



# PERSPECTIVES OF THE RAMBAM

HIS LIFE, IMPACT, AND  
TORAH AS DISCUSSED IN  
THE REBBE'S SICHOS

IN HONOR OF THE SIYUM HARAMBAM  
ON ROSH CHODESH IYAR!



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לזכות  
החתן הרה"ת ר' יהושע זעליג והכלה המהוללה מרת דבורה שיחיו  
ווייס

לרגל נישואיהם ט"ז שבט ה'תשפ"ג  
שנת הקהל

נדפס ע"י הוריהם  
הרה"ת ר' יהודה בנימין וזוגתו מרת חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו ווייס  
הרה"ת ר' חיים אהרן וזוגתו רבקה  
ומשפחתם שיחיו בלאק



In addition to discussing *halachos* in Rambam connected to the daily portion of Rambam and the *piskei dinim* the Rebbe repeatedly cited—such as the Rambam’s description of *yemos haMoshiach*, his perspective on *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*, and the rule he writes about the power of one action impacting the world—the

Rebbe also discussed the Rambam himself and his impact from a historical perspective. The Rebbe described the Rambam from different angles, comparing various elements of the Rambam, his conduct, and his Torah to other *gedolei Yisroel* throughout the generations, bringing forth the versatile and comprehensive nature and influence of the Rambam.

Many of these *sichos* were said at a time around the dates in the Rambam’s life, such as the Rambam’s birthday on Erev Pesach, his *yahrtzeit* on Chof Teves, and often around the *parshiyos* of Shemos and Va’eira.

From Moshe and Aharon to the Alter Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe explored their commonalities with the Rambam and their shared emphases, and the timeless impact they imparted to *klal Yisroel* throughout the generations.

## SOURCE OF TORAH

### *Moshe Rabbeinu*

The connection between Moshe Rabbeinu and the Rambam stands out above the rest. This begins with their shared name, Moshe, and their unparalleled giving and communicating Torah; as is quoted about both of them, “*Moshe emes v’Toraso emes*—Moshe is true and his Torah is true.” Their connection can best be summed up in the timeless inscription on the Rambam’s *kever*: “*Mi’Moshe ad Moshe lo kam k’Moshe*—From Moshe to Moshe, there has been none like Moshe.” As the Rebbe pointed out a number of times, while we don’t know the origins of this statement, it has gone undisputed by all *gedolei Yisroel* throughout the generations.

[The Rebbe also notes, referencing the Shem Hagedolim of the Chida, that there are no *Tanaim* or *Amoraim* with the name Moshe].

The Rebbe explained that “*Torah tzivah lanu Moshe*” is referring to both Moshe Rabbeinu and the Rambam, with

Moshe Rabbeinu giving Torah Shebiksav and the Rambam giving Torah Shebaal Peh in a written and organized fashion.

The Rebbe connects the theme of their communicating Torah with their names. Torah is compared to water—*mayim* and Moshe’s name comes from the word “*Min hamayim meshi’sihu*—From the water I have drawn him.” It is also apparent in the name Maimon—the Rambam’s father.

The Rebbe also connects the path and journey of the revelation of Torah, both by Moshe Rabbeinu and the Rambam, as expressions of personal and communal *geulah*. Moshe Rabbeinu gave the Torah following the *geulah* of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. The Rambam too revealed his Torah Shebaal Peh—the Mishneh Torah, after his personal *galus* and *geulah*, his trials and tribulations, and amid the battling of the *kelipah* of Mitzrayim, ultimately leading the Jewish people towards *geulah*.

# UNITY AND INCLUSION

## Aharon Hakohen

In addition to the connection between the two great Moshes, the Rebbe pointed out that the Rambam must also have a connection to Moshe Rabbeinu's brother, Aharon Hakohen, since the Rambam and Aharon share a very close proximity in dates: The “*nossi*” of Yud-Gimmel Nissan discusses the kindling of the Menorah by Aharon, and the following day, Yud-Daled Nissan, is the Rambam's birthday.

The overarching theme of Aharon Hakohen is *achdus* and *ahavas Yisroel*, “*Ohev es habriyos u'mekarvan laTorah*—Loving the creations and bringing them close to the Torah.” This highlights the unique quality of bringing people together, making peace, and increasing kindness while remaining true and honest to Hashem and the Torah; not lowering Torah to the struggling people but raising the people and bringing them close to the Torah.

This fusion of bringing people close and staying true to Torah does not highlight Aharon alone, rather it brings to light Aharon Hakohen as he is influenced by the *derech* of

Moshe Rabbinu—*emes*. This emphasizes the synthesis of *chessed* (Aharon) and *emes* (Moshe), creating Aharon's special version of *chessed*, going out of the way to help people but still not bowing away from the truth.

The Rebbe goes on to explain that the particular theme of Aharon's *achdus*, coupled with the undying *emes* of Moshe's Torah, is prominent in the Rambam's Torah. The Rambam wrote his *sefer* as a book of *halachos* where there aren't a myriad of opinions and differences, rather he focused on revealing the true *achdus*—unity of Hashem's will—the one true *halacha*.

Of course, Aharon's point of “*u'mekarvan laTorah*,” making the Torah accessible for everyone, wasn't lost on the Rambam either. This can be seen clearly in the Mishneh Torah's clear and concise writing, making it a *sefer* that can be used by every person, big and small, young and old, ultimately uniting all levels of learners together, creating the true fusion of Torah and *achdus*.

# BRINGING TORAH TO THEIR GENERATION

## The Alter Rebbe

As a general introduction to this section, it should be noted that the Rebbe once explained: While it is beyond our capability to compare and differentiate between *gedolei Yisroel* and their approaches, it is acceptable to do so in order to derive a lesson in *avodas Hashem*.<sup>2</sup>

The Rambam and the Alter Rebbe contributed tremendously to the world of Torah. Their summation, organization, and clarification of the halachic opinions preceding them, and the clear foundations they established in Torah, both in *nigleh* (the revealed part of Torah) and in *nistar* (the esoteric part of Torah), shaped the Torah continuance from their times until today.

The Rambam wrote clear-cut *halachos*, gathering and sifting through centuries of *geonim* and *poskim*, bringing forth the *halacha* in the most understandable way for his



THE RAMBAM'S MATZEVA IN TEVERYA.



THE REBBE HOLDS A VOLUME OF RAMBAM WHILE VISITING THE CHILDREN AT THE LAG B'OMER FAIR, 5744.

generation. Coupled with his effort in *nigleh*, the Rambam did the same work in *nistar*—gathering, refining, and clarifying the “Kabbalah” of his generation—*ma'aseh merkavah*, etc., in the four first *perakim* of Sefer Hamada and in Moreh Nevuchim.

Similarly, the Alter Rebbe, in his Shulchan Aruch, clarifies the opinions of the *poskim* that came before him, and even more so in Tanya, setting the foundation of Toras haChassidus for the first time.

The Rebbe explains that the *sefarim* of the Alter Rebbe and the Rambam are both great breakthroughs in the development of Torah. The Tanya is the Torah Shebiksav of Chassidus (all Chassidus, not just Chassidus Chabad) serving as the watershed *sefer* that includes the foundations of the Baal Shem Tov and Maggid's Chassidus as well. This is similar to the Rambam's unprecedented work in Mishneh Torah, bringing the *halacha* element—the summation of Torah Shebaal Peh—for the first time in *ksav*, in written fashion.

It is fascinating to point out that on some level the Alter

Rebbe reveals the *penimiyus* (inner dimension) of the Baal Shem Tov. While the Rambam did not include reasons in his *sefer* of *halachos*—a novel idea at the time—the Alter Rebbe specifically wrote his work in *halacha* with *taamim* (reasons)—also a novel idea at the time, revealing the inner dimension of the *halachos*.

In addition to the general shared frame of mind, we see many comparisons and similarities in numerous elements of their lives and of their Torah. For instance, both have the special multifaceted power in Torah—the hidden and revealed parts of Torah—hinted in their names. The Alter Rebbe's name is “Shnei-Or,” two lights—the lights of *nigleh* and *nistar*. The Rambam carries the name of Moshe, who gave us the entire Torah. Also, in the common acronym for Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon—the Rambam—there are two *mems*; a *pesucha* (regular mem) and a *setuma* (a “*shlos*” mem). The first one refers to *nigleh*, and the second represents the Rambam's work in *pnimiyus haTorah*.

[It is interesting to note that they both wrote their works



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in *nigleh* before their works in *nistar*; Shulchan Aruch before Tanya, and the Yad Hachazakah before Moreh Nevuchim. Also, the Alter Rebbe's original plan for Tanya and the Rambam's Moreh Nevuchim are both split into three parts. We also find that they both started their *sefarim* with a reference to *shem Havaye*—the Rambam in the *roshei teivos* of the first few words “*Yesod hayesodos v'amud hachochmos,*” and the Alter Rebbe begins the Shulchan Aruch with the word “Yehuda” which contains in it the sanctified name of Hashem. Another connection that was highlighted and brought in a *sicha* of the Friediker Rebbe is the similarity of language and writing of the Alter Rebbe and the Rambam and the strong influence of the Rambam's halachic rulings in the Alter Rebbe's Torah.]

One of the more notable lines of comparison between the Rambam and the Alter Rebbe can be seen in the objective and reason for their *sefarim*. Born out of necessity for clarity and direction with the aim to give guidance and a clear path to a people in need, we can see in their respective works the answers to the challenges of their generation and the remedy and direction it holds for our generation as well. Plainly put, while other *sefarim* may have been written primarily to add to Torah, these *sefarim* were written to heal and inspire the Jewish people.

The Rambam wrote his *sefarim* in response to the confusion and inaccessibility to the sources that he saw in his generation, both in the worlds of halacha and *nistar*. His goal

was to aid the Jewish people in understanding the *halacha* and the truth. As we see clearly in regards to the Moreh Nevuchim, it was written specifically to help the confused and perplexed. (Although the Rambam did not want Moreh Nevuchim to be learned by everyone, and he incorporated a *shvuah*, a pledge, that people shouldn't learn it, the Rebbe points out that the Rambam definitely knew that it would get out, and on some level that was his intention. This can be seen from the fact that there are a number of ideas in it that are clearly also for the common man, and we see that there are a number of *halachos* learned from Moreh Nevuchim as well.)

Regarding the Alter Rebbe, there is of course no need to explain this point. In his introduction to the *sefer*, the Alter Rebbe clearly states his reason for writing the Tanya and who the target audience is. Chassidus in general came as a response to the need for an awakening and a boost for a tired and worn out generation and Tanya was written specifically for those looking for advice and assistance in their *avodas Hashem*.

All in all, the Rambam and the Alter Rebbe's work was to bring a revelation through Torah to the tired and confused souls of their generations and the generations to follow. They created and imparted clarity in Torah Shebaal Peh, *poskim* and *halacha*, and in the hidden parts of Torah and Chassidus, arranging these foundations in a perfect and accessible way for each and every Yid to be able to learn and understand.

# SHEPHERD OF THEIR PEOPLE

Another special connection and comparison between the Rambam and the Alter Rebbe was their care for the wellbeing of the Yidden in their times.

The Rambam was known not only as a great figure in *halacha* and *chakirah*, but also as the leader of the Jewish community in Egypt and beyond, utilizing his influence and connections to protect and assist his fellow Jews.

More famously we know of the Rambam's legendary letters, *Iggeres Hashmad* and *Iggeres Teiman*, where he inspires and guides the hurting and confused Yidden of his time,

offering them solace and comfort, guidance, and direction. Similar to this are the Alter Rebbe's efforts to strengthen the Jewish community in Lithuania, White Russia, and beyond; setting up colonies with attainable livelihoods for their inhabitants, and of course, the tzedakah campaigns the Alter Rebbe successfully led for the Yidden living in Eretz Yisroel. All this was in addition to the Alter Rebbe's work for the spiritual well-being of his generation, as seen in his Torah, his letters, and the many stories and histories.

## DEFYING OPPOSITION

The novel and remarkable work of both the Rambam and the Alter Rebbe were not universally accepted at first. On the contrary, both had huge opposition from the greatest Jewish figures of their generations. Only after some time did the tide change, and once learning the truth about them and their novel approaches, many of the opposing camp had a change of heart. So much so that many of these people themselves actually became followers of the Rambam and the Alter Rebbe.

It is fascinating to see the comparable response of the Rambam and the Alter Rebbe to their opposition. The Rambam stood up for his opinion and answered any question

lodged against him or his opinions, but he never got into arguments or fights with his denigrators or attackers. We see the same with the Alter Rebbe; in his famous letter after being freed from prison in Petersburg, he demands of the Chassidim to not quarrel with the *misnagdim*, but rather to behave towards them with kindness, with the hope that it will mirror back.

The Rebbe uses this as a lesson not only for the point of not fighting but primarily a lesson in strength—defying opposition, not attacking them or getting embroiled in a fight with them, rather staying strong in one's convictions and holding on to the truth in all circumstances.

## CREATING CONCLUSIONS

### *The Tzemach Tzedek*

At the farbrengen of Yud-Gimmel Nissan 5746\*, the Rebbe explained that based on the proximity of the Tzemach Tzedek's *yahrtzeit* on Yud-Gimmel Nissan and the Rambam's birthday on Yud-Daled Nissan, there must be a connection between the two.

Their most definitive similarity is their work in *halacha*. The Rambam authored the first complete *sefer halachos* and the Tzemach Tzedek wrote *piskei dinim* (halachic rulings) and *teshuvos* (responsa), both spreading their Torah to and for the entire *klal Yisroel*. The Rebbe points out that while we find

*teshuvos* in *halacha* from the Alter Rebbe and Mittlerer Rebbe too, the Tzemach Tzedek stands out as a world-renowned and respected *posek* in his lifetime, corresponding with great halachic figures even outside of the world of Chassidus.

Additionally, the Rambam collected and consolidated *piskei dinim* and *teshuvos* from all of Gemara, the *geonim*, and *poskim*, narrowing them down into a concise conclusion. We find the same with the Tzemach Tzedek; he gathered, consolidated, and created conclusions from the *sefarim* before him. This is especially so in the world of Chassidus, where



CAMERA CONTROLS SEEN BEHIND THE REBBE AT THE FARBRENGEN OF YUD-BEIS TAMMUZ 5745. AT THESE TELEVISED FARBRENGENS THE REBBE OFTEN DEVOTED MUCH TIME TO DISCUSS UNIVERSAL MORALITY AND SHEVA MITZVOS BNEI NOACH.

the Tzemach Tzedek would often cite a number of different ideas, including from the Baal Shem Tov and Maggid, and sometimes even seemingly opposing ones, and tie them all together, bringing a clear conclusion for the matter at hand.

The one difference in the styles of the two authors is quite fascinating: The Rambam starts from the top down (*milmaalah lematah*), summarizing all the knowledge that was known at his time and bringing it down into a simple *halacha* that can be understood by everyone. The Tzemach Tzedek, on the

other end, worked from the bottom up (*milmatah lemaalalah*), starting with the most simple interpretation of the *pesukim* or *maamarei chazal*, etc. and working his way through all the sources, explaining the deeper and inner meaning, finally reaching the, *maskana*, a final conclusive point. While they take different paths to reach the final conclusion, they share the predominant avenue of consolidation and clarification in Torah.

## A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS

The connection between the Tzemach Tzedek and the Rambam goes beyond their Torah, into their life experiences and perspectives.

Both the Rambam and Tzemach Tzedek had a profound

influence on the non-Jewish world around them, conveying the message of Hashem and the one true Torah.

With the Rambam we see special emphasis placed on the care he had for the wellbeing of the *bnei Noach*, beginning

with his ruling about the obligation of every human being to keep the *sheva mitzvos*, and his description of *yemos haMoshiach* where he openly states that the work of the entire world (including gentiles) will be to know Hashem at the highest level possible.

This is in addition to his personal work and connection with the non-Jews of his time in his capacity as physician of the sultan's court, a job that took up many hours of his day, being his primary source of livelihood. The Rebbe points out that as the sultan and the court's physician, the Rambam certainly looked after the emotional and mental needs of his patients and undoubtedly shared with them their real purpose and source of stability in life—the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*.

The great work of the Rambam in this field is connected with the fact that he was born on Erev Pesach, the time of slaughtering the *korban Pesach*. The Rebbe explains that this mitzvah originated in Mitzrayim primarily for the purpose of destroying its *avodah zarah*—destroying the strength of *kelipah* and bringing morality and G-dliness in its stead. Similarly, the Rambam worked to battle the *kelipah* of the nations

and to inspire them with G-dliness and purpose.

Though in a different climate, the Tzemach Tzedek also fought the battle of *kedushah* and truth against the nations of the world—the Russian government. Not only did he stand firm in his beliefs, but he also went out—arguing, explaining, and convincing the non-Jewish officials of the veracity and necessity of true Yiddishkeit (education, rabbonim, etc.).<sup>3</sup> While we see a bit of this conduct by the Alter Rebbe and Mittler Rebbe too, they engaged in these dialogues in short stints, and they primarily explained the specific points of Chassidus that were being contested. The Tzemach Tzedek, on the other hand, spent a large part of his life battling the influence and proposed reforms of the *haskalah* movement, spending his time in many conferences, meetings, and legislative battles, explaining to the non-Jews the truth of Torah, even going so far as to be *moser nefesh* countless times for this mission—all to convince the Russian government to allow Yiddishkeit to continue and to grow without the damages that the *maskilim* were attempting to impose.

# CLARITY AND STRUCTURE

## *The Rebbe Rashab*

The Rebbe mentions that people may ask about a seeming “contradiction” between the Rambam–Tzemach Tzedek connection that the Rebbe was discussing, and the famous quote from Chassidim that the Rebbe Rashab is the Rambam of Chassidus.

To answer this question, the Rebbe takes a moment to clarify this saying about the Rebbe Rashab, explaining that the similarities between the Rambam to the Tzemach Tzedek's Torah and the Rebbe Rashab's Torah are in different elements entirely, each connection highlighting a different point.

The Rebbe Rashab, the Rebbe explains, is the Rambam of Chassidus, not the Rambam of the Torah in general. In the Tzemach Tzedek's Torah we find full works in *nigleh* and many places where *nigleh* and Chassidus are brought together and united, whereas by the Rebbe Rashab we don't really find works in *nigleh* on their own, and even when cited together with Chassidus, the *nigleh* is dwarfed in size by the large amounts of Chassidus that it comes along with.

The Rebbe explains that this fusion of the different parts of Torah was not the primary focus and undertaking of the Rebbe Rashab, possibly because this feat of Torah consolidation was already achieved by the Tzemach Tzedek, while

the Rebbe Rashab attained this achievement by learning the Tzemach Tzedek's Torah on a level where it became his own.

Where we do see the comparison between the Rebbe Rashab and the Rambam is in the sense of clarity and structure. The Rebbe Rashab's aim was to clarify and to get down to the point in Chassidus—clarifying and organizing subjects and topics—providing this structure of Chassidus to the Chassidim. This is similar to the Rambam, who summarized, clarified, and got to the bottom of the entire world of *halacha* in the revealed part of the Torah, in an accessible fashion for every Jew. **T**

*Adapted from the sichos of Yud-Gimmel Nissan 5738, Chof-Daled Teves 5741, Yud-Gimmel Nissan 5746, Shabbos Parshas Shemos—Va'eira 5748, Shabbos Parshas Shemos 5752, Likkutei Sichos vol. 26—Chof-Chof Daled Teves.*

1. See also “*The Rebbe's Rambam*,” Derher Teves 5783.
2. Yud-Gimmel Nissan 5746.
3. See “*Beyond Concession*,” in this magazine.