

Part 1 – Intro to the 613 Mitzvot

We are going to to an overview look at what is commonly known as the 613 mitzvot/commandments. The most well-known and commonly used listing of the 613 was recorded and classified by Maimonides in the 12th century. This listing is taken from his classic compendium of Jewish law, the "Mishneh Torah," which contains 14 primary "books" or sections.

This list should not be used as a source for any practical Halachic ruling. There are differences of opinion over the applicability today of some commandments in this list. Similarly, distinctions must often be made between rabbinically-decreed commandments and those that still have binding force as Torah-law today. In all cases of doubt, a competent rabbinical authority should be consulted.

Part 2 – Intro to Maimonides

Maimonides's full name was Moshe ben Maimon; in Hebrew he is known by the acronym of Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon, Rambam – translated Our Rabbi/Teacher Moshe Son of Maimon. He was born in Spain in 1135 on Passover eve shortly before the fanatical Muslim Almohades came to power there. To avoid persecution by the Muslim sect — which was wont to offer Jews and Christians the choice of conversion to Islam or death — Maimonides fled with his family, first to Morocco, later to Israel, and finally to Egypt where he died on Dec 12, 1204. He apparently hoped to continue his studies for several years more, but when his brother David, a jewelry merchant, perished in the Indian Ocean with much of the family's fortune, he had to begin earning money. He probably started practicing medicine at this time.

Maimonides's major contribution to Jewish life remains the *Mishneh Torah*, his code of Jewish law. His intention was to compose a book that would guide Jews on how to behave in all situations just by reading the Torah and his code, without having to expend large amounts of time searching through the Talmud. Needless to say, this provocative rationale did not endear Maimonides to many traditional Jews, who feared that people would rely on his code and no longer study the Talmud. Despite sometimes intense opposition, the *Mishneh Torah* became a standard guide to Jewish practice: It later served as the model for the *Shulkhan Arukh* (literally "Set Table," the sixteenth-century code of Jewish law that is still regarded as authoritative by Orthodox Jews.

Although his writings on Jewish law and ethics were met with acclaim and gratitude from most Jews, even as far off as Iraq and Yemen, and he rose to be the revered head of the Jewish community in Egypt, there were also vociferous critics of some of his writings, particularly in Spain. Nevertheless, he was posthumously acknowledged to be one of the foremost rabbinical arbiters and philosophers in Jewish history, his copious work comprising a cornerstone of Jewish scholarship. His fourteen-volume *Mishneh Torah* still carries significant canonical authority as a codification of Talmudic law. In the Yeshiva world he is called sometimes "haNesher haGadol" (the great eagle) in recognition of his outstanding status as a *bona fide* / "good faith" exponent of the Oral Torah.