

*“In the name of the Lord,  
the creator of the world”*

**Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon**

# **MISHNE TORAH**

**The Code of Maimonides**

*The Complete Restatement of the Oral Law*

*A Precise Edition based on Original Manuscripts, with 11 Indexes  
The Classic Masterpiece in a Single Volume with Hebrew Vocalizations*

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**The Mishne Torah Project**

*Or Vishua Publications – a collaboration with Yeshivat Torath Hahaim*

# The Mishne Torah Project

*for Restoration of the Original Text and its Elucidation*



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*Or Vishua Publications – a collaboration with Yeshivat Torath Hahaim*

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To make contributions or requests to use this edition, please contact one of these addresses. The Minshe Torah Project encourages the use of this edition for developing methods for the study and elucidation of the Mishne Torah. Corrections and suggestions for improvement would be happily received at: [rambam4all@gmail.com](mailto:rambam4all@gmail.com)

*The “Mishne Torah Project” publishes pocket editions of the Rambam’s works. Thus far, the books of Knowledge and Love as well as the booklets “Chapters on Charity and the Redeeming of Captives” and “Preparing for the Temple” have been published.*

**“Seek out the book of the Lord and read; none of these shall be missing”**

(*Yeshayahu* 34:16; cited in Rambam, Laws of Sanctification of New Months 19:16)

**“For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”**

(*Yeshayahu* 11:9; cited at the conclusion of the *Mishne Torah*)

The *Mishne Torah*, presented here, is one of the masterpieces of the Jewish people and its spirit. It is the *magnum opus*, full of power and vision, that the Great Eagle, the Rambam (Maimonides) composed for the benefit of every Jew. The work encompasses the entire Oral Law in a concentrated, clear, and polished manner, unprecedented since giving of the Torah at Sinai.

From the date of its publication until today, numerous errors and changes have crept into it, intentionally and unintentionally. As a result, the common editions are filled with innumerable mistakes, errors and omissions resulting from the Christian censor, editorial “repairs” made by ignorant copyists, and printers who stumbled and were ensnared in their wake. The work that had been so pristine when published by the Rambam had become changed to the point that it was no longer recognizable.

The present precise and beautiful edition is the fruit of many years of labor by rabbis in the Land of Israel, foremost amongst them Rabbi Yosef Qafih יוסף קאפח, who made an effort to recover the original version penned by the Rambam himself based on the most ancient and accurate manuscripts. The uniqueness of this wonderful edition lies in its accumulation of all efforts made thus far in the attempt to restore the original version and to present them to the reader with the hopes that we have approximated the vision of the Rambam. We also appended concise indexes to make it easier to read and study it, whether in depth or for review.

The Rambam’s complete, organized masterpiece allows one to study the basic foundations of the Oral Law in its entirety, and in a short period of time. Familiarity with these patterns of thought, whose gates are knowledge and love, guides the reader to purposefully living a life of God-consciousness and understanding of His ways within the revealed universe. Life’s intensity and eternity come from following His ways in practice, pure of body and holy of spirit.

The name of the work, *Mishne Torah*, the namesake of the special Torah scroll that Israelite kings were enjoined to write for themselves, reflects the full glory of its mission: a majestic work that restores our nation to its past glory. If one learns from this book, and it accompanies him at all times, he will gain familiarity with the secret of the enchantment of Jewish life and the full splendor of the Torah’s honor, to which it shall return speedily in our day. May it be God’s will that we reach the day in which all of the laws in this book become the living reality of the Nation of Israel in its homeland, which shall be a light unto the whole world.

However, the reward for those who study and prepare themselves for that great moment is not only in the future. Comprehensive study of the Oral Law can set us on the proper path that the Torah expects us to follow, and help us in our commitment to mold our lives around the *halakha*, in all places and at all times.

We pray that God assistance leads us to success in this noble and glorious task.

# The Uniqueness of This Edition

## ◆ The Version of the Text

This version of the text is based on the edition of the esteemed Rabbi Yosef Qafih *zz”l*. Adjustments were made based on comparison with manuscripts, especially the Yemenite manuscripts, known for their authenticity, and the manuscript of the books of *Madda* (Knowledge) and *Ahava* (Love) **verified by the Rambam’s own signature**. In this edition, we repaired the distortions of the Christian censors and thousands of other errors that crept into the printed edition over the years.

## ◆ Division into Halakhot

The division of the text into individual *halakhot* was also done in accordance with the original division that appears in manuscripts, based primarily on the Rabbi Qafih edition but factoring other precise editions as well. We put each *halakha* from the manuscripts in a separate paragraph. The numbering of the *halakhot* in our edition corresponds to the numbering that appears in the widespread Vilna edition. As a result, the numbering sometimes appears in the middle of a *halakha*.

## ◆ Alternative Versions

Significant variant texts are indicated in the margins and referenced by a star (\*) in the main text. The variants were taken from the precise editions: the Rabbi Qafih edition (פ), Rabbi N. Rabinovich’s *Yad Peshuta* edition (י), the Mechon Mamre edition (מ), Rabbi Shilat’s precise edition of the Rambam (ר), variant texts from the Frankel edition, MS Oxford with the Rambam’s signature (ר), and other manuscripts. Additionally, comments on the text were added based on responsa of the Rambam and his descendants.

## ◆ Vocalization and Punctuation

The book is vocalized and punctuated and all abbreviations are spelled out. Unique words are vocalized in accordance with their appearance in **the Rambam’s own manuscript of the Commentary on the Mishna**.

## ◆ References

Full references to biblical verses have been added, including notation of variations from the Masoretic version and citations which combine several verses. We signified citations which skip parts of a verse without noting it by inserting a bracketed ellipsis [...]. Cross-references to the Rambam’s own works (introduced by “as I explained” or a similar phrase) are annotated as well.

## ◆ Titles

Each chapter has a short title that summarizes the topic of the chapter and aids orientation and memory.

## ◆ The Design

Much effort was invested in making sure that our product is splendid Torah in a splendid vessel. Presentation of the entire work in a single volume enables easy accessibility to the Rambam’s entire composition and the surveying of entire topics at a glance. It is printed on light, high quality paper, making it easily transportable.

## ◆ Illustrations

All illustrations and examples of liturgical script were professionally sketched and are **faithful to the original** manuscripts. Some are identical to the **illustrations in Rambam’s own manuscript of the Commentary on the Mishna**.

### ◆ **Indexes and Appendices**

This edition includes 11 indexes: two indexes of all books and sections, one in order of appearance and one alphabetized, an index of illustrations, an index of chapter topics, an index of the titles in order of appearance, two indexes of the 613 mitzvot, an index of biblical verses, a topical index of the entire Mishne Torah, an index of characters and personalities, a key to weights

and measures, and an additional appendix of the Rambam's biographical information.

### ◆ **The Daily Rambam Schedule**

Division of the work for daily study of three chapters is indicated with: ③▶. In the introduction and in the ordering of prayers an additional indicator is used for those who study one chapter daily: ①▶.



## Letters of Approbation

*For the First and Second Editions*

“Any student can learn this work with his mind at ease, confident that these are the original words of the Rambam...”

**Rabbi Eliyahu Rachamim Zini**

*Rosh Yeshiva of Or Vishua and Rabbi of the Haifa Technion*

“They added many indexes... so that it can be accessible to any person at any time, be he simple or wise.”

**Rabbi Shlomo Moshe Amar**

*Chief Rabbi of Israel and Rishon Lezion*

“By studying this work, a student can encompass all areas of *halakha* in a concise manner...”

**Rabbi Shmuel Tal**

*Rosh Yeshiva of Torat Hachaim*

“...it will be readily available for anyone who wishes to long to enjoy God’s closeness through the study of *halakha* that is free of error, purged of any mistake, and presented in a splendid volume.”

**Rabbi Avraham Elmaliach**

*Chief Rabbi of Dimona  
and Former Head of the Jerusalem Rabbinical Court*

“...he labored and toiled to produce a thing of beauty and accuracy...”

**Rabbi Ovadia Yosef**

*Rishon Lezion and President of Torah Sages Council*

“I have reviewed this volume, studied from it, and perused several cases of corrupt variants here and there... and even used the indexes that appear at the back of the edition. They have certainly done a great thing by publishing an edition from which errors have been so carefully and meticulously filtered out”.

**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

*Head of the Yeshiva-University*

“...It is proper for all of Israel to constantly study the holy *halakha* of the Great Eagle from a precise and accurate edition, free of censorship and mistakes...”

**Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu**

*Former Chief Rabbi of Israel and Rishon Lezion*

“I therefore praise this initiative... to issue a precise Rambam in a single volume that will be accessible and available to every student and rabbi...”

**Rabbi Ratzon Arussi**

Rabbi of Kiryat Ono, Dean of *Machon Moshe* Institute  
for the Study of the Rambam's Writing

“...the Rebbe greatly respected the work of Rabbi Kapach to establish the correct and precise version of the Rambam's works... I therefore regard this as a good enterprise...”

**Rabbi Mordechai Shmuel Ashkenazi**

Chief Rabbi of Kfar Chabad

“I hereby esteem and bless this great enterprise of publishing all fourteen books of the Rambam in a new edition, refined by the Esteemed Rabbi Yosef Kapach ob”m on the basis of manuscripts, ...in a single deluxe volume, in order to provide the public with this great treasure...”

**Rabbi Yitzchak Yehuda Yeruslavski**

Secretary of the Chabad Rabbinical Council in the Holy Land

“They have certainly done very important work, generating a situation where many Torah scholars now set aside times to study *halakha* from the Rambam's works; all who study *halakha* each day are assured of a place in the World to Come.”

**Rabbi Zalman Nechemiah Goldberg**

Member of the High Rabbinical Court

“great benefit offered in this unique publication. Firstly, the text of the Rambam has been presented in a very precise fashion based on numerous editions and versions, as explained in the introduction. Secondly, having the entire text of the Mishne torah in one volume as valuable aid to those needing to refer to referenced to the various parts of the

work that are found in any talmudic subject. Thirdly, the Rambam's Mishne Torah contains a concise redaction of the entire compendium of the oral law; being able to view it as one unit, even in its simple reading impressive, informative and inspiring”.

**Rabbi Zev Leff**

Rabbi of Moshav Matityahu  
*Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Gedola Matityahu*

“I saw the great effort and investment that you made to present the community of lifelong students with something beautiful and accurate, in a wonderful volume and layout...”

**Rabbi Dov Lior**

Rabbi of Kiryat Arba - Chevron and *Rosh Yeshiva of Nir*

“This edition is suitable for the goal that [the Rambam] himself set for his students – to study his treatise by heart, so as to learn the entire Oral Torah from it”.

**Rabbi Nachum Eliezer Rabinovich**

*Rosh Yeshiva of Birkat Moshe* in Maale Adumim,  
author of *Yad Peshuta*, a commentary on the Rambam

“There is nothing greater than having the ability to hold the Rambam's entire *Mishne Torah* in your hand and being able to study it diligently and constantly... especially since this edition is precise and based on venerable manuscripts; fortunate are you”.

**Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Schick**

Head of the *Heichal ha-Kodesh* - Breslov institutes

“[This edition was published] so that the rulings of the Great Eagle become fluent in the mouths of all, for this was the agenda of the Rambam himself... and they added a number of different types of indexes so that everything can be located easily. It has other benefits as well... this is of great benefit to the public”.

**Rabbi Shalom Arush**

*Rosh Yeshiva of Chut shel Chesed*

*“And it shall be, when he sits upon the throne of his kingdom,  
that he shall write himself a copy of this law (Mishne Torah) in a book,  
out of that which is before the Levite Kohanim.  
And it shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life;  
so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God,  
to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them;  
so that his heart not be lifted up above his brethren,  
and that he not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or to the left;  
so that his kingdom and dynasty may endure in Israel”*

*(Devarim 17:18-20)*

## Foreword

*Note: Abridged  
translated version*

Blessed is the Lord, our God, the God of our forefathers, who has revived us and sustained us, in the full meaning of the words, and brought us to this time, to present all of Israel with the *Mishne Torah*, the *magnum opus* of the great and revered Rambam, in an elegant, clear, and painstakingly edited volume – our attempt to approximate, to the best of our ability, the version penned by the hand of our holy Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, the illuminator of darkness, the Great Eagle.<sup>1</sup> This amazing composition captures the light of the Torah; it was unprecedented and remains unsurpassed. It represents the epitome of perfection in its scope, classification, order, polished language, and precision of description and formulation.

The Rambam frequently expressed his amazement at the precise manner in which the sages of the *Mishna* formulated their teachings, describing the laws governing life profoundly and comprehensively in a few words that it took the Rambam himself several chapters to expound. It seems that his own beautiful words on this issue

(Chapter 5 of his Introduction to Tractate *Avot*) apply just as well to his own work:

Our Sages, may they rest in peace, incorporated this entire subject in the most concise possible language, addressing the issue very comprehensively. When you contemplate the brevity of the words that comprehensively discuss this vast and great subject that entire books to not fully cover, **you will know that they were undoubtedly spoken with divine power.**

It is hard to control one’s excitement in the presence of this impressive handiwork, its exemplary composition, and its structure; this awesome work of just one man, whose worldwide reputation was made when he composed his Commentary on the *Mishna* while still in his youth. Even though he dedicated much time to teaching and to communal leadership, he completed his *magnum opus* in a relatively short period of time – ten, or at the very most fourteen years.<sup>2</sup> He undoubtedly had divine assistance in his endeavor.

### I. On the “*Mishne Torah*”

#### ◆ Structure of the Book

The “*Mishne Torah*”, also known as the “*Yad Ha-Chazaka*” meaning “The Mighty Hand”, which alludes to the fact that the work is divided into fourteen books (the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word ‘*Yad*’ is fourteen), incorporates the

entire Oral Law. The invocation that the Rambam, “Moshe the Godly man”,<sup>3</sup> inserted at the beginning of the work and at the beginning of each of its books – “In the name of the Lord, the creator of the world” – addresses the foundation of the entire Torah, and signifies the primal call

to acknowledge God in our everyday lives, and that He is both the Cause and Purpose of our lives.

The work leads those who study it from the routines of daily life to the ultimate purpose of creation. It begins with the fundamentals of the Torah and the structure of Jewish life which must accompany all Jews at all times (the Book of **Knowledge**). It then turns to prayer and daily rituals that lead one closer to God (the Book of **Love**). From there, it moves on to the festivals (the Book of **Times**) and then to marriage and the Jewish household (the Book of **Women**). To keep a person from getting stuck in material matters, the Rambam then introduces segregation (the Book of **Holiness**) and asceticism (the Book of **Vows**). The first half of the work, which deals with the private individual, concludes with the laws pertaining to agriculture and cessation from it, culminating in the declaration of the *Yovel* (Jubilee) year (the Book of **Seeds**). The second half of the work deals with national administration. It begins with the national center – the Temple: Public sacrifices (the Book of **Worship**), individual sacrifices (the Book of **Sacrifices**), and purity of body and mind (the Book of **Purity**). He then describes Jewish civil law: Laws pertaining to damages (the Book of **Torts**), laws regulating commerce (the Book of **Acquisitions**), and laws debts and potentially injurious financial arrangements (the Book of **Justice**). The final section of the work describes the two guiding institutions of the Israelite nation: the monarchy and the Sanhedrin (the Book of **Judges**). It concludes with a description of the Messianic Era and its implications, ending on the same note it began with: “In those days, all of Israel will understand the mind of their Creator in accordance with their ability, as it says: ‘For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea’”.

**Knowledge**  
**Love**  
**Times**  
**Women**  
**Holiness**  
**Vows**  
**Seeds**  
**Worship**  
**Sacrifices**  
**Purity**  
**Torts**  
**Acquisitions**  
**Justice**  
**Judges**

It is doubtful that it is possible to incorporate the entire Torah and wisdom of Israel better than the Rambam did. How appropriate are the words said about him through the generations: “From Moshe to Moshe, none arose like Moshe”.

#### ◆ **Reasons and Purpose**

The reasons that motivated the Rambam to write his work, which he sets down in his introduction, seem to apply today as well – perhaps even more so than in the Rambam’s own time.

His first reason is the plethora of source material confronting a Jew who stands confused and uncertain where to begin and how to find his way through the Jewish library. Very few succeed in encompassing the full glory of the Torah in its entirety: individual and national instruction in the path of God, which pervades every aspect of life. Because of this need, the Rambam presented readers with a digest of the entire Oral Law and all of its branches, a sort of map, astoundingly clear and well organized.

His second reason is the difficulty, as severe today as ever, of deciding the disputes of the Sages and thereby advancing reality toward the great vision of the Jewish people – a unified nation with a unified law, free of differences of opinion with no manner of resolution. This approach of not deciding matters of *halakha* uproots the driving force allowing the Torah to be made manifest in actual life. Because of that, the Rambam decided every issue, presenting the reader with a complete, comprehensive, clear, and unambiguous treatise of halakhic teaching designed for everyone: “Young and old, man and woman, of profound and simple intelligence” (Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah 4:13).<sup>4</sup>

#### ◆ **Mishne Torah – A Complete Torah**

In his introduction (Section 39), the Rambam discusses the significance of the name of his work. The words that began this section, which speak about the king’s duty to write himself a copy of the Torah, certainly seem to have been on the Rambam’s mind. Choosing this name for his *magnum opus*, invested it with a new meaning –

this is the **royal book** of princes, as our Sages said: “All of Israel are princes”.<sup>5</sup>

**Restoring the glory due the Torah is only possible by encompassing all of its details**, including all of the fundamentals of faith, which are true in any time and place, and the entire law and practice of the Jewish people, whether they are obligatory today, or whether the greater part, that which we desire and long for, that we will be obligated in, speedily in our days, when the world establishes the kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup> This is the meaning of the verse that the Rambam placed before his introduction: “Then **I shall not be ashamed** when I look upon **all** of your commandments” (*Tehillim* 119:6). Is it possible to describe the glory of the Torah and of the Nation of Israel without the vision of the Temple and its modes of purity? Without the working and settling of its land? Without the leadership of the Sanhedrin and the majesty of the monarchy? Without the beauty and truth of Jewish law?

It remains astounding that in the midst of a long, dark exile, when Israel was far from its homeland and incomparably downtrodden, “sorrowful, marginalized, manhandled, destabilized, and visited by pain”,<sup>7</sup> the Rambam enveloped himself with pure zeal for God and shone a great light on a nation walking in darkness. He wrote the following to his beloved disciple, R. Yosef bar Yehuda, for whom he composed the *Moreh Nevukhim*:

Understand that I did not compose [the *Mishne Torah*] in order to be considered great in Israel or to gain fame... rather, I composed it, God knows, for myself in the first place,<sup>8</sup> to ease the searching and investigating for what I need, and later, when I got older, because I was truly zealous for the Lord, God of Israel, **when I saw a nation with no true comprehensive law code and without true and clarified beliefs; thus, I did what I did for God alone.**<sup>9</sup>

Later, he presents the vision that characterizes his writing:

Everything that I described to you regarding those who do not accept it as worthy only pertains to my generation. However, **in future generations**, when envy and the lust after power are removed, **it alone will be sufficient for all of Israel.**

Ever since the Rambam wrote the *Mishne Torah* his teachings are used in any Torah deliberation, and none have even attempted to clear a new, true path in the Torah of Moshe without relating to the words of the Rambam. It has spawned thousands of treatises and commentaries: some as questions, some offer solutions; to corroborate, and some argue against. It very quickly became part of the canon of Torah scholars, researchers, and learned men.

However, with the passage of time, the significance and design of this work, to offer practical halakhic instruction to young and old alike, diminished for some reason. An idea took root that it is hard to study and that one cannot simply read it and reach conclusions from it without first studying the relevant Talmudic passages. Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, countered this claim in his work *Kesef Mishne*, on the Ra'avad's gloss at the end of the Introduction to the *Mishne Torah*:

Any subsequent wise person may rely on [the Rambam's] decisions. If there would be a great sage who does not wish to rely on his determinations, such that he also weighs the matter with his discerning intelligence, who can stop him from studying the books of the Talmud and the codes? Thus, this path that [the Rambam] blazed is **beneficial to the whole world** except for one person in every generation. And it is beneficial for that individual as well: if he must rush to make a decision, he may rely on the opinion of [the Rambam]. **And even if he is not rushed, it is no small thing to be familiar with the reasoning of** [the Rambam].

Often, however, in order to understand the words of the Rambam in a particular place, one must be familiar with the entire *Mishne Torah*, and in

order to understand the meanings, principles, and rationales of his words, they must be compared to his words in all of his teachings, as Our Sages wrote: “The words of Torah are impoverished in one place but enriched elsewhere” (*Talmud Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana* 3:5).

This is not the place to expand upon the thesis that **everyone generally rules in accordance with the simple meaning of the Rambam**.<sup>10</sup> It seems that the Rambam wanted only those who are familiar with his **entire** work to issue rulings on complex matters, since various laws within it must be explicated in order to reach a practical conclusion. For example, regarding the olive-size measure (a “*kezayit*”)<sup>11</sup> which is used throughout the *Mishne Torah* but only substantively defined in the Laws of Preparing Sacrifices (13:4): “The *kometz* (handful) was no less than two *kezeytim*”. Since the *kometz* corresponds to the space in the pocket created when the fingers are closed over the palm, and that amount is at least two *kezeytim*, the result is that the Rambam’s opinion of the volume of a *kezayit* is much smaller than contemporary common practice.

Regarding the sources for the Rambam’s decisions, he does not cite prooftexts next to each *halakha*, but it is clear that everything that he wrote is rooted in the words of Our Sages and in the teachings of the Geonim. If one researches his worlds, he would find that he rarely says anything that is not based on their words, and that when he must reach an independent conclusion, he is careful to precede it with the words “it seems to me” or something similar. The efforts of many generations of Jewish sages to discover the Rambam’s sources have borne fruit, and his words, amazingly, continue to find corroboration. Although the sources for the Rambam’s rulings were usually apparent, in more recent times, as more Geonic treasures became available, the halakhic origins of the Rambam’s positions have become ever clearer.

#### ◆ *Halakhot and Halikhot*

Each morning, we recite the following at the beginning of the prayer service: “It was taught in

the academy of Eliyahu: “Anyone who reviews *halakhot* is assured of entering the World to Come, as it says (*Habakkuk* 3:6): ‘His are the ways (*halikhot*) of the world’. Do not read it as ‘*halikhot*’, rather as ‘*halakhot*’ (Order of Prayer 1). This teaching signifies more than a simple pun; it gets to the essence of *halakha* and its purpose. Reviewing *halakhot* in all their manifold detail has the awesome power (“it is assured”) of paving the pathways of the true way of thinking about the world and of a correct apprehension of life (“the ways of the world”).<sup>12</sup> The transition from *halakhot* to *halikhot* is the transition from outward acts to molding awareness and consciousness of God. Review of decided *halakhot* is the key to this consciousness, as long as the student considers not only where the law comes from, but also what its *telos* is. Just as musical notations on paper can generate real music that subsequently affects the soul, so, too, the *halakhot* can only transform into *halikhot* in context of a life that is fully conscious of their internalization and actualization. Those who review *halakhot* and live them are on the highest level of Torah scholar, in whose footsteps the Rambam enjoins us to make an effort to follow:

One who was excommunicated in a dream, even if he knows who excommunicated him, needs ten men who review *halakhot* to release him from his excommunication. If he cannot find any, he must search them out up to a parasang away. If he still cannot find anyone, ten who review *mishna* may release him. If he cannot find anyone, ten who know how to read the Torah may release him. If he cannot find anyone, even ten who do not know how to read the Torah may release him. If he cannot find ten men where he is, even three may release him (*Laws of Torah Study* 7:12).

Thus, *halakhot* (the actions) and *halikhot* (the world view) form a single fabric in the teaching of Torah, a fabric that must not be disconnected, which may “repair character and straighten out actions” in the Rambam’s wonderful formulation from the end of the Book of Sacrifices.<sup>13</sup> One of the most penetrating expressions of this is the

*halakha* about the Cities of Refuge:

If a student was banished to a City of Refuge, his rabbi goes into exile with him, as it says: “and he shall live” (*Devarim* 19:5) – you must take care of him so that he may live. And for of those who have acquired wisdom and those who aspire to, a life without learning is like death. (*Laws of Murder and Self Defense* 7:1)

The power of this *halakha*, as wonderfully formulated by the Rambam, does not lie in the practice that it mandates, but in what it teaches about the essence of life and death. **Life means proper attitudes** (*Moreh Nevukhim* 1:42), not only in the sense of accumulating information, even if they are comprehended, but in man’s ability to live with that comprehension in his awareness and consciousness, allowing it to accompany him at all times. This wonderful *halakha* helps articulate a profound understanding of the gap between the full *telos* of the Torah and the role that it fills today. This *halakha* appears amongst the laws pertaining to Cities of Refuge, which are not practiced today because they do not appear in the *Shulchan Arukh*. However, it remains significant because it pertains to normal life in all times. Its omission from the standard curriculum of Torah study due to its contemporary impracticability completely misses out on the Torah’s intention.

This *halakha* is not unique. There are numerous *halakhot* dealing with ritual purity, the Temple, sacrifices, the Sanhedrin, nazirism, and more. To appreciate the degree to which we are missing out on the Torah, it is enough to note that we can fulfill only about a tenth of the Torah’s 613 *mitzvot*. However, in order to acquire the proper attitudes, the entire Oral Law must be comprehended. The *Mishne Torah* is the only work that can offer that.

In short, the point of halakhic decision-making is not just “to know what to do”; its primary goal is that, through the actions, a Jew will learn the correct attitudes. **The implication of choosing between differing practical and legal opinions which express opposing worldviews is the establishment of the priority of a particular worldview in life. The well-known Talmudic**

**statement that “These and those are the words of the living God” continues with the clear verdict: “But the *halakha* accords with Beit Hillel”** (*Erwin* 13b). This means that although each represents a correct perspective on life, a decision must be reached in favor of the more significant of the two. This understanding grants *halakha* the importance of a worldview and attitude. If we can become familiar with the entire *halakha* with all of its perspectives, we can understand the attitudinal fabric that the Torah and its values are trying to germinate within us.

All perspectives on life find resolution through the totality of the Torah’s commandments. By “totality”, I mean “the entire Oral Law”. Each law reflects different facets, and a person must go beyond reviewing the *halakha*, observing or striving to observe the *halakha*, or understanding the *halakha*, but must remain conscious of them and live them. This expectation entails the effort of studying, of fitting laws together, and of plumbing the depths of their conclusions. From this perspective, the *Mishne Torah* is more than a halakhic compendium “**to know the details of what is forbidden and permitted and the like for all *mitzvoth***” (*Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah* 4:13). Rather, it also includes matters of attitudes and worldview – not just because it incorporates passages that address ethics and Jewish thought, but because the *halakha* is itself an expression of a worldview and an attitude. The strong link between *halakha* and Jewish thought can filter out vain and nonsensical viewpoints. With respect to this unbreakable link, the *Moreh Nevukhim* and the *Mishne Torah* complement each other, each picking up where the other leaves off.<sup>14</sup>

#### ◆ The Vision of this Edition and Instructions to the Student

As we will specify below, many important precise editions have been published recently, all of which have the goal of presenting the reader with the precise words of the Rambam, as he wrote them, plus variant texts and other helpful additions encircling the Rambam’s words. However, specifically due to the plethora of variant texts and commentaries that appear in

these editions alongside the Rambam's words, it is difficult for the student to move quickly through it or to review it by reading it smoothly. It is also impossible to see the Rambam's word in their totality or to survey entire issues at a glance.

**The advantage of publishing the entire work in a precise, single volume edition, without itemizing the variant texts and without the other supplements, lies in its very accessibility even for primary study, knowing full well that there is no need to look in any other book or to wonder if these are the actual words of the Rambam.** One can study the different variant manuscripts in greater depth by looking at the other editions. Additionally, in a single volume edition, everything is spread out before the student. He can survey entire chapters in one glance, study the structure, scope, and order of the *halakhot*. He can thread all of these *halakhot* relating to every area of Torah together, fulfilling the determination made by our Sages (*Brachot* 64a; *Horayot* 14a) that the "Sinai", i.e., one who has attained mastery over the whole Torah, is preferable to the sharp and creative "uprooter of mountains" whose knowledge remains deficient or disorganized. As we have seen, linking the halakhic details from all over the Torah yields a clear, principled comprehension of the Torah.

**For that reason, we saw fit to make a complete, precise, single volume edition, as close as possible and in the spirit of what the Rambam himself produced, available to the Jewish people:** an edition from which one can learn the Rambam's words on any issue, learning in order to observe, whether by generally surveying a particular topic or alongside Talmudic study, even "*Daf Yomi*" study. After all, the purpose of Talmudic discussion is not mental acrobatics or accumulation of information, but to **live as a Jew should**, in consciousness and in action.<sup>15</sup> Halakhic decisions serve that end, and Talmudic discussions can be summarized through them. It

is even more important to study the Rambam's words in order, whether to cover ground, in the manner of eminent Sephardic rabbis such as the author of the *Chikrei Lev* and, more recently, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, or more in depth and with an eye toward practical application. If one wishes to delve into an issue more deeply, it should only be after its attitudinal and practical foundation has been clarified.

When studying the Rambam, we recommend those editions which explain passages by recourse to other passages from the Rambam (Rabbi Qafih's edition, published by Machon Moshe, and the incomplete edition of Rabbi N. Rabinovich, published by Maaliyot). We have already begun releasing a set of volumes to the public which feature an extremely concise explanation (thus far: the Book of Knowledge, the Book of Love, and excerpts from other books). These editions are the "passport" into the Rambam's teachings, which are contained in their full majesty in this volume with no commentary – similar to single volume editions of the *Tanach*.

It is worth citing the Rambam's letter to a Jew whose Hebrew was weak, but who nevertheless delved into the *Mishne Torah* to his utmost ability. The Rambam wrote words of encouragement, stating that he fulfills the *mitzvah* of Torah study with each passage that he studies, and urging him to become more familiar with the Holy Tongue so that he can understand the *Mishne Torah*, which is "easily understood and very easy to know; once you get used to one book of it, you can understand the entire thing".<sup>16</sup>

We conclude with the Rambam's words to his student, R. Yosef bar Yehuda, which appear at the beginning of this volume (Igrot Ha-Rambam, Qafih Edition, pp. 135-136):

I have already warned you not to relax until you know this entire work; let it become your book and study it everywhere, so that you attain its full benefits.

**May it be God's will that He enable us to observe all the words of this Torah, to perform it.**

## II. Editions of the Mishne Torah

### ◆ The Original Copy

Unfortunately, we no longer have the Rambam's own manuscript of the *Mishne Torah*. If we did, we could treat it like the Torah scroll that was kept in the Temple, from which all other scrolls were copied and repaired, and the *Mishne Torah* would certainly only be published based on it. The Rambam continued to make changes to that manuscript even after he published the work. This manuscript, which was kept by the Rambam's descendants for generations, has disappeared. We hope that it has escaped injury and that God helps it find its way back into our hands.

### ◆ The Image as a Metaphor

Who doesn't recognize the image of the Rambam? His well-known portrait, based on an ancient drawing, was proudly displayed on the 1000 Shekel bill in 5743 (1983). A lesser-known portrait appears in a bas-relief engraving at the U.S. House of Representatives, a tribute to his status as one of the men who left their mark on the U.S. Constitution. In it, the Rambam looks like a Greek philosopher. The most famous statue of the Rambam was erected in his native city of Cordoba in honor of what some traditions believe to be his 800<sup>th</sup> birthday.



However, these three portraits are the product of the artists' imagination. In the Rambam's day, painting portraits was not an acceptable practice; all existing portraits were made hundreds of years after his appearance was forgotten. For us, the Rambam's physical appearance is not terribly important. We do not know what any of our forefathers looked like, and nothing about their appearance can enhance or detract from their importance to us. The Rambam's own penetrating words on this matter are worth reviewing:

Graves are marked [so that Kohanim know to keep away], and monuments erected over the graves. Monuments are not built for the righteous, **for their words are their legacy**. Thus, we do not venture to visit graves" (Laws of Mourning 4:4)

The problem is not the attempt to paint an imaginary portrait of the Rambam. Rather, in all three cases, the Rambam, the subject of the work, would certainly have opposed any representation of his own image. Making a sculpture of a human is forbidden as a subset of the category of idol worship: "It is not forbidden to draw images for decoration, except for the image of man" (Laws of Idol Worship 3:10). The depiction of the Rambam wearing Greek clothing concerns another Biblical prohibition: "It is forbidden to follow the manners of the gentiles, or to imitate them – not in clothing nor hairstyle... all of this is proscribed under one rubric: not to imitate them. Rather, the Israelite should be distinguished from them and recognizable by his clothing and his deeds, just as he is distinguished by his knowledge and his demeanor" (ibid. 11:1). Worse than the others was the artist, apparently an apostate Jew or Christian, whose work found its way onto Israel's paper currency. In his depiction, Rambam looks like a Muslim sage and is shorn of his sidelocks, which violates a Biblical prohibition. This distortion is unthinkable!

### ◆ Not Just the Portrait

What has been done to the Rambam in these portraits is a microcosm of what has happened to the text of his monumental and unparalleled *Mishne Torah*, which work recapitulates the entire Oral Law in an extraordinary summation. Nothing that came before it can compare, and to this day there is no work as all-encompassing, well-classified, well-written in the most beautiful Hebrew, succinct, and clear. It is Jewish Law at its best.

However, the text has been completely corrupted – the mistakes have even affected the book's name. The book's name was changed because

many found it difficult to accept its brash title which suggests that the work is second only to the Torah itself. Rather, throughout the Jewish world, it became known as the *Yad Ha-Chazaka*, meaning “The Mighty Hand”, which alludes to the fact that the work is divided into fourteen books (the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word ‘*Yad*’ is fourteen) and also to the concluding verse of the Torah: “and for all the **mighty hand**...which **Moshe** wrought in the sight of all Israel.”

#### ◆ More than 10,000 Mistakes

As noted, from the date of its publication until today, the work has undergone editing and changes during the log, dark exile, intentionally and unintentionally. As a result, the common editions are filled with innumerable mistakes, errors and omissions resulting from the Christian censor, “editorial repairs” made by copyists and printers who were ignorant or who deemed themselves wise. The most widespread edition on the Jewish book shelf is the Warsaw-Vilna printing, which contains over 10,000 errors and variations on the original version. The following are four characteristic examples of these changes:

**I.** One mistaken letter can cause a big controversy. According to the printed editions, the Rambam wrote the following about righteous gentiles (Laws of Kings and Their Wars 8:14; in manuscripts, it is called ‘Laws of Kings and Wars’): “Anyone who accepts the seven Noahide laws and carefully observes them is considered amongst the righteous gentiles and earns a share in the World to Come as long as he accepted them because God commanded so in the Torah and informed us via Moshe that gentiles are commanded thus. However, if he observed them because of common sense, he is not a resident alien, nor a righteous gentile, **nor** (ולא) one of their wise men”.

This version caused a major debate in the Jewish world; why are these men not even considered as savants!? The truth, of course, lies in the original version, which removes all difficulty: “he is not a resident alien, nor a righteous gentile, **rather** (אלא) one of their wise men”.

**II.** An attempted repair that stemmed from a misunderstanding of the Hebrew language can be found in the Laws of Brachot (found in the Book of Love) 6:3: “If one measured out salt (כל את המלה) he must wash his hands afterward”. Many copyists and printers failed to understand that, in this context, the word “כל”, in this means ‘measured’ (as in *Yeshayahu* 40:12), and that the Rambam, in effect, stated that one who handles salt must wash his hands, as he would after a meal, because it would be dangerous for him to touch his eyes. The copyists therefore changed the original text and wrote “if one ate salt (אכל את המלה) he must wash his hands afterward. Some made a different mistake: “anything containing salt ( כל שהמלה בו)...”. This final version became the most prominent printed version, but with the added error: “any bread containing salt ( כל פת שהמלה בו)...”. The Rambam’s expositors, who had only the incorrect edition, were very bothered by his words, which they attempted to explain with farfetched and forced reasoning. Even the Ra’avad, who screamed: “By my life! He is ruining the language for us!”, did not know that it was the copyist who did the ruining, not Rambam.

**III.** The work was severely censored by Christian censors, who omitted entire *halakhot* at the end of the Laws of Kings and Wars that relate to the subject and role of the *Mashiach*, and they deleted reference to Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover, they distorted everything that the Rambam wrote about Christians and apostate Jews, replacing references to them with references to “*mumarim*” (converts from Judaism), a term with no basis in *halakha* since a Jew may not change his religion or abandon his Jewishness. They also consistently and mistakenly replaced “*goy*” (gentile) with “*oveid kochavim u-mazalot*” (worshipper of stars and constellations) and “*avoda zara*” (idolatry / polytheism) with “*avodat kochavim u-mazalot*” (worship of stars and constellations) or other terms which refer to groups of people who no longer exist. They even modified descriptions pertaining to marital relations that did not find favor with them.

IV. Attempts by copyists to square the Rambam to their understanding of the words of Our Sages: In the Book of Times, the Laws of *Chametz* and *Matza* (6:12), the following appears in many manuscripts and later printed versions: “One who eats *matza* on the day before *Pesach* is beaten **until his soul departs.**” In other words, eating *matza* before the *Seder* is a capital crime. Many early authorities and commentaries on the Rambam were bothered by this. The source of this “repair” seems to be a Talmudic formulation<sup>17</sup> which “aided” the copyist in “improving” the Rambam’s text. Studying the better manuscripts of the Rambam shows that the words “until his soul departs” are absent from the original text.

**We have only cited a small number of examples so as not to wear out the reader. In sum: If one wishes to truly understand the Rambam’s beautiful words, he can only do so with a precise edition that was edited based on the most ancient and reliable manuscripts.**

◆ **A Call and a Request**

We have made every effort to debug this edition from any mistakes and typos, but we presume that some errors inevitably crept in. Regarding this,

the sweet singer of Israel prayed: “Who can discern errors? Cleanse me from hidden flaws!” (*Tehillim* 19:13). Like the early copyists, we will conclude with a request to our readers: Please, if you encounter any error at all, investigate it thoroughly (for sometimes it is no error at all) and bring it to our attention, as it says: “Remove the stumbling block from before my people” (*Yeshayahu* 60:14). We will immediately issue notice of this error and its repair on our website, and it will be changed in the next edition. Please give us the benefit of the doubt, for just as there is no grain without chaff, there is no book without errors. Saadia Gaon preceded us when he made the following request in his introduction to “Beliefs and Opinions” (page 6 in the Qafih edition):

I hereby vow by God, Creator of everything, that any wise man who studies this book and finds something incorrect that he should fix it, and if he finds a dubious word, he should explicate it favorably. He should not be deterred by the fact that the book is not his or that I preceded him in explaining that which was not clear to him. For wise people care about wisdom, and love it like one loves family, as it says: “Say to wisdom – ‘you are my sister.’”

**Upon completing our sacred task, we prayed: May it be God’s will that this edition be studied and accepted by the community of those who seek out God’s Torah and knowledge of His Name.**

Y. M.  
Haifa, 5768

## NOTES

1. The Rambam's moniker "The Great Eagle" was given on account of the wide range of issues that he surveyed from his great height coupled with his sharp vision, capable of distinguishing small details of existence. Its source can be found in the vision of *Yechezkel* (17:3), which is an appropriate description of the Rambam.
2. According to Rabbi Qafih's estimates (Introduction to *Moreh Nevukhim*, p. 21).
3. Devarim 33:1. See the Rambam's words in his Commentary on the *Mishna* (*Avot* 5:13): "...a person in whom all virtues of rationality and proportion are gathered...and these are rarely found... if one exists he is called 'a Godly man'...and I add that such a person can also be described as 'an angel of God.'
4. Many disagreed with the Rambam on this issue and wished to present opinions that disagree (for example, the Ra'avad in his glosses). However, there is no doubt that this made the situation that the Rambam saw as severe even more problematic .
5. These are the words of Rabbi Shimon in the *Mishna* (*Shabbat* 14:4). See also the Rambam's commentary *ad loc.*, where he writes: "The law accords with Rabbi Shimon."
6. See the "*Aleynu*" prayer: "To establish the world under the kingdom of God". This prayer originated as part of the third blessing of the *mussaf* services on *Rosh Hashana* and on the *Yovel* year (see the Rambam's order of prayer, section 47), and was later inserted at the conclusion of every prayer.
7. See the Laws of Forbidden Relations (14:1).
8. See the Introduction to the Commentary on the *Mishna* (p. 18 in the Qafih edition) regarding what the Rambam wrote about the composition of the *Mishna*, namely, that it is difficult to understand because of the genius of Rabbi Yehuda the *Nasi*, who compiled it for his own use, and suitable for his great intellect: "for the original Sages only wrote for themselves". However, see also the *Moreh Nevukhim* (2:37): "No sage writes only for himself, to teach himself what he already knows" and Rabbi Qafih's comment *ad loc.*
9. *Igrot Ha-Rambam* (this translation from the Arabic is a combination of p. 125 in the Qafih edition and pp. 300-301 in the Shilat edition).
10. See, at length, Rabbi Qafih's introduction to the Book of Knowledge. The *Shulchan Aruch* is modeled and based on the Rambam as well.
11. Rabbi Shlomo ben Avraham *shlit"á* pointed this out to me.
12. Studying the original context of the verse shows that its subject is not a righteous person, but God actively leading the world. The Sages, in their exposition, related this verse to one who reviews *halakhot*, for such a person walks in God's ways (See the Laws of Character Traits 1:11-14); thus, man's purpose is to understand God's ways in this world (the *halikhot* of God in the world) on the basis of the Torah, and to shape his life accordingly (the *halikhot* of the one who studies).
13. repair character – this is the sense of the term "*de'ah*", and is also its connotation in the *Moreh Nevukhim* (3:51): "Understand that these actions, like reading from the Torah, prayer, and performance of other *mitzvot*, have only the purpose of **training** [the training associated with practice and adaptation, as the editor, Rabbi Y. Qafih pointed out], through occupation with His *mitzvot* instead of occupation with worldly matters, it is as though you were occupied with Him directly, and with nothing else". I cited this passage as the counterpart to what is written in the *Mishne Torah*, since someone wished to claim that *mitzvah* performance has no meaning outside the fact of the performance itself, and not the awareness that they demand, and he even enlisted an obsolete translation to that end.
14. At the conclusion of the *Moreh Nevukhim*, the Rambam cites the verses from *Yirmiyahu* (9:22-23): "Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands, and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord." And explains them thus: "He means to say: 'My goal is that there be, through you, mercy, justice, and righteousness in the earth.' **The goal is to imitate them so that these become our behaviors.** Thus, the purpose mentioned in this verse is what has been explained, that man's perfection, in which God truly glories, is that one apprehends God as best he can and understands how God's supervision of his creatures operates, **and that the behavior of that person follows his comprehension** and constantly intends, through them, to imitate God via mercy, justice and righteousness"...
15. See the splendid words of Rabbi Qafih in his introduction and in comment 10 to Section 1:71:10 of the *Moreh Nevukhim* and understand precisely the Rambam's position on Talmud study as presented in his letters.
16. See *Igrot Ha-Rambam* (Qafih Edition, pp. 135-136).
17. See *Ketubot* 86b, *Chullin* 132b and, more explicitly, *Tosefta Makkot* 3:10 and *Yerushalmi Nazir* 4:3.