**The Rambam the man who can bring peace between Jews and Muslims (Part-I)**

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There are perhaps few figures in Jewish history who can match the stature of the celebrated Rabbi Maimonides. For the Jews the inscription on his tomb stone in Tiberius, Israel, describes his extraordinary status : “From Moses to Moses, there has never been another Moses.” For the Muslims he was Ubayd Allah-a faithful servant of God, a title reserved for those seen as closest to God.

For a scholar like me searching for a key to unlock the door to peace between Jews and Muslims, Maimonides may well provide the answer. Peace would finally bring relief to the long-suffering Palestinians and a sense of security to the Israelis. At the moment, it appears that Jews and Muslims cannot agree on anything: what is dark to one is light to the other, peace to this side is conflict to the other and a sense of grievance and anger blight their view of each other. The result is the cloud of misery and despair which hangs low over their relationship.

I believe that an introduction of Maimonides into the conflict between Jews and Muslims would not only establish how close Judaism and Islam are to each other, but why the relationship between them needs to be based in compassion and justice if the words of the great Rabbi are to be heeded. I cannot imagine any other historical figure playing this role at this time in history. As someone committed to promoting dialogue and friendship between the two communities for decades it is with the sincere hope of finding peace between the two that I turn to Maimonides. (Maimonides is one of the great philosophers among many others like Ibn Rushd or Averroes, Ibn Arabi and Al-Ghazali during the Golden Age of Islamic scholarship I explore in more detail in my forthcoming book, “The Flying Man, Aristotle, and the Philosophers of the Golden Age of Islam: Their relevance today.”)

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Maimonides, or the Rambam, a Hebrew acronym for Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, was born in Cordoba and was a contemporary of Averroes, a fellow Cordoban. After largely living in peace and prosperity for four centuries in what is commonly referred to as the Golden Age for the Jewish community, the Almohads, a new dynasty from North Africa, took power in Andalusia and launched an offensive against the Jewish community, forcing them to choose between conversion, migration or death. Synagogues and Jewish centers were destroyed and Jews found themselves forced to wear special clothing. The father of Maimonides, then a teenager, Rabbi Maimon ben Joseph, a respected elder and judge in the Jewish community, found everything was now disrupted. The family found itself on the run, first taking shelter at Fez and later relocating to Palestine and eventually arriving in Cairo. Maimonides wrote his celebrated note of consolation, Epistle on Martyrdom, suggesting that those who converted to Islam forcibly should maintain their faith, even if privately.

Maimonides emphasized the role and thought of Abraham, who lived among polytheists but moved strongly towards monotheism and rejected idolatry. Abraham emphasized monotheism and the belief that God created the universe and embraced all creation. Maimonides championed the concept of “negative theology,” that is understanding God through what he is not, as the best way to attempt to understand the true nature of the divine. God is transcendental, all-knowing and all-powerful, while man is made in God’s image and lives to realize that ideal. Maimonides also emphasized the distinction between the soul and the intellect, which are pure. He also pointed to the body which is “base” dealing with physical and material matters. Maimonides’ life in Cairo allowed him to enjoy a relatively secure and stable environment after his dangerous and turbulent journey from Spain and through North Africa.

Maimonides argued that in order to practice the Jewish faith correctly, you have to first be knowledgeable; you could not be ignorant in faith. He took much of Jewish scripture as allegorical and metaphorical, which other rabbis did not always agree with. His use of the word “perplexed” in the title of one of his most important books refers to the intelligent man who tries to understand and find a balance between inherited rabbinical law and the world around him. As a true philosopher, Maimonides first identifies the problem of existence and then illustrates how to move ahead in order to overcome it.

Maimonides argued that in order to best practice one’s faith, knowledge and intelligence are essential while ignorance must be eliminated. It was an argument Socrates used in discussing democracy, suggesting that only educated people who understand the ramifications of a democratic form of government should participate in it.

With reference to the main philosophic questions that interested Muslim philosophers and were discussed by them, Maimonides believed that the soul and the body, while distinct, are still unified, with the former holding sway over the latter. The soul is divided into five parts: the nutritive part, the perceptive part, the imaginative part, the appetitive part, which is concerned with emotions, and sensations, and finally, the rational part, which involves the capacity to interact with metaphysics. In his celebrated work, The Guide for the Perplexed, Maimonides sets forth his views on the creation of the universe, which essentially reaffirms the traditional Jewish view on creation. Examining such theories as laid out by Moses, Plato, and Aristotle, Maimonides rejects Aristotle’s argument that the world is eternal, instead championing Moses’ view that the world was created by God out of nothing; Maimonides does write that Plato’s view of a world created with pre-existing matter provides an acceptable alternative.

Maimonides was influenced by Aristotle, Al-Farabi, Avicenna and Averroes, a fact he acknowledged. A towering Judaic figure, he was also quintessentially a product of the age of the ilm-ethos. Like our other great philosophers of that time, Maimonides emphasized logic, rationality, knowledge, research, and-above all-piety in his writings.

Yet there was also Jewish opposition to his ideas and philosophical approach-for example, Rabbi Solomon of Montpellier in France instigated church authorities to burn The Guide as heretical. Maimonides’s views on resurrection received criticism from many rabbis and Jewish scholars of his period. In his Treatise on Resurrection (1191), Maimonides argued that the belief in the resurrection of the dead, those who had been righteous during their lives, was a fundamental aspect of Judaism, and that, on the issue of resurrection, Jews should not merely interpret Jewish scripture as allegorical.

In his work Maimonides explored the righteous figures of the Jewish people’s sacred history. He was inspired by Moses, who he saw as being closest to a perfect man, having both revelation and knowledge. But he also admired Aristotle and his writing on ethics and virtue. Maimonides was providing a theological charter and framework for being a good human being, writing for two Jewish audiences-the individual but also for the larger community.

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