

APPROBATIONS

ספר משנה תורה, הוא היד החזקה לרבינו משה בן מימון, עם פיסוק קל, איזכורים מהמקרא ומפתחות, בעריכת צבי ה. פרייזלר. ירושלים: כתובים, תשמ"ו.

Sefer Mishneh Torah, hu ha-yad ha-hazakah le-Rabenu Mosheh ben Maimon.
'Im pisuk kal, 'izkurim me-hamikra u-maftehot, ba-'arikhat Tsevi H. Praisler. Added t. p. in English:
The Mishneh Torah, written by Moses Maimonides, in the original Hebrew,
including punctuation, Biblical references and indices. Ed. by Zvi H. Preisler.
Jerusalem: Ketuvim Publishers, 1985.

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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 As many readers know, as a practical guide to Jewish observance, *Mishneh Torah* has long been superseded by Joseph Caro's *Shulhan Arukh*; only the Yemenite community has remained loyal to the Maimonidean Code.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.¹ 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

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and an index of Biblical citations which the earlier editions did not provide. A disadvantage is the thin paper, which makes for a handier volume, but means that the book had better be used for reference rather than constant study. The fact that the Talmudic references contained in the commentaries by Caro and others are not provided in this edition is another indicator that this edition is not designed for study.

Alas, the major problem is with the subject index itself. In order to cut down its bulk—it takes up about one tenth of the 870 folio pages—the policy was obviously to give no more than one reference to each item indexed. In practice, this meant making numerous cross-references from specific entry words to the larger headings and sub-headings under which they are grouped.

Some of these headings, such as "Nezikin" (damages, encompassing much of the civil law) become very unwieldy because of the proliferation of subdivisions which are crowded in such a way as to be difficult to follow down the page. Another illustration of the problems with the index is the entry *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest), a subdivision among numerous others under *Kohen*, with no reference from the expected separate compound entry after *Kohen*.

The index, while undoubtedly very useful and much better than none, thus leaves much to be desired. On occasion, it has frustrated this particular user to the point where he has gone back to his old habit of leafing through the likely-looking chapters of the work itself. The more's the pity.

Notes

¹Isaac Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)*, New Haven: Yale Judaica Press, 1980. For a brief survey of Maimonides' life and work see Twersky's introduction to his anthology *A Maimonides Reader*, New York: Behrman House, 1972.

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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