

A VISION *for* MASHIACH

THE REBBE AND THE RAMBAM



IT'S
TIME TO
KNOW

SEIZE THE MOMENT. GAIN CLARITY IN THE
REBBE'S TEACHINGS ON MOSHIACH

LESSON 1

The Ultimate Restoration



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I. WHAT WILL HE DO?

LEARNING EXERCISE

Why do you look forward to Mashiach?

Freedom, prosperity, and wellness?

Divine revelation?

Meeting loved ones?

Meeting the greats from our past?

The opportunity to do mitzvos unavailable in Galus?

INTRODUCTION

The Rambam dedicated the final two chapters of *Mishneh Torah* to the *halachos* of *yemos haMashiach*, the messianic era. These are chapters eleven and twelve of *Hilchos Melachim Umilchamoseihem*—the Laws of Kings and their Wars. He was the first to organize these laws and to present them in systematic fashion so that Mashiach can be studied as a complete subject.

Considering the Rebbe's zeal and life-long focus on Mashiach, it is not surprising that the Rebbe devoted a great deal of time to analyzing, dissecting, and deepening our understanding of these two chapters of Rambam.¹ The Rebbe's methodology and depth consistently reveal original perspectives and surprising angles that don't occur to us at first glance. When we learn the Rambam under the Rebbe's treatment, the Rambam often emerges in an entirely new light.

Let's begin by reading Rambam's first statement in this chapter:



TEXT 1

Rambam, Mishneh Torah, *Hilchos Melachim Umilchamoseihem*, 11:1

הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ עֵתִיד לַעֲמֹד וּלְהַחְזִיר מַלְכוּת דָּוִד לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפָּחָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה. וּבִזְמַן הַמְּקֻדָּשׁ וּמְקֻבָּץ נְדָחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְחֹזְרֵי כָּל הַמְּשֻׁפְּטִים בְּיָמָיו כְּשֶׁהָיוּ מֻקְדָּמִים. מִקְרִיבֵי קֶרְבָּנוֹת. וְעוֹשֵׂי שְׂמִטִּין וְיִזְבָּלוֹת כְּכֹל מִצְוֹתֵי הָאֱמוּנָה בַּתּוֹרָה.

וְכָל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ מֵאֲמִין בּוֹ. אוֹ מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ מִחֻפָּה לְבִיאָתוֹ. לֹא בִשְׂאֵר נְבִיאִים בְּלִבָּד הוּא כּוֹפֵר. אֲלֵא בַּתּוֹרָה וּבְמִשְׁנֵה רַבֵּנּוּ. שֶׁהָרִי הַתּוֹרָה הַעֵדִידָה עָלָיו שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְיָשֹׁב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצֶךָ" "אִם יִהְיֶה נְדָחְךָ בְּקִצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם" וְגו', וְהִבְיָאָה ה'" (דברים ל, ד-ה). וְאֵלוֹ הַדְּבָרִים הַמְּכַבְּרִים בַּתּוֹרָה הֵם כּוֹלְלִים כָּל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁנֶּאֱמָרוּ עַל יְדֵי כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים. אֵף בְּפָרְשֵׁת בְּלָעַם נֶאֱמַר וְשָׁם נִבְּא בְּשֵׁנֵי הַמְּשִׁיחִים. בְּמִשְׁנֵי הָרִאשׁוֹן שֶׁהוּא דָּוִד שֶׁהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד צָרִיהֶם. וּבְמִשְׁנֵי הָאַחֲרוֹן שֶׁעוֹמֵד מִבְּנָיו שֶׁמוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל [בְּאַחֲרוֹנָה].

For the Sake of Israel

Rambam rules that the Beis Hamikdash will be built before the ingathering of the exiles. Building the Beis Hamikdash first will elevate the state of the Jews when they will arrive in Israel. Building the Beis Hamikdash later would elevate the state of the Beis Hamikdash because it would be built by all the Jewish people. Here we see that to benefit the Jew, G-d is prepared to compromise on the Beis Hamikdash because G-d treasures the Jew even above the Beis Hamikdash.

Toras Menachem 5743:1, pp. 519–520

In the future, the messianic king will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty. He will build the Beis Hamikdash and gather the dispersed of Israel. In his days, the observance of all the statutes will return to their previous state. We will offer sacrifices, observe the shemittah and yovel years according to all the instructions delineated in the Torah.

One who does not believe in him, or does not await his coming, denies not only the statements of the other prophets, but also denies the Torah and denies Moshe, our teacher. This is evidenced by the Torah's testimony to his coming, "G-d will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you. He will again gather you from among the nations. . . . Even if your Diaspora is at the ends of the heavens, G-d will gather you up from there . . . and bring you to the Land" (Deuteronomy 30:3–5). These explicit words of the Torah include all the statements made by all the prophets.



Reference to Mashiach is also made in the portion of Bilam, who prophesied about two anointed kings: the first anointed, King David, who saved Israel from her oppressors; and the final anointed king who will arise from [David's] descendants and save Israel in the end of days.

THE HALACHIC RELEVANCE

The Rambam begins his treatment of Mashiach by describing his role. To the casual reader it appears that the Rambam's intent is to offer a general introduction to the subject. Before discussing the specifics, Rambam tells us what Mashiach is about. The Rebbe's approach is that every word in the Rambam has halachic relevance. There are no throwaway lines. No story is brought just for the sake of storytelling:

TEXT 2

The Rebbe, *Likutei Sichos* 18, p. 277

דער רמב"ם איז מפרש אין פרק יא פון הלכות מלכים ניט בלויז די זאך פון ביאת המשיח און דעם חיוב להאמין בו, נאר אויך וואס עס איז ענינו, גדרו, ופעולתו, און אופן התגלותו. ובמילא אין וואס עס באשטייט דער חיוב להאמין בו . . . דאס איז ניט נאר א סיפור דברים וואס משיח וועט טאן און וואס ס'וועט זיין בימיו, נאר דאס איז א הלכה.

In chapter eleven of the Laws of Kings, Rambam doesn't merely tell us that Mashiach will come and that we must believe it. He also presents the concept, definition, function, and the process by which Mashiach will be revealed, thereby establishing the parameters of our belief about Mashiach . . . This is not just a story about what Mashiach will do and what will occur in the era of Mashiach. This is a point of halachah.



Throughout these two chapters, Rambam explains what we can expect Mashiach to do and what we can't expect from him. What will occur in the era of Mashiach, and in what order. This is not just for the sake of storytelling. This is a book of halachah, and as such, Rambam tells us what Mashiach is expected to do, according to halachah, and what he is not expected to do. This will enable us to determine Mashiach's authenticity. Even Mashiach will be bound by his halachic role. If he fulfills it, we will know he is Mashiach. If he fails to fulfill it, we will know he is an imposter.

Moreover, this halachah is relevant even before Mashiach arrives. It is a mitzvah to believe in and to await the coming of Mashiach. A mitzvah can't be ambiguous. If we are to believe, we need to know specifically what to believe. If we are to await, we need to know precisely what we are waiting for. Thus, these descriptors have halachic significance. They inform our faith in and our anticipation of Mashiach.

SUMMARY

The description of Mashiach's role has halachic significance:

1. It gives us concrete items by which to determine the legitimacy of any prospective Mashiach.
2. It informs about the specifics of our faith in and anticipation of Mashiach.

II. HIS PRIMARY ROLE

FOUR DESCRIPTORS

In Text 1, we read that Mashiach will:

1. Restore the Davidic kingdom
2. Build the Beis Hamikdash
3. Bring about the ingathering of the Jewish people
4. Restore all the *mitzvos* that can't be fulfilled in the Diaspora.²

The casual reader might reasonably conclude that the first three points are Mashiach's primary goals, and the last point merely derives from the former points. In other words, Mashiach's primary role is to bring relief to the Jewish people and to restore our former glory.

The Rebbe reads the Rambam differently. The Rebbe asserts that Mashiach's entire purpose is not to restore our glory, but to restore the Torah's glory. The first three points are merely precursors, or necessary conditions, to make the final point possible.

MASHIACH: THE CULMINATION OF JUDAISM

The Rebbe arrives at this conclusion through a comprehensive analysis that is as astounding as it is simple, and as deep as it is obvious. And in his inimitable style, the Rebbe begins with a holistic treatment of the entire subject.

Two questions:

1. Why is this section, the Laws of Kings, the last section of the *Mishneh Torah*?
2. Why are the laws about Mashiach not only in the last section of the *Mishneh Torah*, but also within the very last chapters of this section?

Detailed Analysis

The Rambam presents three concrete restoration goals and three mitzvah-oriented restoration goals. Mashiach will restore (a) the Davidic monarchy, (b) the Beis Hamikdash, and (c) the Jewish presence in Israel. With each of these steps he will restore one of the following sets of *mitzvos*: (a) all the statutes that had been interrupted, (b) the sacrificial rite, and (c) *shemita* and *yovel*, which require the presence of most Jews in Israel (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Shemita Veyovelin* 12:16).

Likutei Sichos 18, pp. 277–278.



The second question is easy to answer. Since Mashiach will only come at the end of time, it makes sense to place the *halachos* about him at the end of the book. But the first question is more difficult to answer. Why are the laws about Jewish kings, a primary aspect of Jewish life, placed at the end of the book? Moreover, in the opening passage of this section, Rambam writes that the obligation to appoint a king became binding when the Jews entered Israel. If this was among the first *mitzvos* that Jews encountered in Israel, why is it the very last section of the book?³

The Rebbe's answer is incisive and refreshing.

The last page of a book is not the least important page. It is the culminating page. Every word in the book, every chapter of the book, must flourish and come to fruition in its final page. Accordingly, the end of a book that encapsulates the corpus of Torah is the culmination of the entire Torah.

Having presented every mitzvah in the Torah, the Rambam concludes with the conditions that are necessary to fulfill these *mitzvos*. Some of these *mitzvos* can be fulfilled in all places and at all times. But some can only be performed by those who live in Israel.⁴ Others only take effect when all, or at least most, Jews live in Israel.⁵ Many require the presence of the Beis Hamikdash.⁶

After the Jews entered Israel, they were unable to fulfill many of these *mitzvos* for nearly four hundred years. This is because they didn't have a Beis Hamikdash, they were repeatedly harassed and attacked by neighboring nations, and were therefore, unable to settle down fully. It was only after G-d appointed the first permanent Jewish king, David, that the necessary conditions were achieved to

³ Building a Beis Hamikdash was another obligation that became binding with their entry into Israel. Yet, Rambam enumerates the laws about the Beis Hamikdash much earlier than the laws about kings.

⁴ Such as *terumah* and *maaser*.

⁵ Such as *shemittah* (according to Rambam—*Hilchos Shemittah Veyovlin* 12:16) and *yovel*.

⁶ Such as *korbanos*, *tumah* and *taharah*, *Sanhedrin*, *semichah*, etc.

fulfill all the *mitzvos*.⁷ In fact, this is the true role of a Jewish king: to create the optimal conditions for mitzvah observance.⁸ Inasmuch as having a king was a necessary ingredient for the fulfillment of all the *mitzvos* in the Rambam's book, these laws appear as the final section of the book.

This explains why the Laws of Kings is the last section of the book. Why are the laws about Mashiach in *the final chapters* of this section?

TEXT 3

The Rebbe, *Likutei Sichos* 18 p. 278

די אלע ענינים וואס האבן געפעלט אין קיום תורה ומצוות מצד דעם וואס עס האט געפעלט אין שלימות כל ישראל ובית המקדש, וואס דאס איז כללות ענין הגלות, ווערט נשלם דורך משיח'ן. און אין דעם באשטייט וואס משיח איז מחזיר מלכות דוד ליושנה כו', וחוזרין כל המשפטים. ער ברענגט צוריק די שלימות הלכות ומצות התורה.

The primary impact of Galus is our inability to fulfill all the Torah's precepts because we lack the Beis Hamikdash and because the Jewish people are not present in Israel. Mashiach's role is to correct this. He will restore the Davidic kingdom in order to restore the Torah and all its precepts.

As the restorer and successor of the Davidic kingdom, Mashiach will restore all that David Hamelech achieved. He will rebuild the Beis Hamikdash and return all Jews to Israel. But all this will be the means to his primary purpose. They will create the necessary conditions for his main function—the complete restoration of the Torah and its *mitzvos*.

Rambam wrote his book in *Galus* when, as we outlined, many of the *mitzvos* were not practicable. He placed the laws about Mashiach at the very end of this section because Mashiach's primary role will be to restore what the first Jewish king established—the optimal conditions for mitzvah observance.

The Necessary Proof

This is precisely why Mashiach is not required to perform miracles to prove himself. He is authenticated by achieving his goal. Since his primary goal is to restore the Torah, he proves himself by doing just that. Everything else is irrelevant. Similarly, prophets are authenticated by foretelling the future accurately, not by performing miracles. The prophet's role is to prophesy, not to perform miracles. Hence the method of authentication entails prophecy. Everything else is irrelevant.

Likutei Sichos 18, pp. 280–281



On the basis of this comprehensive treatment, the Rebbe concludes that, of the four descriptors that the Rambam provided of Mashiach's role, the fourth one was primary. Mashiach will come not so much because we need him to redeem us, or to restore our land, our independence, or our prosperity. Mashiach will come because moving forward without being able to observe these *mitzvos* is inconceivable.

That is why Jews have anticipated his arrival for so many years. That is why Jews have always been desperate for Mashiach. That is why G-d can't wait to send Him.

THE PROOF

In this context, the Rebbe lends new understanding to the Rambam's intention when he cites the following proofs about Mashiach's arrival:

TEXT 4

Rambam, Ibid.

שְׁהָרִי הַתּוֹרָה הַעֵיִדָה עָלָיו שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְשָׁב ה' אֶלְהֵיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצֶךָ . . . אִם יְהִי נִדְחָךְ בְּקִצָּה הַשָּׁמַיִם . . . וְהִבִּיאָךְ ה'"
(דברים ל, ד-ה)

. . . . אַף בְּפִרְשֵׁת בְּלָעַם נֶאֱמַר וְשָׁם נִבְּא בְּשָׁנֵי הַמְּשִׁיחִים. בְּמִשִּׁיחַ הָרִאשׁוֹן שֶׁהוּא דָּוִד שֶׁהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד צָרֵיהֶם. וּבְמִשִּׁיחַ הָאַחֲרוֹן שֶׁעוֹמֵד מִבְּנֵי שְׁמוֹשֵׁי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל [בְּאַחֲרוֹנָה].

For the Torah testifies to his coming, "G-d will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you. He will again gather you from among the nations. . . . Even if your Diaspora is at the ends of the heavens, G-d will gather you up from there . . . and bring you to the Land" (Deuteronomy 30:3-5).

. . . Reference to Mashiach is also made in the portion of Bilam, who prophesied about two anointed kings: the first anointed king, David, who saved Israel from her oppressors; and the final anointed king who

Out of Order

The two proofs appear out of order. The first one is from *Chumash* Devarim and the second one is from *Chumash* Bamidbar.

However, upon closer analysis we see that they are presented in ascending order. The first speaks of *Ge'ulah* as a liberation from *Galus*. The second (which doesn't mention *Galus*) describes the inherent benefits of *Ge'ulah*, not merely as it contrasts with the darkness of *Galus*.

Sefer Hasichos 5751:2, p. 688



will arise from among [David's] descendants and save Israel in the end of days.

A casual reader would assume that the Rambam is focused on the first and third descriptors of Mashiach's role—restoring the Davidic monarchy and ingathering the Jewish exile. Yet, the Rebbe remains focused exclusively on the fourth goal—restoring the *mitzvos* that are denied to us in *Galus*. The Rebbe continues to see all the other goals as means to this end.

There are two sets of passages referenced here.

1. The Jewish people will return to Israel.
2. As a king, Mashiach will pick up where David Hamelech left off.

We explained earlier that in *Galus*, some *mitzvos* are denied to us because we don't live in Israel, and others are denied to us because we don't have a Beis Hamikdash. These two sets of passages provide proof that Mashiach will restore both sets of *mitzvos*.

The first set testifies that we will one day return to Israel, which will allow us to restore the *mitzvos* that require us to live in Israel.

The second set testifies that Mashiach will be a king. Just like David Hamelech did, Mashiach will vanquish our enemies and rebuild the Beis Hamikdash,⁹ which will restore all the other *mitzvos* that are denied to us today in *Galus*.¹⁰

⁹ See *Likutei Sichos* 16, p. 304, footnote 49, which suggests that, though the second Beis Hamikdash was built without a king, it was an exception because it was built as a continuation of the first Beis Hamikdash. Otherwise, a Jewish king is necessary to build the Beis Hamikdash. Hence, the first Beis Hamikdash was built by Shlomo Hamelech and the last Beis Hamikdash will be built by the *melech HaMashiach*.

¹⁰ In addition to the underlying role of all Jewish kings to enhance and deepen the nation's faith in and relationship with G-d. See *Sefer Hamitzvos, Mitzvos Aseh* 273. See also *Hilchos Melachim Umilchamoseihem* 4:10.



SUMMARY

Mashiach's primary role will be to restore the *mitzvos* that are denied to us in *Galus*.



III. THE TORAH DEMANDS IT

Once we understand Mashiach's primary role, we can understand why Rambam inserts the following lines:

TEXT 5

Rambam, Ibid.

וְכֹל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ מְאֱמִין בּוֹ. אוֹ מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ מְחַכֶּה לְבִיאָתוֹ. לֹא בִשְׂאֵר נְבִיאִים
בְּלִבָּד הוּא כּוֹפֵר. אֶלָּא בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ.

Anyone who does not believe in him or does not await his coming denies not only the statements of the other prophets, but denies the Torah and denies Moshe, our teacher.

At first glance these words are superfluous and out of context. If Rambam merely wants to define the role of Mashiach, why does he veer into discussing the severity of denying Mashiach? It would be sufficient if he told us that we are required to believe in him without mentioning that denying Mashiach equates with denying the Torah.¹¹

The Rebbe teaches that these words play directly into Rambam's primary point. Rambam wants us to know that restoring the Torah to its original glory is Mashiach's primary purpose. With these words Rambam tells us that if the Torah is not restored, it is as if the Torah has been reversed.

Did you know that only two hundred and seventy out of the six hundred and thirteen *mitzvos* are practicable in the Diaspora?¹² So

¹² This is based on מגילת סתרים, quoted by the *Shalah* in his שבתבב לתורה. He writes that of the 613 *mitzvos*, 126 *mitzvos aseh* and 243 *mitzvos lo saase* apply in *Galus*. In total, that is 369. The *siman* for this is *Shir Hashirim* 5:2, "אני ישנה ולבי"



what does this mean for the Torah? Does it mean that more than half of the Torah was erased when we were exiled from Israel? Can the Torah be erased? Is that even possible if we believe that the Torah is eternal?

The very notion of an eternal Torah demands—nay, *requires*—a positive reversal of our fortune so that the Torah can be restored to its full grandeur.¹³ Thus, concludes the Rambam, if you deny the coming of Mashiach, you're not just denying a prophecy. You're fundamentally denying the Torah itself. You are really saying that more than half of the Torah has been permanently erased.¹⁴ Such denial is theologically impossible. If you deny the coming of Mashiach, you may as well deny the entire Torah.¹⁵

Mashiach: A Fundamental Principle

Belief in Mashiach is one of the fundamental principles of Jewish faith. This is not only due to the centrality of Mashiach to Judaism, but also to Mashiach's role as restorer of the Torah's precepts. Without Mashiach, the Torah—the central pillar of Judaism, is compromised.

Likutei Sichos 18, p. 280

ער.” The word ישנה (plus the four letters of the word) is a *gematriya* of 369. He then reduces the number further to a total of 270. Of the *mitzvos aseh*, explains the *Shalah*, only 48 are universally binding. This is because many *mitzvos* are only binding on those who encounter the obligation. For example, מיניקה is only binding on those who own a home. Of the *mitzvos lo saaseh*, only 222 *mitzvos* are universally binding. If you calculate all the universally binding *mitzvos*, you arrive at 270. A *siman* for this is in the same *pasuk*, “אני ישנה ולבי ער.” The word ער has a *gematriya* of 270. However, in his *Sefer Mitzvah Katser*, the *Chafetz Chayim* counts 77 *mitzvos aseh* (כמנין) and 194 *Mitzvos lo saaseh* (כמנין צדק) for a total of 271.

¹³ So long as these missing *mitzvos* will be restored, the fact of their temporary absence doesn't contradict their eternal nature—the *mitzvos* are still prevalent; only their fulfillment is temporarily restricted. This is because the *mitzvos*, as they exist within the divine will, are eternal even when we can't fulfill them. As G-d's will is eternal, so are His commandments except that when we are unable to fulfill them, their eternality is not manifest on the physical plane. However, if they would never be restored, their eternality would be irrevocably canceled on the physical plane, and that would be problematic because the Torah was given to us eternally on *this* plane. (See *Likutei Sichos* 18, p. 280, footnote 63; 19, pp. 182–183.)

¹⁴ This explains why the Rambam concludes halachah 3 (after explaining that Mashiach is not expected to change the natural law) with the statement that the Torah is eternal and can never change. Mashiach's primary role is to restore the *mitzvos* as they once were, not to change the world. He might indeed do that one day, but it is not his primary role.

¹⁵ This is also why Rambam adds,

“ואלו הדברים המפורשים בתורה הם כוללים כל הדברים שנקארו על ידי כל הנביאים.” All the promises about Mashiach made by all the future prophets, such as universal peace, prosperity, and abundance, all feed into Mashiach's primary goal—restoring the Torah. These promises remove the impediments to our fulfillment of the Torah's precepts. When we are not engaged in war or desperate to make ends meet, we are free to spend our day steeped in the Torah, growing inexorably closer to G-d, and fulfilling all His commandments.



SUMMARY

The eternity of the Torah depends on the coming of Mashiach.

KEY POINTS

1. Understanding Mashiach's role informs our belief in and anticipation of Mashiach.
2. Mashiach's primary purpose is to restore the *mitzvos* denied to us in the Diaspora.
3. All of his other roles, including the building of the Beis Hamikdash, are features of this central promise.
4. When we are not beleaguered by enemies, when we are stable and prosperous, when we are in our Land, and when we have the Beis Hamikdash, we can serve G-d completely and study His Torah undisturbed.



