

בס"ד

# SICHOS IN ENGLISH

Excerpts of Sichos delivered by  
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at his periodic public addresses,  
translated into English

**UNITY THROUGH RAMBAM**  
**AS A MEANS TO UNITY, JEWS**  
**SHOULD STUDY RAMBAM'S MAGNUM OPUS,**  
**MISHNEH TORAH, DAILY**



**Sichos In English**

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# Unity Through Rambam

As a means to unity, Jews should study Rambam's magnum opus, *Mishneh Torah*, daily.

Unity among Jews is such an important matter that all efforts must be undertaken to achieve it. Indeed, unity hastens the final redemption: The cause of the exile, our sages say,<sup>1</sup> was baseless hatred among Jews. When love and unity reign among Jews, the cause of the exile will have been abolished — and thus automatically the exile itself will be ended.

## Unity Through Torah

One of the ways to promote unity is for all Jews to learn the same subject in Torah. When a Jew studies Torah he and Torah are joined in “a wonderful union, like which there is none other.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. Yoma 9b.

2. Tanya, p. 18.

When a number of Jews study the same topic, they too, through the Torah they study, are united in “a wonderful union, like which there is none other.” And because Torah is eternal,<sup>3</sup> the bond forged between Jews through Torah is also eternal.

This unity is in addition to the warmth and closeness among those who learn a common subject when they together discuss and analyze its ideas.

The unity of Jews through Torah could be produced by learning any topic. But since “Israel is linked to the Torah”<sup>4</sup> — meaning every aspect of a Jew and Jewry is connected to Torah in its entirety — the ultimate unity is produced by learning something which encompasses the *whole* Torah.

## Rambam’s Mishneh Torah

There is a work which does just that. Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon — Maimonides) wrote a work which, he writes in his Introduction to it, is a “compendium of the entire Oral Torah.” He called this work “Mishneh Torah”<sup>5</sup> — “Repetition of the Torah” for “a person who first reads the Written Torah and then this work will know from it the whole of the Oral Torah.” And, he writes, it is written “in plain language and terse style<sup>6</sup> so that the entire Oral Torah might become systematically known to all.”

Besides serving as an instrument wherewith to unite all Jewry, there is another important advantage to learning Mishneh Torah — concerning the mitzvah of studying Torah, in which there are various levels:

1) “Study which leads to deed; they are the laws which every person needs to know to observe the mitzvos properly.”<sup>7</sup>

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3. Tanya, p. 44. See Rambam, Laws concerning the Foundations of Torah 9:1.

4. Zohar, III, 73a.

5. It is also known as “Yad HaChazakah” (lit., The Strong Hand).

6. Unlike his other works, Mishneh Torah is the only work Rambam wrote in Hebrew. Rambam was so meticulous in the composition of Mishneh Torah that in certain instances we derive laws from the way he divided the halachos into different sections.

7. Shulchan Aruch Admur HaZoken, Laws of Torah Study 2:9.

2) “To know all the Written Torah and the whole Oral Torah,” which includes “all the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, Mechilta, Sifra, Sifri, Tosefos and all the Midrashim... to fulfill the mitzvah, ‘You shall surely observe all the mitzvah.’”<sup>8</sup> This encompasses the study of all the laws, Aggadah, the secrets of the Torah, etc.

3) There is a special advantage to learning the *laws* of the Torah,<sup>9</sup> including those which are unnecessary for observance of the mitzvos<sup>10</sup> (such as those which do not apply in exile).

4) Study specially to engrave the words of Torah in one’s memory.<sup>11</sup>

In the third level, study of the halachos in Torah, Mishneh Torah is unique. Unlike other halachic works (e.g. Rif and Shulchan Aruch) which omit certain laws, such as those which do not apply in exile, Rambam’s Mishneh Torah explains *all* the halachos in Torah.<sup>12</sup> When, therefore, a person learns Mishneh Torah, he fulfills the mitzvah of studying and knowing all the Torah’s laws.

In the light of the above, the following proposal is offered:

In addition to one’s regular study sessions in Talmud (Bavli and Yerushalmi), in the laws necessary for proper observance of mitzvos, and in other subjects in Torah, every person should learn Mishneh Torah daily.<sup>13</sup> Mishneh Torah should be apportioned into sections, a different section to be learned each day.<sup>14</sup> Thus, each day all Jews will learn the one and the same section.

8. Ibid., 1:4, 2:1, 2:10.

9. In the Talmud (see Megillah 28b), “halachos” are called “the crown of Torah.”

10. See Sefer Mitzvos Gedolos, Introduction to the Affirmative Precepts; Or Tzaddikim 22:19.

11. Likkutei Torah, parshas Kedoshim, p. 60.

12. See Or Tzaddikim 22:19: “A person should complete the 613 mitzvos, in deed, speech and thought. He should therefore learn Rambam’s Yad HaChazakah.”

13. The daily study of Mishneh Torah should be undertaken “bli neder” — “without an oath.”

14. Mishneh Torah is divided in daily portions to be learned by all Jews, unlike the way the study of Talmud is divided — different tractates learned by several people (rather than all learn the entire Talmud). There are several reasons for this: (i) If people would learn different parts of Mishneh Torah, the unity produced by learning the *same* topic in Torah would be missing; (ii) The obligation to learn *all* the laws in Torah would be unfulfilled; (iii) Rambam, in writing laws, relies on what he wrote earlier. This makes

## Apportionment of Mishneh Torah

1) (i) Study should begin on Sunday, the twenty-seventh of Nisan.

(ii) Study of Mishneh Torah should follow the order arranged by the Rambam himself. Thus, study should begin with the Introduction, followed by the enumeration of the mitzvos and the listing of the mitzvos grouped in the order in which they are presented in Mishneh Torah. This should be done in the first four days.

(iii) Thereafter (starting on the fifth day), three chapters a day should be learned.<sup>15</sup>

(iv) According to this arrangement, the study of Mishneh Torah will be concluded on erev Pesach, the birthday of the Rambam<sup>16</sup> (or on a day immediately proximate to his birthday). As is the Jewish custom, a public mitzvah-banquet should be held in conjunction with the completion of study of the Mishneh Torah (“siyum”).<sup>17</sup> Because people are busy on erev Pesach preparing for Pesach and therefore the siyum cannot be properly celebrated on that day, it should be held on a day proximate to erev Pesach, “with a multitude of people”<sup>18</sup> in attendance.

a difference halachically, for at times he did not write certain details relying on what he wrote earlier. Thus, if each person learns only certain parts of Mishneh Torah, not in order, he may err in the proper understanding of the halachah through not having learned a relevant earlier passage. In learning Talmud, in contrast, there is no halachic significance in the order of tractates.

15. A calendar has been published with details of which parts of Mishneh Torah are to be learned on which days.

16. Our sages (Shabbos 105a) say that the letters of “Anochi” (“I”), the first word of the Ten Commandments, are the first letters of the words “Anoh Nafshi Kesovis Yehovis” — “I, My soul (i.e. Myself) have given it in writing.” Chassidus (Likkutei Torah, parshas Shelach, p. 96) explains that this can be interpreted that G-d placed His soul — His Essence — into the Torah (i.e. “I have given My soul in writing”). Thus, through learning of Torah, one “possesses” G-d. Since “the righteous are compared to their Creator” (Rus Rabbah 4:3), it follows that the Rambam placed his essence (his soul) into his work; and, through learning Mishneh Torah, one is united with Rambam. There is therefore special significance in completing the study of Rambam on (or proximate to) his *birthday*.

17. See Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:1, Ramah, Orach Chaim 551:10; Tur and Ramah, Orach Chaim ch. 569.

18. Mishlei 14:28.

2) Those who are unable to learn three chapters a day should learn a chapter a day (prefaced, as before, by the Introduction and enumeration of the mitzvot).<sup>19</sup> They will thereby conclude its study in the month of Shevat, 5747 (for 5746 is a leap year).<sup>20</sup> The public siyum should be held on a festival proximate to the time it is concluded.

3) Since it is very difficult to learn in depth three chapters a day, one may tend to learn them superficially. It is therefore proper for those who are capable of it to learn in depth at least one law (or part of a law) of the daily portion. Of course, this is in addition to learning the *entire* daily portion, through which one is united with the others who learn it.

## Sefer HaMitzvos

Because one of the principal goals of learning Rambam is to unite all Jews, women and children should also participate: In the words of Scripture,<sup>21</sup> “with our youth and with our elders ... with our sons and with our daughters.” Thus, children — both in years or in knowledge — although unable to learn Mishneh Torah, should participate by learning a work similar to Mishneh Torah, also authored by the Rambam — Sefer HaMitzvos (The Book of Mitzvos).

In his Introduction to Sefer HaMitzvos, Rambam writes that it serves as an “opening” and “introduction” to the Mishneh Torah. In it Rambam enumerates and briefly explains the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot which are explained at length and in detail in Mishneh Torah.

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19. There are two customs concerning the way the Written Torah is to be completed: during the course of one year or during three years (Rambam, Laws of Prayer 13:1). Thus the same two options are offered concerning the Rambam’s Mishneh Torah (*Repetition of the Torah*). And, just as “the simple, unquestioned custom in all Israel is that they complete the Torah in *one* year” (ibid), so it is proper to complete the study of Mishneh Torah in one year. If one is unable to do so, then the second option — to do so during three years — is available.

20. A separate calendar has been published for those who learn Mishneh Torah over the course of three years.

21. Shemos 10:9.

Sefer HaMitzvos, unlike Mishneh Torah, is not written in Hebrew but in Arabic, the tongue commonly spoken in Rambam's time (it was afterwards translated into Hebrew by R. Moshe Ibin Tibbon). This implies that this work is able to be studied by those who are as yet incapable of understanding Hebrew — those young in years or knowledge.

Hence, those unable to study Mishneh Torah should learn its concepts as presented briefly in Sefer HaMitzvos.

## Apportionment of Sefer HaMitzvos

So that all those who study Rambam — both those learning Mishneh Torah and those learning Sefer HaMitzvos should be united together, the study of Sefer HaMitzvos should correspond to the study of Mishneh Torah: The daily portion of Sefer HaMitzvos should be in those mitzvos whose laws are discussed in the daily portion of Mishneh Torah (i.e., and not following the order of the mitzvos as presented in Sefer HaMitzvos). Thus all Jews will learn the same mitzvos at one time: Those who are capable of it — at length in Mishneh Torah; others — briefly in Sefer HaMitzvos.

During those days when the Introduction of Mishneh Torah (and the enumeration of mitzvos, etc.) is being studied, those who learn Sefer HaMitzvos should learn part of the Introduction to Sefer HaMitzvos and the fourteen “Principles” (the rules as to how to ascertain which are the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos) written by Rambam at the beginning of Sefer HaMitzvos.

In some instances, the laws of Mishneh Torah concerning a mitzvah (or mitzvos) are learned over a number of days greater than the number of mitzvos which the laws discuss. Those who learn Sefer HaMitzvos should in those days repeat the study of the daily portion corresponding to the laws then being discussed in Mishneh Torah.<sup>22</sup> In addition, they should (within a few days) complete the study of the fourteen “Principles.”

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22. There are also some instances in which a section of Mishneh Torah deals with laws concerning which there is no mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos. Those who learn Sefer HaMitzvos should in those days study those mitzvos which correspond to the *content* of the



The two reasons given above for studying Rambam apply also to the participation of women.

Uniting Jewry: The mitzvah, “Love your fellow as yourself”<sup>23</sup> devolves upon women as upon men.

2) Torah study: Women are obligated to learn those laws which they need to know (all prohibitory precepts and affirmative precepts not dependent on a set time).<sup>24</sup> Further, because every Jew awaits Moshiach’s coming every day, we can posit that included in the laws which women need to know are many of the laws concerning sacrifices. And concerning laws which they do not need to know, women receive reward for learning them.<sup>25</sup>

## Participation of all Jews

Since one of the principal elements in the study of Rambam is the unification of Jewry, as many Jews as possible, men, women and children, should participate.

Those who first participate after the study of Rambam has already begun, should start learning the daily portion which the others are learning, and should learn the missed earlier portions at another time.

May it be G-d’s will that the unity of Jews engendered through the study of Rambam hasten the true and complete redemption.<sup>26</sup> May we speedily merit the fulfillment of the promise with which Rambam concludes Mishneh Torah: “The whole world will be occupied only in knowing the L-rd, and all Israel will therefore be great sages, knowing the hidden matters and comprehending knowledge of their Creator as much as man is capable of, as it is

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laws in Mishneh Torah; and in certain cases, should learn the actual laws in Mishneh Torah. The full details will be found in the calendar which has been published for the benefit of those who learn Sefer HaMitzvos.

23. Vayikra 19:18.

24. Admur HaZoken, Laws of Torah Study 1:14.

25. Rambam, Laws of Torah Study 1:13; Admur HaZoken, *ibid*.

26. More so, may just the *resolution* to study Rambam hasten the end of exile. See Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 571:3.

said:<sup>27</sup> 'For the earth will be full of knowledge of the L-rd as the waters cover the sea.'"

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27. Yeshayah 11:9.



