MISHNEH TORAH

THE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE

by

MAIMONIDES

Edited according to the Bodleian (Oxford) Codex
with Introduction, Biblical and Talmudic References;
Notes and English Translation

by

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BOYS TOWN JERUSALEM PUBLISHERS

1965
Then shall I not be ashamed when I look to all thy commandments (Ps. 119:6).

INTRODUCTION.

...[All the precepts which Moses received on Sinai, were given together with their interpretation, as it is said:] And I will give unto thee the tables of stone, and the law, and the commandment, (Exodus 24:12)... The law refers to the Written Law; and the commandment, to its interpretation. God made us fulfill the Law in accordance with "the commandment." This commandment refers to, that which is called the Oral Law. The whole of the Law was written by Moses, our teacher, before his death, in his own hand. He presented a scroll to each tribe and deposited one in the Ark for a testimony, as it is said Deuteronomy 31:26. Take this book of the law, and put it under the Ark of the testimony of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. Deuteronomy 26:18. The commandment, which is the Interpretation of the Law, he did not write down but gave a charge concerning it to the Elders, to Joshua and to the rest of Israel, as it is said Deuteronomy 4:2. "All this which I command you, that shall ye observe to do, thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." (Deuteronomy 4:2). Hence, it is called the Oral Law,

Although the Oral Law was not committed to writing, Moses taught the whole of it, in his court, to the seventy elders as well as to Eleazar, Phinehas and Joshua—all three of whom received it from Moses. In his court, he taught the Oral Law and charged him concerning it. So too, Joshua, throughout his life, taught orally. Many elders received the Oral Law from Joshua—Eli received it from the elders and from Phinehas, Samuel, from Eli and his court. David, from Samuel and his court. Ahijah, the Shilonite, was among those who had come forth from Egypt. He was a Levite and had heard the Law from Moses, in his childhood. He received the Oral Law from David and his court. Eliah, received it from Ahijah, the Shilonite, and his court. Elissa, from Eliah and his court. Jehoiada, the Priest, from Elissa and his court. Zechariah, from Jehoiada and his court. Hosea, from Zechariah and his court. Amos, from Hosea and his court. Isaiah, from Amos and his court. Micah, from Isaiah and his court. Joel, from Micah and his court. Nahum, from Joel and his court. Habakkuk, from Nahum and his court. Zephaniah, from Habakkuk and his court. Jeremiah, from Zephaniah and his court. Baruch, the son of Neriah, from Jeremiah and his court. Ezra and his court received it from Baruch and his court.
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The members of Ezra's court are called "The Men of the Great Synagogue." They were Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Daniel, Hananiah, Michael and Azariah, Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah, Mordecai, Zerubbabel and many other sages, numbering altogether one hundred and twenty elders. The last of them was Simon the Just, who is included among the hundred and twenty elders. He received the Oral Law from all of them and was a high priest after Ezra. Antigonus of Socho and his court received the Oral Law from Simon the Just and his court. Jose, the son of Joseph of Zeredahl, and Joseph, the son of Johanan of Jerusalem, and their court, from Antigonus and his court. Judah, the son of Perahiah, and Nini, the Asbelite, and their court, from Jose the son of Joseph and Joseph the son of Joash and their court, Judah, the son of Tabbai, and Simeon, the son of Shethah and their court, received from Judah, the son of Perahiah and Nini the Asbelite and their court. Shemaiyah, and Abtaliel, proselytes of righteousness, and their court received from Josiah and Simon and their court. Filliel and Shammas and their court received from Shemaiyah and Abtaliel and their court. Rabban Johanan, the son of Zakai, and Rabban Simeon, the son of Filliel received from Filliel and his court. Rabban Johanan ben Zaccoi had five disciples who were the most distinguished among the scholars who received the Oral Law from him. They were Rabbi Eleazar the Great, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Iddo the Priest, Rabbi Simeon, the son of Nahumel and Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Arach. Rabbi Akiba, the son of Joseph, received the Oral Law from Rabbi Eleazar the Great. Joseph, his father, was a proselyte of righteousness. Rabbi Ishmael (and: Rabbi Meir), the son of a proselyte of righteousness, received the Oral Law from Rabbi Akiba. Rabbi Meir and his colleague also received it from Rabbi Johanan. The colleagues of Rabbi Meir were Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Josel, Rabbi Simeon, Rabbi Nehemiah, Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Shammua, Rabbi Johanan, the land-maker, Simeon the son of Aziz and Rabbi Hananiah the son of Tarsaion. Rabbi Akiba's colleagues received the Oral Law from Rabbi Eleazar the Great. The colleagues of Rabbi Akiba were Rabbi Tarfon, the teacher of Rabbi Josel, the Galilene, Rabbi Simeon, the son of Eleazar, and Rabbi Johanan, the son of Neri. Rabban Gamaliel the Elder received the Oral Law from Rabbi Simeon, his father, a son of Filliel the Elder. Rabban Simeon, his son, received it from him. Rabban Gamaliel, his son, received it from him. Rabban Simeon, his son, received it from him. [Rabbi Judah, one son of Rabbi Simeon, is the Rabbi, called Our Teacher, the Saint. He received the Law from his father and from Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Shammai, and from Rabbi Simeon, his father's

*As, full proselytes in contradistinction to proselytes of the gate who only accepted the obligation of the seven Noahide precepts.

** Rabbi Eleazar, son of Hyrcanus.
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colleagues; Our Teacher, the Saint, compiled the Mishnah. From the time of Moses so that at Our Teacher, the Saint, no work had been composed from which the Oral Law was publicly taught. But to each generation, the head of the then existing court, the prophet of that time wrote down for his private use a memorandum of the traditions which he had heard from his teachers, and which he taught orally in public. So too, every student wrote down, according to his ability, the exposition of the Torah and of its laws, as he heard them, as part of the new material evolved in each generation, which had not been received by tradition but had been deduced by application of the thirteen hermeneutical rules and had been adopted by the Supreme Court. This was the method in vogue all the same of Our Teacher, the Saint.

He gathered together all the traditions, enactments, interpretations and expositions of every portion of the Torah, that had either come down from Moses, our Master, or had been deduced by the sages in successive generations. All this material he redacted in the Mishnah, which was diligently taught in public, and thus became universally known among the Jewish people. Copies of it were made and widely disseminated, so that the Oral Law might not be forgotten in Israel.

Why did Our Teacher, the Saint, act so and not leave things as they were? Because he observed that the number of disciples was diminishing, local calamities were continually happening, the wicked Government was extending its domain and increasing in power, and Israelites were wandering and emigrating to distant countries. He therefore composed a work to serve as a handbook for all, and the contents of which could be rapidly studied and would not be forgotten. Throughout his life, he and his colleagues were engaged in giving public instruction in the Mishnah. Among the sages who were members of our sainted master’s court and received instruction in the Oral Law from him, the following were the most distinguished: his sons, Simeon and Gamaliel; Rabbi Eliezer; Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Hoshaya. These were the most illustrious of the sages who received instruction from him; besides thousands and tens, of thousands other scholars. Although these sages are named as having received instruction from our sainted teacher and attended his college, Rabbi Yohanan was a child at the time, and, at a subsequent period, a pupil of Rabbi Yochai from whom he received instruction. Rav also received instruction from Rabbi Yannai; as Samuel did from Rabbi Hamnna, son of Hamna. [Rav compiled the Sifra and the Sifre, the purpose of which is to expound and teach the principles of the Mishnah. R. Hiya compiled the Таrufiа, to explain the subject matter of the Mishnah. So too, Rabbi Hoshaya and Bar Kappara compiled Sotaita, to elucidate the text of the Mishnah. Rabbi Yohanan composed the Jerusalem Talmud]
in Palestine: approximately three centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple. Among the distinguished sages who received the law from Rav and Samuel were: Ratza, Rav Judah, Rav Nahman, and Rav Kahanan. Among the distinguished sages who received such instruction from Rabbi Johanan were: Rabbi, grandson of Halaq, Rav Ami, Rav A'di, Rav Dimi and Rav Abin. Among the sages who were thus instructed by Rav Pilius and Rav Judah were: Rabbi and Rav Joseph. Among the disciples of Rabbi and Rav Joseph were: Abba and Rav. The last two were also instructed by Rav Nahman. Among Reva's disciples were Rav Ashi and Ravina. Mar. son of Rav Ashi, was instructed by his father, Rav Ashi, and by Ravina.

Acquiescing, crossing back from Rav Ashi to Moses our teacher, (upon whom we place), there were forty generations of scholars (who received the Oral Law each from his predecessors in unbroken succession) as follows:

(1) Rav Ashi received from Rav; (2) Rav from Rabbi; (3) Rabbi from Rav Hurva; (4) Rav Hurva from Rabbi Johanan, Rav and Samuel; (5) Rabbi Johanan, Rav and Samuel from Our Teacher; (6) Our Teacher, the Saint, from his father, Rabbi Simon; (7) Rabbi Simon from his father, Rabbi Gamaliel; (8) Rabbi Gamaliel from his father, Rabbi Simeon; (9) Rabbi Simeon from his father, Rabbi Gamaliel (the Elder); (10) Rabbi Gamaliel (the Elder) from his father, Rabbi Simeon; (11) Rabbi Simon from his father, Rabbi, Rabbi; (12) Rabbi and Shammai from Shemariah and Abba; (13) Shemariah and Abba from Judah and Simeon; (14) Judah and Simeon from Joshua; (the son of Perahia) and Natan (the Ascalonian); (15) Joshua and Natan (the Ascalonian) from Joseph (the son of Joseph) and Joseph (the son of Johanan); (16) Joseph (the son of Joseph) and Joseph (son of Johanan) from Antigonus; (17) Antigonus from Simon the Just; (18) Simon the Just from Ezra; (19) Ezra from Baruch; (20) Baruch from Jeremiah; (21) Jeremiah from Zephaniah; (22) Zephaniah from Habbakuk; (23) Habbakuk from Nahum; (24) Nahum from Joel; (25) Joel from Michta; (26) Michta from Isaiah; (27) Isaiah from Amos; (28) Amos from Hosea; (29) Hosea from Zechariah; (30) Zechariah from Jehoshaph; (31) Jehoshaph from Elijah; (32) Elijah from Eliezer; (33) Eliezer from Ahijah; (34) Ahijah from David; (35) David from Samuel; (36) Samuel from Eli; (37) Eli from Phinehas; (38) Phinehas from Joshua; (39) Joshua from Moses, our teacher; (40) Moses, our teacher, the teacher of all prophets, from the Eternal, God of Israel.

All the sages here-mentioned were the great men of the successive generations; some of them were presidents of colleges, some elders, and some were members of the great Synedrion; besides them were thousands and thousands of disciples and fellow-students. Ravina and Rav Ashi closed the list of the sages of the Talmud. Rav Ashi it was who compiled the Babylonian Talmud in the land of Babil (Babylon), about a century after Rabbi Johanan had compiled the Jerusalem Talmud. These two 'Talmuds' contain an exposition of the text of the Mishnah and an elucidation of its abstruse points and of the new subject-matter that had been added by the various courts from the day of Our Teacher, the Saint, till the completion of the Talmud. The two Talmuds, the Tosefta, the Sifra, and the Tosefoth, are the source, from all of which is 'Akhidat what is forbidden, and what is permitted, what is certain and what is clear, what is a penal violation and what involves no penalty, what is fit to be used and what is unfit for use, all in accordance with the traditions received by the sages from their predecessors in unbroken succession up to the teachings of Moses as he received them on Sinai.

2. From these sources too, are ascertained the decrees, instituted by the sages and prophets, in

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each generation; to serve as a protecting force about the Law, in accordance with Moses' express instruction, "Ye shall keep my charge." (Lev. 18:30); that is, "Ordain a charge to preserve My charge." Point these sentences a direct instruction is also obtained of the customs and ordinances that were formally introduced in various generations by their respective authorities. One who came into use with their sanction from stage to stage is forbidden to depart from it. As it is said, "Thou shalt not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare unto thee, to the right hand, nor to the left." (Deut. 17:11). So too these works contain the clearly established judgments and rules received from Moses, for which the Supreme Court of each generation deduced by applying the hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of the Law, and which were decided by those venerable authorities to be the Law, all of which, accumulated from the days of Moses in his own time, Rav Ashi put together in the Gemara. The sages of the Mishna composed other works to expand the words of the Torah. Rabbi Hoshiai, a disciple of Ḥuna Tissula, the Saint, wrote an exposition of the Book of Genesis; and Rabbi Simeon, commentator on the Pentateuch, from the beginning of the book of Exodus to the end of the Pentateuch. This work is called Megillah. Rabbi Akiba also wrote a Megillah. Other sages, who lived subsequently, compiled Mishnaim. All these works were compiled before the Babylonian Talmud. Ravina and Rav Ashi and their colleagues were the last of the great sages who firmly established the Oral Law, made decrees, and ordinances and introduced customs. Their decrees, ordinances, and customs obtained universal acceptance among Israelites wherever they settled.

After the Court of Rav Ashi, who compiled the Crimina which was finally compiled in the days of his son, an extraordinarily great dispersion of Israel throughout the world took place. The people emigrated to remote parts and distant lands. The prevalence of wars and the search of armies made effect prohibitive. The study of the Torah declined. The Jewish people did not flock to the colleges in their thousands and tens of thousands as heretofore, but in each city and country, individuals who felt the divine call gathered together and occupied themselves with the study of the Torah; study all the works of the sages and from these, learnt the method of legal interpretation. The court established in this country, after the time of the Talmud, made decrees and ordinances, and introduced customs for those residing in this particular country or for residents of other countries. Its enactments did not obtain the acceptance of all Israel because of the remonstrance of the Jewish rabbis and the difficulties of travel.

And as the court of any particular country consisted of individuals (whose authority was not immediately established), while the Supreme Court of seventy-one members had, several
years before the compilation of the Talmud, creased by the
those living in one country to observe the customs
not in any court
directed to issue a decree that did not issue in the said court in the
the Gemara, the earlier authority is not necessarily followed but that view is adopted which seems more reasonable whether it be that of an earlier or later authority.
The foregoing observations refer to rules, decrees, ordinances, and customs that originated after the Talmud had been compiled. But whenever it is already mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud it binding on all Israel. And every city and country is bound to observe all the customs observed by the sages of the Gemara, promptly their decrees, and upholding their instructions, on the ground that all these customs, decrees and institutions, mentioned in the Talmud, received the assent of all Israel, and those sages who issued the ordinances, issued the decrees, introduced the customs, gave the decisions and taught that a certain ruling was correct, constituted the body or the majority of Israel's wise men. They were the leaders who received from each other the traditions concerning the fundamentals of Judaism, in unbroken succession back to Moses, our teacher, upon whom be peace.
The sages, however, who arose after the compilation of the Talmud, studied it deeply, and became Rabbis for their wisdom, and those called Geonim. All these Geonim who flourished in the land of Israel (1), Shinar (2), Spain and France, taught the method of the Talmud, elucidated its obscurities, and expounded the various topics with which it deals. Furthermore, the work is compiled in Aramaic mixed with other languages—this having been the vernacular of the Babylonian Jews at the time when it was compiled. In other countries, however, as also in Babylonia in the days of the Gemara, no one, unless specially schooled, understood that book. Many applications were made to the Gemara of the day by residents of different cities, seeking for explanations of difficulties in the Talmud. These, the Gemara answered, according to their ability. Those who had put the questions collected the responses which they made into books for study. The Gemara had, as different editions, composed commentaries on the Talmud. Some of them expressed specific laws; others, particular chapters that presented difficulties to their contemporaries; others again expounded similar subjects and entire orders of the Talmud. They also made compilations of settled rules as to things permitted

(1) Palestine
(2) Babylon

Corin-1
Jewish/Literary
or forbidden, as to infractions which were penal or were not liable to a penalty. All these dealt with matters in regard to which compendio were needed that could be studied by one not capable of penetrating to the depths of the Talmud. This is the godly work in which all the Geonim of Israel engaged, from the completion of the Talmud to the present date which is the eighth year of the eleventh century after the destruction of the Second Temple.

In our days, severe yizkudos prevail, and all feel the pressure of hard times. The wisdom of our wise men has disappeared; the understanding of our prudent men is hidden. Hence the commentaries of the Geonim and their compilations of laws and responses, which they took care to make clear, have in our times become hard to understand so that only a few individuals properly comprehend them. Needless to add that such is the case in regard to the Talmud itself, the Babylonian as well as the Palestinian—the Geonim, the Sifre and the Tosefta, all of which works require for their comprehension a broad mind, a wise soul and considerable study, and that one can learn from them the correct practice as to what is forbidden or permitted, and the other rules of the Torah.

On these grounds, the son of Maimon the Sefardi, bestowed himself, and, relying on the help of God, blessed be He, intensely studied all these works, with the view of putting together the results obtained from them in regard to what is forbidden or permitted, clean or unclean, and the other rules of the Torah—all in plain language and terse style, so that thus the entire Oral Law might become systematically known to all, without being difficult and solutions or differences of view, one person saying so and another something else, but consisting of statements, clear and convincing, and in accordance with the conclusions drawn from all these compilations and commentaries that have appeared from the time of Moses to the present so that all the rules shall be accessible to young and old; whether these pertain to the (Pentateuchal) precepts or to the institutions established by the sages and prophets, so that no other work should be needed for ascertaining any of the laws of Israel, but that this work might serve as a compendium of the entire Oral Law, including the ordinances, customs and decrees instituted from the days of our teacher Moses till the compilation of the Talmud, as expounded for us by the Geonim in all the works composed by them since the completion of the Talmud.

Hence, I have entitled this work Michael Torah (Repentance of the Law), for the reason that a person, who first reads theWritten Law and then this compilation, will know from it the whole of the Oral Law, without having occasion to consult any other book between them.

* Corresponding to 493 A.M. (1177 C.E.).
I have seen fit to arrange this Compendium in large divisions of the law according to various topics. These divisions are discussed in chapters grouped according to subject matter. Each chapter is subdivided into smaller paragraphs so that they may be systematically memorized. Among the laws in the various topics, some consist of rules in reference to a single Biblical precept. This would be the case when such a precept is rich in traditional matter and forms a single topic. Other sections include rules referring to several precepts when these all belong to one topic. For the sake of clarity, the order of topics and is not planned according to the number of precepts, as will be explained to the reader.

The total number of precepts that we obligated for all generations is 613. Of these, 480 are affirmative, their mnemonic is the number of bones in the human body. 133 precepts are negative and their mnemonic is the number of days in the solar year.

Blessed be the all-gracious who hath aided us.

LIST OF PRECEPTS ACCORDING TO MAIMONIDES

AFFIRMATIVE PRECEPTS

1. To know that there is a God, as it is said, "I am the Lord, thy God" (Ex. 20:2. Deut. 5:6). 2. To acknowledge His unity, as it is said, "The Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4). 3. To love Him, as it is said, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6:5). 4. To fear Him, as it is said, "The Lord, thy God, Shalt thou fear" (Deut. 5:12; 10:20). 5. To pray to Him, as it is said, "And ye shall serve the Lord your God" (Ex. 23:25). 6. To cleave to Him, as it is said, "Thou shalt cleave unto Him" (Deut. 10:20). 7. To revere by His name, as it is said, "And by His name shalt thou swear" (Deut. 6:8). To imitate His good and upright ways, as it is said, "And thou shalt walk in His ways" (Deut. 28:9). 9. To hallow His name, as it is said, "And I will be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel" (Lev. 22:32). 10. To read the Shema' twice daily, as it is said, "And thou shalt speak of them when thou liest down and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7). 11. To teach Torah and to teach it; as it is said, "Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children" (Deut. 6:7). 12. To bind, the phylactery on the head, as it is said, "And they shall be frontlets between thine eyes" (Deut. 6:8). 13. To bind the phylactery on the arm, as it is said, "And thou shalt bind them as a sign upon thy hand" (Deut. 6:8). 14. To make fringes (Kesihot), as it is said, "And they shall make for themselves fringes" (Num. 15:38).