

LUMINARIES

Personalities
in the
Rebbe's Torah

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Master of Pnimityus HaTorah

The Ramban

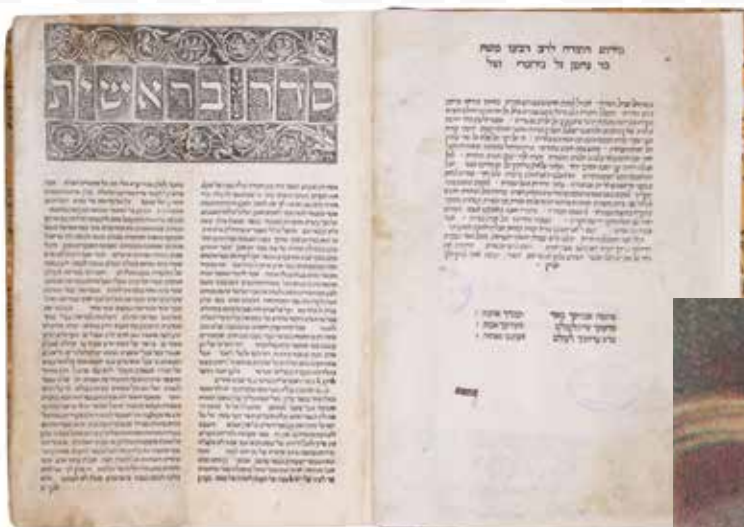
In the year 4976 (1216), designated by the Rambam as a “Ketz” for the return of *nevuah*, the revelation of Kabbalah reached its peak during the era of the Rishonim.

The Rebbe identifies key Rishonim who were foundational *mekubalim*, who spread and taught the wisdom of *pnimityus haTorah* in their time. The Rebbe lists these Gedolei Yisroel and their revelation of *nevuah* and Kabbalah as a necessary precursor to the coming of Moshiach.

Among the Rishonim of Germany, particularly from among the Chassidei Ashkenaz, the Rebbe mentions Rabbi Yehuda Hachossid and his father Rabbi Shmuel Hanavi, as well as Rabbi Elazar of Germaiza (Worms), the Baal HaRokeiach.

From the Rishonim of southern France (Provence), the Rebbe lists the Raavad and Rabbi Ezra Hanavi. However, the Rishon we discuss in this article, whose impact may be greatest, is the Ramban – Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman of Girona, in northern Spain. The Rebbe notes that he “wrote a number of books in Kabbalah, and it is mentioned in the Kisvei HaArizal that he is one of the few *mekubalim* upon whom we rely.”¹

The Ramban is a figure revered not only in the Jewish world but also beyond. He is considered one of the greatest and most outstanding Rishonim, with an incredible impact on both the scholarly and practical aspects of Torah to this day. In addition to his monumental achievements and enduring influence, we will focus on the aspect of the Ramban that is emphasized in the Rebbe's Torah and Chassidus, namely his significant place in the *mesorah* of *pnimityus haTorah*.



AN EARLY
HANDWRITTEN
EDITION OF THE
PIRUSH HA'RAMBAN.

A PORTRAIT THAT HAS COME TO BE
ASSOCIATED WITH THE RAMBAN.



Rabbeinu Moshe Ben Nachman of Girona

Rebbi Moshe Ben Nachman of Girona, also known as the Ramban, was born in the town of Girona (Girona), part of the Kingdom of Catalonia, in the year 4954 (1194). He lived through the turn of the millennium, at the height of the *Tekufas Harishonim*.

The Ramban studied in the Yeshivos at Barcelona and Girona in northern Spain, and also seems to have studied in Yeshivos in southern France. There, he not only inherited the *mesorah* of the Geonim of Sefarad, like the Rif and Rambam, but also learned the Torah of the Baalei Hatosfos from northern Tzorfas and Ashkenaz. This broadened the horizons of Torah study for the young Ramban and - through him - for later generations.

In addition to his study of Nigleh from his teachers Rebbi Yehuda Ben Yakar and Rebbi Meir Ben Nosson, he also learned Kabbalah from teachers who passed to him the Toras Hakabbalah of the Raavad.

The Ramban's greatness in Torah was evident in his youth. By the age of twenty, he had already written supplements to the Rif and a sharp and critical work called *Milchamos Hashem*, which defended the Rif from the criticisms of Rebbi Zerachia Halevi, the Baal Hamaor from Provence.

The Ramban grew to be one of the greatest Rishonim of his times, with his influence reaching across the borders of the medieval world to all the Rishonim of his era, both in Ashkenaz and Sefarad.

In addition to his leadership, the Ramban's vast Torah works range from *Hasagos* on the Baal Hamaor to *seforim* on Kabbalah, including the *Chiddushei HaRamban* on Shas, the *Pirush HaRamban* on Chumash, *Hasagos* on the *Sefer Hamitzvos* of the Rambam, collections of *Drashos*, *Shailos u'Teshuvos*, and several other smaller works, including *Sefer Hageuleh* about Moshiach and *Shaar Haggmul* about *schar v'onesh*.

The Ramban's Torah places him in the ranks of the foremost Poskim, Mechadshim, Baalei Hashkafa, and Baalei Kabbalah of all Jewish history.

To explain the great impact that the Ramban's Torah had on all of Jewish learning, let us turn to an explanation by Rabbi Chaim Dov Shevel, the *Mahadir* [editor and publisher] of as well as commentator on, the works of the Ramban, in an article in the *Yiddishe Heim*.

Before the Ramban's time, there were two different *darkei hamilmud* [schools of thought]: First, there were the



LOCATION OF THE DEBATE IN WHICH THE RAMBAN PARTICIPATED.

Chachmei Tzorfas and Ashkenaz, most notably Rashi, Rabbeinu Tam, and the Baalei Tosfos, whose learning was focused around the Gemara. They would discuss and contrast various *sugyos*, and work to reconcile apparent contradictions. While this all had an impact on practical Halacha, it didn't begin with Halacha, it ended there.

Second, you had the Torah of the Chachmei Sefarad, such as the Rif, and most famously the Rambam, whose emphasis wasn't on the Gemara and the *sugyos* as they are in Shas, but the clarification of Halachos and creating structure in new forms outside of Shas. In addition, in Sefarad, there was a lot more emphasis on Chakira (philosophy) and Piyut (as in the works of the Ibn Ezra and Rebbe Yehuda Halevi) which was not the case among the Rishonei Ashkenaz.

In the period of the early Rishonim, there was little to no interaction between the two *darkei halimud* and their Rishonim. [An exception was found in Provence, which was nestled geographically, as well as ideologically and stylistically, between the Sefardim in Spain and the Baalei Hatosfos in France.]

The Ramban changed this. He studied and incorporated the Torah of Ashkenaz, fusing it with his Sefardi *mesorah*. This is seen clearly in the Chiddushei HaRamban on Shas – an entirely new style of Torah writing – *Chiddushim*, which doesn't just reconcile conflicting *sugyos* (as Tosfos do), and doesn't just explain Torah in the conceptual wide range view as the Sefardi *mesorah* does, but rather merges the two in a unique style — *Chiddushim*.

This synthesis of the two *darkei halimud*, was then continued by the Ramban's star pupil the Rashba, and then the Ritva, and so on, through the generations.

Ramban's Leadership

The Frierdiker Rebbe shared in a *sicha* on Chai Elul 5701: "The Baal Shem Tov was the spiritual *yoiresh* (inheritor) of the famous Ayin Tov (positively disposed) and Ohev Yisrael – the Ramban, Rebbe Moshe Ben Nachman – who found words of comfort for the suffering Jews of his times when the *gezeiras hashmad* surfaced, and extended a comforting hand to the *Anusim* [forced converts], welcoming them back into the Yiddishe camp."

While it is common to think of the period in which the Ramban lived as "the golden age" of Spanish Jewry, it must be noted that this is relative to other locations at that time and in comparison with later periods in Spain. However "golden" the situation for the Jews in Catalonia compared to those in France and Germany at the time, trouble was already brewing in Spain.

Unlike his fellow Baalei Hatosfos who were being attacked, banished, and even murdered in the northern Christian lands, the Ramban was an honored citizen of the Aragonian crown. He was the official Rav of Girona, and later all of Catalonia, worked as a physician, and even served as advisor to Jaime the First, King of Aragon. Documents have been discovered that refer to the Ramban as "Bonastruc ca Porta" [Good luck at the gate], as he was said to have lived near the city gates.

During this time, the power of the church was growing, while secular royal power was diminishing. What had started in Italy, Germany, France, and England eventually reached Spain, as rabid and official Jew-hatred, brought upon by the Christian monastic orders began to show itself in the Ramban's times.

In 5023, the king pressured the Ramban into a debate against Pablo Christiani (a *Meshumad*), who claimed to bring evidence for Christianity from the Gemara. The Ramban agreed as long as the king granted him protection and allowed him to respond freely. After four non-consecutive days of debate, the king cut it short, as the Ramban obliterated his opponents's arguments and derided the entire Christian belief. The king was impressed and granted the Ramban a prize of three hundred gold coins.

The story didn't end there. The following Shabbos, the king himself came to lecture the Jews about Christianity, and the Ramban bravely stood up and rebutted the king's attempts. To disprove the claims of the church, the Ramban published an account of the *Vikuach* so people could see the arguments and that he had clearly won. This enraged the monks, and they sought revenge against the Ramban. As the situation worsened and even the king could not intervene on his behalf, the Ramban left Spain for Eretz Yisroel.

[In another example of Christian persecution during the times of the Ramban, the Rebbe shared a story from the Seder Hadoros about the Ramban's Talmid, Reb Avner, who had converted to Christianity and forced the Ramban to come to his house on Yom Kippur, and ate Chazzir in front of his former Rebbe. He explained that he left Yiddishkeit because it cannot be that everything is in Haazinu as the Ramban had taught. The Ramban showed him that even his name is hinted in a Possuk in Haazinu. He had a change of heart, and the Ramban sent him on a journey of Teshuva.^{2]}

Eretz Yisroel

The Ramban spent his final years in Eretz Yisroel, after arriving in the year 5027 (1267). After traveling from the port city to Yerushalayim, the Ramban described the desolate state in which he found the holy city. For years, the Jewish community and the general population of Eretz Yisroel had been going through numerous upheavals.

Wars had been ongoing for decades between the Crusader states and various Muslim rulers. In the few decades before the Ramban's arrival, the city of Yerushalayim changed hands several times, from the Crusaders to the Khwarzarm Persians, and then - after several Mongol raids - the Egyptian Mamluks. When the Ramban arrived, he writes, there were hardly any people living in Yerushalayim. The Jewish population was down to just two Yidden.

The Ramban turned one of the abandoned structures into a Shul, gathering a few Jews from around the region to form the nucleus of a community. Since the Ramban's time, there has never ceased to be a community of Yidden in Yerushalayim. The Ramban continued to teach and write Torah in Akko until his passing in the year 5030 (1270). He is buried

in Eretz Yisroel, although the exact location is not fully clear.

Halacha like the Ramban in Pnimiyyus HaTorah

In the conventional Torah world, the Ramban is known for his innovative Torah interpretations, his approach to Halacha, and his clear Hashkafa. However, in the realm of Chassidus, as demonstrated in the aforementioned *sicha*, the Ramban is celebrated as one of the great Mekubalim in history, with a significant role in transmitting the sacred secrets of Kabbalah.

The Ramban's approach to Kabbalah is distinct from earlier Gedolei Yisroel such as Rashi and the Rambam, who, despite possessing deep Kabbalistic knowledge, kept its teachings concealed in their works.. The Ramban is among the first, if not *the* first, to clearly incorporate ideas from Kabbalah into his *Pirush*. While there may have been previous works of Kabbalah disseminated among *talmidei chachamim*, this is the first work where Kabbalah and *Peshat* merge, blending the revealed and hidden aspects of the Torah.³

Following a Kabbalistic tradition passed down from his



THE RAMBAN'S SHUL DURING ITS INITIAL RENOVATION IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SIX DAY WAR.



A DIAGRAM OF THE RAMBAN'S SHUL IN ERETZ YISROEL DRAWN 500 YEARS AGO BY A VISITOR TO ERETZ YISROEL.

Rebbeim, the Ramban pioneered a new path in Kabbalistic teaching. He can be seen as one of the first public disseminators of *pnimiyus haTorah*, whose teachings reached a wide audience. From his time until today, people from all walks of life (on both sides of the debate over studying *pnimiyus haTorah*) learn "Ramban on Chumash," incorporating *pnimiyus haTorah* ideas into simple *peshat* and *hashkafa*, thanks to the Ramban's remarkable work. He was a true trailblazer in revealing the hidden aspects of Torah.⁴

The Ramban's Kabbalistic tradition is mentioned in the *Hakdama* of Rabbeinu Chaim Vital to the *Kisvei HaArizal*,⁵ referenced by the Rebbe. Reb Chaim writes that the Ramban's tradition originated from the Raavad, who learned the secrets of Torah from Eliyahu Hanavi. This knowledge was passed down through generations (the Raavad's son – Rabbi Yitzchok Sagi-Nahor, Rabbi Ezra⁶ and Rabbi Ezrial of Girona, the latter two being the Ramban's Rebbeim in Kabbalah) until it reached the Ramban, who was considered the last of the true Mekubalim before the Arizal's time.⁷

The Ramban's involvement in Kabbalah extended beyond his commentary on Chumash and his works on Kabbalah. He had a *pnimiyus haTorah* perspective on everything, evident throughout his works, from interpretations of *pessukim* to opinions on Halacha. The Rebbe explains that one of the reasons that Chassidus follows the Ramban's opinion over the Rambam's regarding the times of Moshiach is because of the Ramban's focus on *pnimiyus haTorah*. Unlike the Rambam, who focused primarily on the revealed parts of Torah, the bulk of the Ramban's attention and immersion was in *pnimiyus haTorah*. Just as we follow Rav's opinion in *Issur V'heter* and Shmuel's opinion in legal matters based on their areas of expertise, in a dispute in the realm of *pnimiyus haTorah*, the Halacha aligns with the Ramban.⁸

Pirush Haramban Al Hatorah

One of the most famous and oft-quoted works of the Ramban is his Pirush on Chumash. Throughout the world of Torah scholarship, and specifically in the Rebbe's teachings, we find numerous references to the Ramban's commentary, which the Rebbe referred to as "one of the most accepted and relied upon *pirushim*."⁹

The Ramban's goal in his commentary is not just to explain the simple *peshat* as Rashi does; therefore, the rules and parameters of the Ramban's *pirush* differ as well. Besides bringing ideas from *Sod* and *Drush*, the Rebbe points out that the Ramban may not explain certain things if they have already been explained by others.¹⁰

Following Rashi, the Ramban often quotes him and has certain similarities to him.¹¹ Like Rashi, the Ramban does not make Halachic rulings in his *pirush*,¹² though he will at times



AN INSIGNIA BELONGING TO THE RAMBAN DISCOVERED APPROXIMATELY 50 YEARS AGO. CURRENTLY HELD IN THE ISRAEL MUSEUM.

mention ideas of Halacha.¹³ While his commentary contains *Remez* and Kabbalah, he is primarily a *Pashtan*, focused on the simple meaning, similar to Rashi but not quite on the same level.¹⁴

It is interesting to note that many ideas in the Rebbe's teachings, as found in Chassidus, Likkutei Sichos, and Igros Kodesh, are based on - or extensively explained in - the Ramban's writings. Examples include the impact of our Avos on today's world [*Maaseh Avos Siman Lebonim*], the Mitzvah to be holy in all aspects of life [*Kadesh Atzmecha Bemutar Lach*], and the concept of the Beis Hamikdash as primarily a place for Hashem's presence rather than just for Korbanos. The list goes on and on.

Numerous ideas and *pirushim* of the Ramban form the basis of core concepts in the Rebbe's Torah. Perhaps it was the Ramban's background in Kabbalah and his efforts to integrate the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah that provided the background, context, and framing of *pnimiyus haTorah* even in his *pirushim* in *peshat*, making the Ramban's Torah not only a prominent work in the revealed part of Torah, but also foundational in the realm of *pnimiyus haTorah*.

Along these lines, there is fascinating *sicha* of the Frieddiker Rebbe, where he says that "People who come with 'complaints' to Chassidim, can have bigger 'complaints' about the Ramban. Often, before the Ramban would bring something from *pnimiyus haTorah* he would write "V'al Derech Ha'emes" [and according to the truth...], and this would be even after bringing a *drush* from Chazal. This is because in Nigleh it is possible to veer off from the real meaning of the study and falsehood might be hard to discern. Chassidus does not allow for any falsehood, if one deviates in *pnimiyus haTorah*, it is immediately clear."¹⁵

IN HIS TORAH

הכל מודים בתחיית המתים ובקיום הזמן ההוא בכלליו ופרטיו כמו שפירשתי זולתי דעת הרב רבי משה זכרונו לברכה שנותנת קצבה לזמן התחיה ומחזיר הכל לעולם הנשמות כמו שנזכר למעלה ואנחנו מקיימין אנשי התחיה לעדי עד מימות תחיית המתים לעולם הבא שהוא עולם שכולו ארוך ואדון הרחמים יזכנו לטוב אשר צפון ליראיו ופעל לעבדיו למען רחמי וחסדיו אמין ואמן.

(רמב"ן שער הגמול בסופו)

Everyone agrees and believes in the concept of *Techiyas Hameisim* (resurrection of the dead) and the existence of that time in all its general aspects and specific details, as I have previously explained, aside from the differing opinion of the Rav, Rabbi Moshe (the Rambam) of blessed memory, who sets a limit to the duration of the *techiya* and suggests that everything ultimately returns to the world of *Neshamos*, as mentioned earlier. Yet, we keep the people who experience the *techiya* alive forever, from the time of *Techiyas Hameisim* in the World to Come, a world that is long and everlasting. May the Master of Mercies grant us the merit to partake in the goodness that He has reserved for those who fear Him, and may He act on behalf of His servants out of His boundless mercy and kindness, *Amen Ve'Amen*.

Regarding the time after Moshiach comes and *Techiyas HaMeisim* begins, there is a Machlokes between the Rambam and the Ramban. The Rambam holds that following *Techiyas HaMeisim*, bodies will cease to live and only *Neshamos* will live on, in complete unity with Hashem. The Ramban, on the other hand, disagrees and explains that at the time of *Techiyas HaMeisim*, the physical body will be refined, and as *Neshamos in bodies*, they will have the utmost *Giluy Elokus* (revelation of G-dliness), living in the physical reality of *dirah betachtonim*.

Chassidus follows the opinion of the Arizal, and that of the Ramban before him, that the ultimate goal of *dirah betachtonim* will be reached at *Techiyas HaMeisim*, with *Neshamos* in physical bodies in this world.

1. Likkutei Sichos, vol. 2, p. 588.
2. Shabbos Parshas Haazinu 5742; Hisvaaduyos 5742 vol. 1, p. 109.
3. Igros Kodesh vol. 18, p. 101.
4. Igros Kodesh vol. 22, p. 94.
5. Shaar Hahakdamos, Hakdamos ch. 1.
6. The Chida says that this Rebbi Ezra was known as Ezra Hanavi, which was brought in the sicha as one of the examples for the generation of Nevuah.
7. Reb Chaim Vital explains that after the Ramban all the works in Kabbalah were basically reframing previous concepts of pnimiyus haTorah; there is no real development of this Torah in their works.
8. Shavuos 5727; Toras Menachem vol. 50, p. 57. An explanation

mentioned elsewhere is that the Ramban was later than the Rambam and knew his opinion while ruling differently. In cases such as this, halacha kabasrai [Halacha follows the later opinion].

9. Shabbos Parshas Vayikra 5732; Toras Menachem vol. 67, p. 418.
10. Shabbos Parshas Shelach 5734, Sichos Kodesh 5734 vol. 2, p. 218.
11. Shabbos Parshas Balak 5737; Sichos Kodesh 5737 vol. 2, p. 247.
12. Sichos Kodesh 5727 vol. 1, p. 35.
13. Shabbos Parshas Mishpatim 5737; Sichos Kodesh 5737 vol. 1, p. 503.
14. Sichos Kodesh 5740 vol. 1, p. 855.
15. Sefer Hashichos 5704, p. 54.