one should**, e.g. *Giving the person 50 cents. This is giving out of kindness but you should give more.*
- **To give after being asked**, e.g. *When you see the person in need but you don't volunteer. The person comes to you and so they're embarrassing themselves.*
- **To give before one is asked**
- To give **without knowing who will receive it, although the recipient knows the identity of the giver**
- To give **without making known one's identity**
  - e.g. *When you give someone else the money and tell them to give it to the person so the person that is receiving the money does not know who gave the money in the first place to be less embarrassed. Moses stresses that the person should not know who you are when you give the money because the person will feel embarrassed and the person who gave it is gonna feel superior.*
- To give so that **neither giver nor receiver knows the identity of the other**
- **To give another the means to be**
- **Self-supportive**, through a gift, loan or employment

### Man causes his own evil

- Shouldn't blame anyone else.

### Observing the Shabbat

- In the Torah, it says we should observe the shabbat because (1) God created the world in 6 days and rested on the 7th and (2) God took us out of slavery in Egypt.
- Maimonides gave us a third reason. (3) Because it is good for the soul.
- On the Jewish Shabbat, we are supposed to rest. Some do and some don't because we can interpret our own ways in religion
- Maimonides wanted us to think about our life and come to an understanding of ourselves (Mind, body + spirit)

### Free will

- Ties in with the first teaching
- He said we all have free will. In his 13 principles of faith, he said God knows what we will do
- *E.g. God is watching us and we can choose to go through any doors. God knows which one I'm going to take before I know*
- We have free will to choose what we will, e.g. *Be a good or evil person*
- Mankind allows evil people to do what they do, e.g. *Hitler. People choose their own kind.*

### Be content

- Be content with who you are, recognise your abilities and act accordingly
- Be realistic and subsequently accept your life

### Instruction

- There should be method to our instruction
- The example he used was before you dive to the bottom of the ocean to get pearls, you have to learn to swim! (Because you can do 4 unit maths, you have to learn to put 2 and 2 together)

### Friends and family

- it doesn't matter how much you have, what you have achieved - it is worthless without friends and family.

**More information:**

- Philosophically Maimonides was a religious rationalist, e.g. He encourages IVF because he believes in prolonging life.
- Still the most widely studied Jewish commentator. He wrote about things that are of concern to all religious traditions
- Much of his writings were about God and other theological issues that applied to all religions

**UNESCO Conference - 1985**

- *“Maimonides is perhaps the only philosopher in the middle ages, perhaps even now, who symbolises a confluence of four cultures: Greco Roman, Arab, Jewish and western.”* - Vitali Naumkin
- *“I regard him first and foremost as an Arab thinker”* (because Maimonides lived under Muslim rule). - Abderrahmane Badaqi
- *“Maimonides is the most influential Jewish thinker of the middle ages and quite possibly of all time.”*
- This shows us that Maimonides' teachings go above his own religion and affect many other individuals and religions

**Continued influence:**

- He was a model for the present, a foreshadowing of the balances inherent to modernity. E.g. Mind, body and spirit
- His Judaism is a religion in which concrete behaviour serves the need of abstract thought. He looked at the Torah and thought of how to put it to practice. He said if you're on a study board and a funeral goes past, you stop your study to go to the funeral because you have to honour the dead. But if you're at a wedding and a funeral goes past, you do not stop the wedding because we have to understand that death is a part of life. Life prevails
- Maimonides became the inspiration for Jewish people throughout the ages who wished to have a faith based on reason. We can apply logic, reason and science with Judaism.
- He succeeded in convincing almost all Jews that the God of Judaism is entirely incorporeal (no body - spiritual). Given the dramatic anthropomorphism of the bible and rabbinic literature this was no mean feat. The project of creating comprehensive and logically organised codes of law, culminating in the publication of the *Shulhan arukh*, must also be seen as at least a partial success of Maimonides.
- Academic and literary capacity
- Rational thinking and search for truth
- Architect of the tradition
- Comprehensive knowledge and synthesis of various fields
- Social involvement, understanding and adjustment to the needs of the audience
- Physician - he was a doctor and his way of practicing medicine and illnesses influenced medicine at the time.
- Thus, he had different spheres of impact.

**Extra (CONNECT ALL ASPECTS OF THE RELIGION)**

- Maimonides and bioethics marry together because of the rational nature of his writings and way of thought.
- Maimonides and marriage marry together (see teachings).