

Mashiach ben Shlomo

By: ASHER BENZION BUCHMAN

The twelfth of Rambam's Thirteen Fundamentals of Faith¹ is the belief in the coming of the Mashiach. As part of this *ikkar*, Rambam makes the following assertion: "Part of this fundamental is that there is no king except from the descendants of Dovid and Shlomo, and any who disputes the matter of this family denies the word of G-d and His prophets." In the final two chapters of *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam restates² the requirement that Mashiach be a descendant of Dovid, destined to rebuild *Malchus Beis Dovid*, and this rule is well known by all practicing Jews and is universally accepted. However, the ancestry of Shlomo HaMelech is not unanimously accepted³ nor are there clear Biblical or Rabbinic sources to confirm it, and perhaps for this reason Rambam does not repeat it in *Mishneh Torah*.⁴ He does, however, repeat this assertion in the *Sefer HaMitzvos*⁵ and in *Iggeres Teiman*,⁶ and his inclusion of it in *Ikkarei Emunah* relates to us how certain he was of it⁷ and how important he considered it.

¹ Incorporated into his *Peirusb HaMishnah* as the introduction to the tenth chapter of *Sanhedrin*.

² Along with some of the evidence.

³ Rav Kappach, in his notes on the *Peirusb HaMishnah*, says Rambam is so vociferous about Mashiach being from Shlomo because the Christians claimed their "Messiah" was from the Biblical character Nossan. In fact, the *Zohar* also says that he will be descended from this Nossan. See the note to the Frankel edition which finds a possible source for Shlomo as the ancestor of Mashiach in *Midrash Tanchuma* (Buber) to *Toldos* and the Brisker Rav's explanation for how Rambam deduced it.

⁴ In *Mishneh Torah* he only records that which is explicitly stated by *Chazal*.

⁵ *Lav* 362.

⁶ Rambam states that *Mishneh Torah* is a restatement of all the conclusions of *Torah Shebe'al Peh*. Thus, some insights that he feels are simple deductions but not stated as the consensus of *Chazal* can sometimes be found in the *Sefer HaMitzvos* and yet they are not included in *Mishneh Torah*.

⁷ It is, of course, possible that he changed his mind on this issue at some point, but his restatement of it in *Sefer HaMitzvos* and *Iggeres Teiman*, much later in his life, would mediate against. Even if he later dropped it from the *Ikkarei Emunah*, it still would seem to remain as his firm position.

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However, though Rambam does not state explicitly in *Mishneh Torah* that Mashiach will be a descendant of Shlomo, he does give us reason to infer it and also hints at the concept behind it. In *Hilchos Melachim*, he explains “That if a king will arise from the House of Dovid who immerses himself in Torah (הוגה בתורה) and involves himself in its mitzvos like Dovid his father... and compels all of Israel to walk in its ways and to rectify the breaches in its observance and fights the wars of G-d, he is presumed to be the Mashiach. If he did this and succeeded and defeated all his surrounding enemies and built the *Mikdash* in its place and gathers the dispersed of Israel, then he is definitively Mashiach”⁸ (*Hil. Melachim* 11:4). It logically follows from this that just as presumed Mashiach must be the descendant of Dovid and his epitome, definite Mashiach must be in the image of Shlomo and also his descendant, as Mashiach must have the inherited qualities of Shlomo HaMelech in order to enable him to build the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Moreover, in *Hilchos Teshuvah*, Rambam might, at first glance, seem to contradict what he says in *Hilchos Melachim*. Here he explains that “That king which will arise from the seed of Dovid will be wiser (בעל חכמה) than Shlomo and great in prophecy, close to that of Moshe Rabbeinu” (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 9:2). While this level of greatness is a far cry from his description in *Hilchos Melachim* of a הוגה בתורה, nevertheless, there is no contradiction. His statement here relates to us a non-halachic insight about this person. Whereas Rambam only commits himself to recording Jewish Law in *Mishneh Torah*,⁹ he tells us in the heading to *Hilchos Teshuvah* that it will be necessary to incorporate “fundamental principles of faith that follow in relation to this mitzvah,” implying that this is necessary to understand and perform the mitzvah of *teshuvah*. In fact, we will not be required to test Mashiach to insure his greatness in wisdom and prophecy, and the *halachah* in *Hilchos Melachim* stands, that we only recognize him as a הוגה בתורה, ועוסק במצוות, but Rambam, as Torah philosopher, informs us in *Hilchos Teshuvah* that he will, in fact, have the incomparable genius that he describes there.

With regard to the substance of these qualities, we easily understand that Mashiach may not be equal to Moshe Rabbeinu in prophecy, for the Torah tells us that there shall never arise an equal to Moshe Rabbeinu,

⁸ *Kesef Mishneh* comments that all these principles are “collected from *midrashim* and verses in *Tanach* and from things on which there are traditions from the mouths of scribes and books.”

⁹ See Introduction to *Mishneh Torah*.

and the *Ikkarei Emunah*¹⁰ inform us that no prophecy can challenge the prophecy of Moshe's eternal Torah. But why must he be a **greater** *chacham* than Shlomo HaMelech, who is described both in *mikra*¹¹ and *Chazal*¹² as the smartest man that ever existed? Shlomo HaMelech is the author of the greatest philosophical works in Jewish liturgy: *Kobeles*, *Shir HaShirim* and *Mishlei*.¹³ In scientific understanding, he is the one who knows the language of the animals and understands all the rules of agriculture and medicine.¹⁴ The term *chacham*, according to Rambam,¹⁵ refers to understanding all the rationale behind the Torah—and this is what Shlomo represents. But here again, the explanation would seem straight-forward. As Rabbi Nachum Rabinowitz points out,¹⁶ Shlomo HaMelech does fall short of total *chochmah*. “Shlomo said, ‘All of this I was able to comprehend, but the *parashah* of *Parah Adumah*, I examined and asked and searched and concluded ‘I said I am a *chacham* but it is far from me.’”¹⁷ But Mashiach will understand this as well¹⁸—comprehending how G-d teaches us to deal with the confusion and fear that is associated with death that defiles (מטמא) the human mind.¹⁹

But I believe there is yet another omission by Rambam that gives us greater insight into why Mashiach must be descended from Shlomo HaMelech and smarter than him. In the introduction to *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam lists the *Baalei HaMesorah*—those in charge of handing over the Torah from generation to generation and who are, in fact, the authorized interpreters and owners of the *mesorah*. This list includes *Malchei Yisrael*, starting with Moshe Rabbeinu and Yehoshua along with their *Batei Dinim*. *Dovid HaMelech* and his *Beis Din* are also included, as is *Chezkiyahu U'Beis Dino*. But Shlomo and his *Beis Din* are not included. The *Beis Din* of Dovid handed over the *mesorah* to “*Achiyah HaShiloni* who was one of those who

¹⁰ *Ikkarim* 7–9 really spells this out as do the last four chapters of *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*.

¹¹ See, for example, *Divrei HaYamim* 2:1:12, *Melachim* 1:5:13.

¹² See TB *Berachos* 10:2, *Pesachim* 56a.

¹³ TB BB 9a.

¹⁴ See sources in notes 10, 11. See Rambam's introduction to his commentary on the Torah where he refers to *Sefer Chochmos Shlomo*.

¹⁵ *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:54

¹⁶ *Yad Pesutah*, *ibid.*

¹⁷ *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Chukas* 15

¹⁸ *Yad Pesutah* (*ibid.*) based on *Peskita Rabbassi*, para. 13

¹⁹ In the introduction to *Sanhedrin perek* 10, Rambam speaks of the industrial revolution and the growth of human knowledge. The Mashiach, living in the age of science, would ostensibly be able to solve mysteries that even Shlomo could not.

had gone out of *Mitzrayim*.²⁰ How can it be that the most brilliant of Torah scholars who was the *melech* who succeeded in building the *Beis HaMikdash* and whose *Beis Din* gave us the *takanos* of *Netilas Yadayim* and *Erwin* is not included?²¹ *Chazal* credit him with having made “handles” for the Torah with these fundamental *takanos*.²² Why is he overlooked as a *Baal HaMesorah*? Moreover, it would seem that a disruption in the *mesorah* occurs at this time—as the *mesorah* seems to revert back to a student of Moshe Rabbeinu.²³

Rambam’s judgment in omitting Shlomo is most likely related to another statement by *Chazal*. “And Rav Yitzchak said, ‘Why are not the reasons for the Torah [mitzvos] revealed? Two verses revealed their reasons and the greatest of the earth was caused to stumble by them. It is written (*Devarim* 17), ‘Do not increase your wives [lest they turn aside your heart]’ and Shlomo said that ‘I can increase them and my heart will not be turned,’ and then it is written (*Melachim* 1:11:4), ‘In Shlomo’s old age his wife turned away his heart.’ It is written ‘He should not increase his horses [and he should not return the nation to Mitzrayim]’ and Shlomo said that ‘I will increase them and not return them’ and then it is written (*Melachim* 1:10:29), ‘And a chariot went out of Mitzrayim... with one hundred and fifty horses.’”²⁴ Shlomo felt that the reasons for the mitzvos took precedence over the textual formulation.²⁵ And because of this mistaken interpretation of Law, the seeds of the Temple’s destruction were planted by its own builder. Strikingly, *Sefer Melachim* (2:25;26) ends with the exile of the people to Mitzrayim, echoing the *mikra* of לא ירבו לו סוסים פן יחזיר העם מצרימה.

Mashiach ben Shlomo will be a greater *chacham* than Shlomo HaMelech. He will correct the error of his father. He will reconstitute the

²⁰ See Ravad who disputes this and the Kesef Mishneh’s response. See the mid-rashic sources in the Frankel ed. *Mekoros VTzijyonim*. It quotes the Me’iri who does include Shlomo in the *Seder HaKabbalah*.

²¹ See TB *Erwin* 21b.

²² See *Hakirab* 3, “King Solomon’s *Takanab*: Rambam’s *Erwin*,” especially pages 198–202. I contend there that the builder of the *Beis HaMikdash* in the depth of these *takanos* implanted into the consciousness of the people the concepts of a constant state of *kedushah* and a bond among the people themselves and to the *Beis HaMikdash*.

²³ Note, that it is Rambam the rationalist who inserts the ancient *Achiyah* into the *mesorah* while Ravad takes issue with it.

²⁴ TB *Sanbedrin* 21b.

²⁵ A version of דרשינן טעמא דקרא.

mesorah of Dovid HaMelech, for he will have the wisdom to eschew all the trappings of *malchus*—excess of women, of wealth and power.²⁶

Flatbush's Shlomo, Shlomo Sprecher ז"ל, embodied תורה וגדולה במקום אחד. He was the *chacham* with expertise in almost any field imaginable and yet never presumed to know better than others, seeking only to hear and understand the words of *Chazal*. He led the humblest of lives and never sought the limelight, only showing himself when it was necessary to help others and to further the Torah ideals he fought for. His devotion to Torah, the Jewish People, and the Jewish State was all consuming. He will serve as a model to be emulated by all those who seek to live a life devoted to hastening the coming of Mashiach. ❧

²⁶ See *Hakirah* 14 סדר המצוות לספר המצוות של הרמב"ם where I point out that the *mitzvos* of סוסים, כסף וזהב, לא ירבו לו נשים are the final *mitzvos* in the listing for they are to form the foundation of the ideal Jewish society.