

**History 371, Section 01
History of the Jews
Slippery Rock University
Fall 2008**

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Office Hours: MWF, 10-11am; TR, 1:30-2:30pm (or by appointment)
Course Days/Time/Place: TR, 9:30-10:45am in 217 SWC (Spotts)

**Note: You are responsible for the information in this syllabus. Please read it (and refer to it occasionally) so you will know all assignments and due dates. I will take points off late assignments!
Also, if you miss a reading quiz or exam, you forfeit the points!**

Course Description

The expanse of Jewish history is overwhelming: It covers from the ancient Israelites in biblical times to the modern state of Israel; and, because of the migration of Jews throughout the world (the Jewish *diaspora*) and their importance in economic, social, and religious history, the story of the Jews is interwoven with the history of many parts of the world. In this course, we will focus on the modern period of Jewish history, emphasizing the rise of Zionism, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and Israeli society (i.e., from around 1800 to the present). However, I will use the first several weeks to present an overview of Jewish history so you will have a broader context into which you can place the information we will consider in the remainder of the course. Also, learning about the state of Israel will require some information on broader issues in the history of modern Europe and the modern Middle East.

Along with class lecture and class discussion, we will also view some films dealing with issues related to the course. We will view these films either in class or out of class (see weekly schedule below) starting in week ????, and may view as many as 2 a week, depending on the week.

I will need to be selective in the presentation of information. However, I hope the topics and issues discussed will spark your interest and lead to further study of one or more aspects of the course contents. I believe one of the most important roles of a teacher is to excite you to learn more about the world and to help you develop critical-thinking skills that will serve you in that ongoing learning process and in whatever career(s) you end up pursuing.

Course Goals, Methods of Assessment, and Outcomes

This course serves as an Enrichment Course (Global Community) that fulfills requirements in the Liberal Studies Program and in the category of Distributional Electives in Non-Western History that fulfills part of the requirement for majors both in History and in Secondary Education—History. My goals in this course are for students to:

- Obtain a general understanding of the historical chronology of the nineteenth and twentieth-century Middle East and of key issues related to this dynamic region of the world
- Identify, understand, and discuss intelligently key figures, events, and concepts in Middle East history.
- Open their mouths in class discussions by making comments on issues I raise and/or by raising and commenting on issues of interest to them.
- Demonstrate improved competency in writing by learning to write clear, concise, and organized sentences + paragraphs = papers.

My methods for assessing student performance—as related to the goals above and which hopefully will lead to the desired outcomes explained below—are to have students

- Take pop quizzes on course readings.
Outcome: This method, by *scaring* students into keeping up with the reading, ☺ teaches them, hopefully, to

read for content and to take note of and remember important events, figures, and concepts related to course content. (Corresponds with university-wide outcomes 2, 4, 5, 8, and with History Department outcomes 3-4.) **Note: You may view the university-wide and History Department outcomes under “Course Information” on Blackboard (Bb).**

- Read selected key monographs written by important scholars in the field of Middle East history and politics and write two substantive reviews on two of them and one shorter response paper on another. In evaluating the papers, I grade for content (what the students write), organization (the order in which they write it), and style (how they write it—e.g., word choice, grammar, spelling, etc.). I do my best to give substantive feedback to students to help them improve on later papers they will write; if I do not see some improvement each time, I let students know in writing. I give the students the opportunity to share their thoughts and insights on the books in scheduled class discussions.

Outcome: This method requires students

1. to confront key issues addressed by specialists;
2. to think critically about the specialists’ assessment of these issues;
3. to grapple with the assessments and summarize main arguments, to evaluate evidence used, to identify major players and events, and to draw out important passages;
4. to pay attention (based on my written comments) to detail, language usage, and my suggestions on how to improve their writing, and to be held accountable for doing so—in the same way they will be held accountable by supervisors/bosses in their future jobs/careers.

(Corresponds with university-wide outcomes 1-8, and with History Department outcomes 1-4.)

- Participate in class discussions and debates. I do my best to establish an environment in which the shyest of students feels free to express his/her opinion. From class to class, I keep track on paper of who makes comments, asks questions, etc. At the end of the semester, I calculate participation into the overall course grade.

Outcome: This method encourages students to express themselves verbally—a skill that scares some students, but if developed even a little can be rewarding and, hopefully, will prepare them to teach, to give presentations, to clearly voice their opinions on what they perceive as bad or misguided policies, etc.

(Corresponds with university-wide outcomes 1-8, and with History Department outcomes 1-4.)

- Write midterm and final essay exams. On a study guide, I present the students with several questions that they have to prepare, and then I require them to write on one for the midterm and two for the final. The final exam study guide sometimes includes comprehensive (or what SRU students call “cumulative”) questions to prompt students to think broadly about the full sweep of the course. Because of the difficulty of handwriting answers in a limited amount of time, in grading, I pay attention to content and am less concerned with grammar and spelling (unless, of course, the grammar is so bad that it deters me from understanding the content☺).

Outcome: This method encourages study groups (in preparing for the exams) and requires students: to discern and memorize (for later retrieval in writing) major players, events, and concepts related to course content; to fulfill an assignment under a tight time constraint (something they no doubt will have to do, at least occasionally, in their future jobs/careers); and to write rapidly in language that is comprehensible.

(Corresponds with university-wide outcomes 1-2, 4-5, 8, and with History Department outcomes 1-4.)

Required Texts and Readings

You can purchase the following **required books** on the textbook floor of the SRU bookstore (downstairs):

Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*.

Donna Rosenthal, *The Israelis* (Preferably updated [April 2008](#) edition)

Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*.

Robert Goldenberg, *The Origins of Judaism*

Links to online historical documents from Jewish history or to articles (I list the articles and/or documents with their online addresses in the weekly schedule below—see week 1 for example.)

In addition to the above required texts, I reserve the right to assign, when appropriate, **required readings** that will either be posted on Blackboard (Bb) or found on the internet. The information for these readings, if not listed below under “weekly schedule,” will be given you in class the week before you are to read them.

Course Requirements and Grading

I will assign grades according the following requirements:

1.	Estimated 8 reading quizzes (each with 5 questions worth 2 points each)	80
2.	4 one-page response/thought papers (25 points each) on play script/films	100
3.	4-page book response	100
3.	Attendance and class participation	100
4.	Final Exam	<u>100</u>
	Total points possible (estimated):	480

I will calculate the grading of exams and papers, and the final course grade, on a straight percentage of the total points earned as follows:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
Below 60	F

Quizzes: The reading quizzes, which you will take online through Blackboard (Bb), will consist of multiple choice, true/false, **and/or** short answer questions dealing with readings (which I will specify via Bb email) done for the week in which you take the quiz. If you miss taking a quiz during the timeframe allotted on Bb, you forfeit the points. If you don’t have access to Bb yet, you need to obtain access TODAY.

Response/Thought Papers: You will base all four one-page papers on a play script/films. In all, I will show six films during the semester (either in or out of class), but because we will view the last film—*Paradise Now*—during the final exam period, you will only have five films to choose from for these papers. Everyone will write a one-pager on Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, whether you read it online or view it out of class. You will choose three out of the remaining four films to write the other three one-pagers. I will show one of the six films as part of the History Department’s “History and Film” night—*The Believer* (Thurs, Oct 23, from 8-10pm). **I announce all due dates for these papers in the “weekly schedule” below.**

For these papers you must adhere to the following criteria:

- You will respond to/express your thoughts on anything that interested you in the films. Do not summarize the films; I’ve seen them and know what they are about already.
- All papers should be in 12-point font (no larger, no smaller) and double-spaced with one-inch margins on top and bottom and on the sides.
- Your name, course number and section, and due date should be single-spaced at the top of page 1. Do not try to take up space by using extra spacing (triple-space, etc.); if you do so I will take points off!

NOTE: FYI, I will not grade these papers meticulously. I assign them to get you to think and write about the films you view as a stepping stone to class discussion. Therefore, if you write them and adhere exactly to the criteria immediately above, you should get all the points.

Book Response: You will respond to the Goldenberg book based on criteria I will post to Blackboard (Bb). **Paper due at the beginning of class on Thurs, Sept 25.**

Attendance and Class Participation: I will raise several issues/topics for class discussion during the semester; and I have no doubt you students also will raise some significant issues/topics worthy of discussion. Also, sometimes we will explore what you have read about topics in the course through question and answer.

I expect all students to participate in class discussions in one way or another. Obviously, staying up with the reading will give you some food for thought. Please let us hear your thoughts in class. Some will have more to say than others, and that's fine, but you must participate to earn full credit for this requirement. I will do my best to be fair in calculating the participation points at the end of the course.

Final Exam: This exam will be "objective," consisting of matching and multiple choice questions. **You will take the final exam on Bb during finals week.**

Weekly Schedule

I. FROM ANCIENT ISRAEL TO DIASPORA, C. 2000 BCE-1900 CE

Week 1 (Aug 26, 28)

Introduction to the course. The Formation of Ancient Israel and Israelite Kingdom, c. 1300-587 BCE.

Reading: Scheindlin, pp. viii-23.
 Goldenberg, pp. 1-67.
 Historical document: The Victory Stele of Merneptah mentioning "Israel"
 (<http://www.touregypt.net/victorystele.htm>)

Week 2 (Sept 2, 4)

Last week cont.; Origins of Diaspora and Jews Under the Romans and Sassanids, c. 587 BCE-632 CE.

Reading: Scheindlin, pp. 25-69.
 Goldenberg, pp. 68-136.
 Historical document: Josephus Describes the Romans' Sack of Jerusalem
 (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/josephussack.html>)
 Historical document: Josephus Describes the Mass Suicide at Masada
 (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/josephusmasada.html>)
 Historical document: Roman Sources on the Jews and Judaism, 1 BCE-110 CE
 (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/roman-jews.html>)

Week 3 (Sept 9, 11)

Continuation of last week.

Reading: Goldenberg, pp. 137-209.

Week 4 (Sept 16, 18)

Jews in the Islamic and Christian Worlds, c. 632-1500 CE.

Reading: Scheindlin, pp. 71-121.
 Historical document: Islam and the Jews: "The Pact of 'Umar," 9th Century CE
 (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jews-umar.html>)
 Article: Elliot Wachman, "Maimonides." (You will find this article at the end of this syllabus.)

Week 5 (Sept 23, 25)

4-page book response due at beginning of class on Thurs, Sept 25

Last week cont.; Jews in Europe and the United States, c. 1500-1900 CE.

Reading: Scheindlin, pp. 123-197.

Week 6 (Sept 30, Oct 2)

Continuation of last week.

II. FROM DIASPORA TO STATEHOOD, C. 1800-1948 CE

Week 7 (Oct 7, 9)

No classes on Oct 7 because of Fall Break/Professional Development Day.

The Phenomenon called Antisemitism.

- Reading: Historical document: Literature - William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1515> or <http://www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/merchant>)
 *I have a wonderful DVD version of this play. I would be happy to schedule some group viewings of the DVD for those interested.
 Historical document: Antisemitic Legends (<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/antisemitic.html>)
 Historical document: "Adolf Hitler's First Antisemitic Writing September 16, 1919" (<http://www.h-net.org/~german/gtext/kaiserreich/hitler2.html>)
 Historical document: Adolf Hitler- "The Discovery of Antisemitism in Vienna" (<http://www.h-net.org/~german/gtext/kaiserreich/hitler1.html>)

Week 8 (Oct 14, 16)

1-page paper (required of ALL students) on Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* due on Thurs., Oct 16.

Discussion of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

Antisemitism continued.

Week 9 (Oct 21, 23)

I will host a showing of *The Believer* on Thurs, Oct 23, for History and Film night; if you choose to write a one-pager on this film, it will be due on Tues, Oct 28.

Nationalism and the Rise of Zionism to c. 1920.

- Reading: Scheindlin, pp. 217-226.
 Dowty, pp. 1-44.
 Historical document: Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/herzl2.html>)

Week 10 (Oct 28, 30)

The British Mandate, the Holocaust, and the Establishment of the State of Israel, c. 1920-1948.

View the movie *Schindler's List* this week (time: about 195 minutes; short class discussion on Tues, Nov 4)—viewing schedule TBA.

- Reading: Scheindlin, pp. 199-215, 227-233.
 Dowty, pp. 45-86.
 Historical document: League of Nations: The Mandate for Palestine, July 24, 1922 (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1922mandate.html>)

Week 11 (Nov 4, 6)

1-page response paper on *Schindler's List* due at beginning of class on Tues, Nov 4 (if chosen).

British Mandate, Holocaust, Israel cont.

View the movie *The Chosen* this week (time: about 100 minutes; class discussion on Tues, Nov 11)—viewing schedule TBA.

- Reading: Rosenthal, pp. 1-24 (1-22 in older edition).
 NOTE: As the reading schedule for the rest of the semester is pretty hefty, I suggest diving into the Rosenthal book this week and over the weekend (based on reading assignments for next week). You will notice that some weekly reading assignments from here on out are more hefty than others. I suggest reading ahead on the less hefty weeks.

III. ISRAEL IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ISRAELI SOCIETY, 1948 CE-PRESENT

Week 12 (Nov 11, 13)

1-page response paper on *The Chosen* due at beginning of class on Tues, Nov 11 (if chosen).

Short discussion of *The Chosen*.

From *Hagana* to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Law of Return and Israel's melting pot.

Reading: Rosenthal, pp. 49-78, 103-179 (47-74, 97-169 in older edition).
Dowty, pp. 86-104.
Historical legal document: Israel's Law of Return
(http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Immigration/Text_of_Law_of_Return.html)
Film: "Tkuma"—Episode 2: "The Ingathering."

Week 13 (Nov 18, 20)

A nation born in conflict: The Arab-Israeli-Palestinian (A-I-P) conflict, 1949-c. 1980.

Reading: Scheindlin, pp. 235-263
Dowty, pp. 105-130.
Rosenthal, pp. 205-230 (195-220 in older edition).

We will start watching the movie *Campfire* in class (time: about 90 minutes).

Description from All Movie Guide: "A woman seeking to embrace both her faith and her culture finds that neither is as simple as she imagined in this drama from Israel. It's 1981, and Rachel (Michaela Eshet) has become a single mother of two teenage girls after the unexpected death of her husband. Looking for a new identity as she starts her life again, Rachel decides to pull up roots and leave Jerusalem for a new settlement on the West Bank. Rachel's daughters have become acclimated to city life and are unenthusiastic about their mother's decision, but that doesn't change her mind. However, Rachel's neighbors soon make their own feelings felt; they obviously aren't happy with the prospect of a single mother living in their community, and she soon finds herself subjected with any number of matchmaking opportunities from fifty something men. More seriously, daughters Esti (Maya Maron) and Tami (Hani Furstenberg) don't feel safe or accepted in their new environment, especially Tami, who has a traumatic experience while on a camping trip with a Zionist youth organization. *Campfire* was the winner of five Israeli Academy Awards in 2005, including Best Picture." *Mark Deming*

Week 14 (Nov 25)

Nov 26-28 is Thanksgiving Holiday.

Finish watching *Campfire* in class and have class discussion on it.

Reading: Dowty, pp. 130-186.
Rosenthal, pp. 183-204, 231-253 (173-194, 221-243 in older edition).

Week 15 (Dec 2, 4)

1-page response paper on *Campfire* due at beginning of class on Tues, Dec 2 (if chosen).

The Arab-Israeli-Palestinian (A-I-P) conflict, c. 1980 to the present.

Reading: Dowty, pp. 187-229.
Rosenthal, pp. 257-302 (247-291 in older edition).

We will watch the Movie *Ushpizin* in class (or perhaps out of class, schedule TBA) this week and have a short discussion on it (time: about 90 minutes).

Description from Amazon.com: "A cinematic fable set in the orthodox Jewish world, *Ushpizin* follows a poor childless devout man named Moshe (Shuli Rand) and his wife Malli (Michal Bat Sheva Rand, Shuli's real-life spouse) who can't afford a succah, the temporary dwelling required by the Succoth holiday. Suddenly a friend helps them find a succah and an anonymous donation rescues them from debt; Moshe believes the Lord has smiled on him at last and celebrates by buying a particularly beautiful citron (a lemon-like fruit) for the Succoth observations. But when a couple of escaped convicts appear--one of whom knows Moshe from his old neighborhood--they insinuate themselves into Moshe and Malli's hospitality and quickly abuse it, threatening the couple's marriage and testing their faith. Like many Jewish stories, *Ushpizin* balances an almost fairy-tale story with psychologically real characters (made all the more vivid thanks to the uniformly excellent performances) and complex social conflict. The movie provides a

fascinating look into a closed community--though its insider's perspective may seem initially opaque to many viewers, the personalities and conflicts soon become accessible to anyone. A unique, intriguing film." --Bret Fetzer

Product Description found at Amazon.com: "Winner of the 2004 Best Actor award at the 2004 Israeli Film Academy for writer-star Shuli Rand Ushpizin is a heart-warming and light hearted look at the daily lives of ultra-Orthodox Jews learning living and loving in modern-day Israel. Following the story of a family facing hardships they must rely on their faith for miracles to happen during the holiday season. Inspiring heartwarming and uplifting Ushpizin is a critically acclaimed film that regardless of faith or religion everybody can enjoy."

Week 16 (Meet on Thurs, Dec 11, 8-10am for final film)

1-page response paper on *Ushpizin* due at the beginning of class (if chosen).

We will watch the movie *Paradise Now* and have a short discussion on it (time: about 91 minutes).

Description from Amazon.com: "Two men, best friends from childhood, are summoned to fulfill their agreement to be suicide bombers for the Palestinian cause. Khaled and Said (Ali Suliman and Kais Nashef, both making striking film debuts) believe fervently in their cause, but having a bomb strapped to your waist would raise doubts in anyone--and once doubts have arisen, they respond in very different ways. *Paradise Now* is gripping enough while the men are preparing for their mission, but when the set-up goes awry and Khaled and Said are separated, it becomes almost excruciatingly tense. The movie passes no judgment on these men; impassioned arguments are made for both sides of the conflict. This is a work of remarkable compassion and insight, given the shape and sharpness of a skillful thriller. Its psychological portrait goes beyond the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and resonates with fanaticism and oppression throughout the world, be it related to a religious, nationalist, or tribal cause. A stunning film from writer/director Hany Abu-Assad." --Bret Fetzer

Product Description found at Amazon.com: "'PARADISE NOW' follows two Palestinian childhood friends who have been recruited for a strike on Tel Aviv and focuses on their last days together. When they are intercepted at the Israeli border and separated from their handlers a young woman who discovers their plan causes them to reconsider their actions."

FINAL EXAM: To be taken on Bb between Tues, Dec 9, at 8am, and Sat, Dec 13, and 12pm

Accessed on August 2007 at
http://chabadstanford.org/pages/wisdom_center/Article/Print/132.html

Maimonides

By Elliot Wachman

"From Moshe (Moses) to Moshe (Maimonides) there arose none like Moshe."

Throughout history, there have been a number of thinkers whose influence over the generations that succeeded them continues to be clearly evident today. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) was one of these figures. The range and sheer volume of his writings are in themselves exceptional. Before the age of twenty-three, Maimonides had completed a treatise on the Jewish calendar, a dissertation on logic, a commentary on nearly one half of the Babylonian Talmud, and a legal digest of the Jerusalem Talmud. In the decades that followed, Maimonides composed thousands of responsa to questions posed him by religious leaders from all over the world, and numerous treatises on the theory and practice of medicine -all these in addition to his major works: the Commentary on the Mishnah, the Mishneh Torah and Sefer HaMitzvot, and the Guide for the Perplexed.

The circumstances under which many of these were written were far from comfortable. Born in 1135, Maimonides lived the first thirteen years of his life in Cordova, Spain. Fleeing the persecutions of the Moslem Almohades, Rabbi Maimon, Maimonides' father and the leader of Cordova's Jewish community, led his family from city to city in Southern Spain during the next decade as the Almohades gradually swept throughout the country. Maimonides' commentaries on the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, as well as his early treatises, were composed during these years of wandering. In 1159, the Maimon family arrived in Fez, Morocco where they were able to stay for five years. It was in Fez that Maimonides did the bulk of the work for his Mishnah commentary. Working at times in difficult physical conditions, he was often forced to work from memory, condensing and clarifying the lengthy Talmudic explanations of the Mishnah without the text in front of him. In 1164, religious persecution forced the family from Fez as well. After journeying through the Holy Land, Rabbi Maimon and his family arrived in Fostat, Egypt (outside Cairo) in 1166, the year of Rabbi Maimon's death. During the next five years, the family was supported by Maimonides' brother David, enabling Maimonides to begin work on his Mishneh Torah. In 1171, however, David died in a shipwreck, leaving Maimonides responsible for providing for the family. It was at this juncture that he began what was later to become a distinguished career as a doctor, serving ultimately as the personal physician of the Grand Vizier Alfadhil and the Sultan Saladin. By 1177, Maimonides' scholarly works had become sufficiently respected that he was asked to become the Chief Rabbi of Cairo, a large and influential Jewish community. Despite these responsibilities, he completed the Mishneh Torah soon after and, some ten years later, his Guide for the Perplexed. The nature of these accomplishments is best understood in the context of his life during the latter part of this period, as described in the following excerpt from one of his letters:

Concerned by the confusion between Aristotelian and Jewish conceptions of the world, and fearing its potential consequences, Maimonides composed his Guide.

"I dwell at Fostat and the Sultan resides at Cairo; these two places are . . . about one mile and a

half distant from each other, My duties to the Sultan are very heavy. I am obliged to visit him every day, early in the morning; and when he or any of his children, or any of the inmates of his harem, are indisposed, I dare not quit Cairo, but must stay during the greater part of the day in the palace. It also frequently happens that one or two of the royal officers falls sick, and I must attend to their healing. Hence, as a rule, I repair to Cairo very early in the day, and even if nothing unusual happens, I do not return to Fostat until the afternoon. Then I am almost dying with hunger. I find the ante, chambers filled with people, both Jews and Gentiles, nobles and common people, judges and bailiffs, friends and foes--a mixed multitude, who await the time of my return.

I dismount from my animal, wash my hands, go forth to my patients, and entreat them to bear with me while I partake of some slight refreshment, the only meal I take in the twenty-four hours. Then I attend to my patients, write prescriptions and directions for their various ailments. Patients go in and out until nightfall, and sometimes even, I solemnly assure you, until two hours and more in the night, I converse with and prescribe for them while lying down from sheer fatigue, and when night falls I am so exhausted that I can scarcely speak.

In consequence of this, no Israelite can have any private interview with me except on the Sabbath. On that day the whole congregation, or at least the majority, come to me after the morning service, when I instruct them as to their proceedings during the whole week; we study together a little until noon, when they depart. Some of them return, and read with me after the afternoon service until evening prayers. In this manner I spend that day. I have here related to you only a part of what you would see if You were to visit me.” (1)

Quite apart from the circumstances of their composition, it is difficult to appreciate the volume of Maimonides' output without an understanding of the scope of his major works--the Mishnah Commentary, the Mishneh Torah, and the Guide. Second only to the Bible in its importance, the Mishnah is a vast collection of primarily legal material which, prior to its written compilation in the 3rd century C.E., had been passed down orally from teacher to student for over a thousand years. During the few hundred years following the Mishnah's redaction, scholars elaborated on and argued over the meaning of its terse Hebrew. The compilation of these Aramaic commentaries, known as the Gemara (and, taken together with the Mishnah, as the Talmud) was done in both Babylon and in the Land of Israel, producing what are known as the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, respectively. Often, these works contain many pages of text for each few lines from the Mishnah, the complete sets filling many folios. As the culmination of several hundred years of scholarly effort to set down in writing the Oral Law (that part of Jewish law not contained explicitly in the Bible), their importance can hardly be overstated. The Babylonian Talmud, in particular, has served as the cornerstone for an edifice of commentary and discussion that continues in sparkling vibrancy to shape contemporary Jewish thinking.

The Guide was responsible for opening up a new era of Jewish philosophy, serving as both cornerstone and catalyst for subsequent works of this genre.

By the 12th century C.E., some 700 years after the Babylonian Talmud had taken its final form, there had developed a vast Jewish population for whom its extended, often subtle reasonings were inaccessible. Without the Talmudic explanations, however, it was difficult to properly understand the condensed language of the Mishnah. To help rectify this gradually worsening situation, Maimonides composed his Commentary on the Mishnah. Gleaning primarily from the

Talmudic discussions as well as from later scholars, he brought brief, lucid explanations to each passage in the Mishnah whose meaning was not otherwise evident. When disagreements as to points of law arose, he clearly set down the final, accepted opinion. His Commentary included a comprehensive Introduction as well as smaller introductions to particularly difficult sections of the Mishnah. Some of these latter are quite well-known and much studied in their own right. His preface to Chapter X of the tractate Sanhedrin, for example, contains the Thirteen Principles of Faith that continue to be recited daily in many Jewish communities. His introduction to the tractate Ethics of the Fathers has enjoyed sufficient popularity to merit its translation into a host of languages and has, in fact, been frequently published on its own, separate from the Commentary. Taken as a whole, the Commentary stands as a remarkable achievement. Written in Arabic and later translated into Hebrew, it soon became widely read by Jews all over the world. Indeed, though it was the first complete, specific commentary on the Mishnah, it has remained until this day as one of the most definitive explications of the text and is invariably included in standard editions of the Talmud.

THE THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES OF FAITH: 1. I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is the Creator and Guide of all the created beings, and that He alone has made, does make, and will make all things. 2. I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is One and Alone; that there is no oneness in any way like Him; and that He alone is our G-d--was, is and will be. 3. I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is incorporeal; that He is free from anthropomorphic properties; and that He has no likeness at all. 4. I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is the first and the last. 5. I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is the only one to whom it is proper to pray, and that it is inappropriate to pray to anyone else. 6. I believe with complete faith that all the words of the prophets are true. 7. I believe with complete faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace unto him, was true; and that he was the father of the prophets, both of those who preceded and of those who followed him. 8. I believe with complete faith that the whole Torah which we now possess was given to Moses, our teacher, peace unto him. 9. I believe with complete faith that this Torah will not be changed, and that there will be no other Torah given by the creator, blessed be His name. 10. I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, knows all the deeds and thoughts of human beings, as it is said, "it is He who fashions the hearts of them all, He who perceives all their actions." (Psalms 33:15) 11. I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, rewards those who observe His commandments, and punishes those who transgress His commandments. 12. I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and although he may tarry, nevertheless, I wait every day for him to come. 13. I believe with complete faith that there will be resurrection of the dead at the time when it will be the will of the Creator, blessed be His name and exalted be His remembrance forever and ever.^{3/}

Studied and consulted by Jews from all over, Maimonides's Mishneh Torah was soon acclaimed as the greatest work of Jewish scholarship since the Talmud.

Though the Commentary clarified considerably the labyrinth of legal discussions that had accumulated since the redaction of the Mishnah, it did not provide a clear, practical source to which people could turn to answer day-to-day questions of law. There was, in fact, a pressing need at the time for such a code, arranged by topic, that could provide the average person with reliable, definitive rulings of Jewish law (halachah). A number of years earlier, Rabbi Yitzchakl

Alfasi (the "Rif") took the first step in this direction, selecting out the authoritative opinions and the relevant legal passage of the Talmud, deleting the more elaborate discussions and the anecdotal sections. In its final form, the Rif's digest was a tremendous accomplishment--few scholars possessed the learning and insight necessary to sort through all the Talmudic material to arrive at final rulings. Paralleling the organization of the Talmud--with its frequent, often abrupt shifts of subject-- however, the Rif's work was not easy to consult for those not thoroughly versed in the Talmud.

Maimonides sought to remedy this deficiency by composing a code organized topically. Dividing his work into fourteen books, with each book split into chapters and each chapter partitioned into discussions of individual laws, he strove to create a code in which the ruling on a particular issue could be readily located. Collecting all Biblical, Talmudic, and post-Talmudic legislations and picking out the most authoritative opinions, he included the entire range of Jewish law--even those laws which, according to tradition, will not be practiced again until the time of the Messiah (such as those pertaining to Temple sacrifices). To facilitate accessibility and readability, Maimonides chose to present the laws in his code without reference to their sources or explanations of their rationale (both of which were subsequently supplied by later commentators). In short, his intent was to provide a code of law that, in his words, would allow "no man [to] have any need to resort to any other book on any matter of Jewish law, but that the compendium should contain the entire Oral Law." As such, he decided to call it the *Mishneh Torah* (Second to the Torah). And indeed, from its publication, response to the work was extraordinary. Studied and consulted by Jews from all over, the *Mishneh Torah* was soon acclaimed as the greatest work of Jewish scholarship since the Talmud. Written in clear, carefully chosen language, the *Mishneh Torah* became a model of succinct, focused composition. (Later commentators have referred, in fact, to Maimonides' writing in this work as "golden language".) Unique in its scope, peerless in its composition, the work has stood as the basis for all codifications of Jewish law since.

Despite the immeasurable influence of these legal works, the *Commentary* and the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides is best known by many as a philosopher and as the author of the *Guide for the Perplexed*. Unlike these other books, the *Guide* was written for a very specific audience. During Maimonides' lifetime, many observant philosophically-minded Jews had become attracted to the works of the ancient Greek Philosophers, an influence that was popular among the Arab intelligentsia of the time. Faced with conflicts between the Aristotelian and Jewish conceptions of the world, these Jews became troubled and shaken in their faith. Concerned by this confusion and fearing its potential consequences, Maimonides composed his *Guide* to systematically elucidate the primary philosophical and religious tenets of Judaism. Not meant for the nonbeliever, it was explicitly designed for knowledgeable, believing Jews. As Maimonides writes in his introduction to the *Guide*: "The object of this treatise is to enlighten a religious man who has been trained to believe in the truth of our holy Law, who conscientiously fulfils his moral and religious duties, and at the same time has been successful in his philosophical studies." (2)

Physician's Oath Attributed to Maimonides

"O G-d, Thou has formed the body of man with infinite goodness; Thou has united in him innumerable forces incessantly at work like so many instruments so as to preserve in its entirety this beautiful house containing his immortal soul, and these forces act with all the order, concord,

and harmony imaginable. But if weakness or violent passion disturb this harmony, these forces act against one another and the body returns to the dust whence it came. Thou sendest them to man Thy messengers, the diseases which announce the approach of danger, and bid him prepare to overcome them. The Eternal Providence has appointed me to watch over the life and health of Thy creatures. May the love of my art actuate me at all times, may neither avarice, or miserliness, nor the thirst for glory or a great reputation engage my mind; for, enemies of truth and philanthropy, they could easily deceive me and make me forgetful of my lofty aim of doing good to Thy children. Endow me with strength of heart and mind, so that both may be ready to serve the rich and the poor, the good and the wicked, friend and enemy, and that I may never see in the patient anything else but a fellow creature in pain.

If physicians more learned than I wish to counsel me, inspire me with confidence in and obedience toward the recognition of them, for the study of the science is great. It is not given to one alone to see all that others see. May I be moderate in everything except in the knowledge of this science; so far as it is concerned, may I be insatiable; grant me the strength and opportunity always to correct what I have acquired, always to extend its domain; for knowledge is boundless and the spirit of man can also extend infinitely, daily to enrich itself with new acquirements. Today he can discover his errors of yesterday, and tomorrow he may obtain new light on what he thinks himself sure of today.

G-d, Thou has appointed me to watch over the life and death of Thy creature: here am I ready for my vocation.” (3)

The Guide is divided into three parts. The first is dedicated to discussions of confusions apt to arise directly from the text of the Bible-- apparent Scriptural contradictions, anthropomorphisms of G-d, and the like. The second tackles problems stemming from incompatibilities between "scientific" (Aristotelian) and Biblical approaches to G-d and the world, and thoroughly analyzes the legitimacy of applying Aristotelian thinking to questions of religion and the Bible. The final section of the Guide addresses more general, fundamental religious issues: the nature of good and evil, the purpose of the world, the meaning behind the Commandments, the character of pure worship.

Unfortunately, the philosophical language in which the Guide is couched has led many to misunderstand Maimonides' intentions. Fully cognizant of these potential difficulties, Maimonides makes clear in his introduction that the Guide must be read with great care: What I have written in this work was not the suggestion of the moment; it is the result of deep study and great application....Do not read superficially, lest you do me an injury, and derive no benefit for yourself. You must study thoroughly and read continually."²/ Some of the greatest classical Rabbinical commentators have in fact indicated that a number of the concepts Maimonides discusses are based on profound insights from the Zohar, the primary text of Jewish mysticism. It is to be emphasized that even at its most philosophical and scientific, the Guide remains firmly grounded in the Torah. Maimonides viewed science and philosophy as aids to understanding G-d's Law, rather than ends in themselves.

Despite the misunderstandings that followed its publication and the specificity of its intended audience, the Guide's influence was profound in both Jewish and non-Jewish circles. Arguably the most commented upon philosophical treatise of all time, it has over thirty Hebrew commentaries whose authors are known and a host of other commentaries penned by writers

whose names have been lost. Translated into nearly every European language, it is quoted extensively in the works of Aquinas, Bacon, and others. Most significantly, however, the Guide was responsible for opening up a new era of Jewish inquiry into questions of philosophy, serving as both cornerstone and catalyst for subsequent works of this genre.

In the areas of both law and philosophy, Maimonides' contributions to Jewish thought are unique. His Mishnah Commentary, Mishneh Torah, and Guide for the Perplexed were each landmarks in the history of Jewish thought. Indeed, the extent of Maimonides' influence on later scholars is perhaps best captured by the saying that is engraved on his tombstone in Tiberias in Israel: "From Moshe (Moses) to Moshe (Maimonides) there arose none like Moshe."

- (1) As quoted in Roth, L. *The Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948.
- (2) As quoted in M. Friedlander's translation of the Guide, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1881.
- (3) As quoted in *The Rambam: A Brief Biography*, New York. Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch, 1985. Reprinted by Permission from Aleph, March/April 1989.