Maimonides' encyclopedia of the Halakhah, *Mishneh Torah* ("The Repetition of the Law"), is what we call today a reference work. As many readers know, as a practical guide to Jewish observance, *Mishneh Torah* has long been superseded by Joseph Caro's *Shulhan Arukh*; only the Yemenite community has remained loyal to the Maimonidean Code. But the attempt by Maimonides to arrange the whole Halakhah in logical order using simple Mishnaic Hebrew has never been duplicated. This is not the place to survey the voluminous literature on the work. We shall content ourselves with pointing to the scholarly English translation which has been in progress for many years in the Yale Judaica series, and to Isaac Twersky's important introduction to the translation. Twersky provides evidence that Maimonides intended the *Mishneh Torah* to be, inter alia, a reference work for himself.\(^2\)

While the work in 14 "books," normally printed in five physical volumes, is very useful for students of Jewish law even today, it presents problems of its own. Some subjects are by their nature hard to find, e.g., the "Noahide laws" which the Jew considers a universal code of conduct. The laws of damages are not all in one place. The section on the Sabbath requires much work by the searcher unfamiliar with the order in which the author grouped the thirty chapters which he devoted to the subject. In short, what was Maimonides' index to the Talmud is today in need of an index of its own. Zvi Preisler, a Jerusalem attorney who has made a name for himself in legal indexing, has now provided such an index. He was assisted by a staff of scholars and lawyers.

The edition of the text is useful in its own right, even though no scholarly work on the text is claimed. We refer to the fact that, in place of the facsimile reprints of the 5-volume Vilna (1900) edition found on the Israel market, we have a relatively handy one-volume edition, minus the standard commentaries, but with some punctuation (largely commas), plus Biblical references and indices which he devoted to the subject. In order to cut down its bulk—it had better be used for reference rather than a handy volume, but means that the book is not designed for study. The burden of investigating and searching for the halakot which are needed constantly is the thin paper, which makes for a much better leafing through the likely-looking chapters—a larger and much better than none, thus leaves much to be desired. On occasion, it has frustrated this particular user to the point of being more the pity.

Notes


2 In the first instance I composed it . . . for my own sake, in order to free myself from the burden of investigating and searching for the halakot which are needed constantly . . .” (Letter to his disciple Joseph ben Judah, quoted by Twersky, *Introduction*, p. 42).

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