

Summary

The topic of my dissertation is the educational philosophy of Maimonides. The first and longer part of the dissertation belongs to the realm of the history of ideas. I analyzed Maimonides' most important legal and philosophic texts connected to education.

The second part of the dissertation proposes a modern interpretation of the Maimonidean educational theory, and explores those parts of the classical Jewish educational values and principles that can be applied to contemporary Jewish education in Hungary.

In the introductory part of the dissertation, after giving a bibliographical survey and a short introduction to the major topics of general and Jewish educational thought, I dedicated a chapter to Maimonides' life and to the exploration of the cultural and historical context of his time.

The third chapter deals with the value of Torah study in the classical Jewish sources. I have selected most of the sources from the Talmudic period, but I also analyzed relevant texts from the Jewish liturgy, since the Jewish prayer book is one of the most used Jewish books on the everyday level, and it is very important to see how the value of learning is represented in the Jewish prayers. A short analysis was offered to the topic of the conflicting religious values, and to the high rank of the Torah study among them.

The fourth, the fifth and the sixth chapters deal with the different aspects of one major topic: the connection between theory and practice in Maimonides' educational philosophy. I side with those scholars who hold the opinion that there is no contradiction between Maimonides' religious and philosophical thought.

In the fourth chapter I analyzed the normative duty and the philosophical value of learning and knowing. In the first part of the chapter, I proposed a detailed exploration of the legal sources concerning learning and knowledge both from the point of view of duties and values. In the second part of the chapter, I analyzed mostly philosophical sources both from the *Mishneh Torah* and from *The Guide of*

the Perplexed. My conclusion was that according to Maimonides knowledge is the highest religious value and it constitutes human perfection.

The fifth chapter deals with the interrelation between faith, religious law and philosophy. After a short analysis of the different concepts of faith in Judaism, I explored the four models of the relation between law and philosophy according to Professor David Hartman. This chapter contains the explanation of Maimonides' legal philosophy. I tried to show the connection of Maimonidean legal teleology both to Aristotelian and to Talmudic thought. At the end of this chapter, I explained the close interrelating connection between the practical and the theoretical mind according to Maimonides' legal philosophy. Metaphysical and practical wisdom in Maimonides' thought are two realms that cannot easily be separated.

The main topic of the sixth chapter is the pedagogical aspect of the ideal leader in Maimonides' political and educational thought. This chapter has three parts. The first part contains an overview of the literature about the questions of Maimonides's esotericism and philosophical elitism. I argue that the approach of Professor Aviezer Ravitzky is the most convincing among the different opinions.

I devoted the second part of the sixth chapter to the question if Maimonides believed in the possibility of educating the masses and enabling them to acquire philosophical knowledge. I took the stance that Maimonides was a realist with an optimistic attitude, and he definitely held the opinion that everybody could acquire a certain level of metaphysical knowledge. I proved this thesis from the detailed textual analysis of the image of Abraham in the Mishneh Torah. According to my understanding, Abraham was the ideal educator in the eyes of Maimonides.

The third part of the chapter moves from the realm of the ideal to the real, and offers an understanding of the image of the realistic teacher based on the normative duties defined in the Laws of Torah Study section of the Mishneh Torah.

In the seventh and last chapter I tried to apply the principles and values of Maimonidean educational philosophy to our contemporary Jewish life in Hungary. I suggested that the education in Hungarian Neolog synagogues belongs to the larger field of informal Jewish education. After listing and exploring the general educational values that are relevant to the contemporary Jewish life (for example: study for its own sake, pedagogical optimism, commitment to traditional Jewish values even when

they are considered outdated by the general population etc.), I suggested that the major goal of the contemporary Jewish education in the Neolog synagogues has to be to strengthen the Jewish identity of the members of the community.

Beyond the general definition of the educational goals I tried to elaborate what the most important aspects of the realization of this goal are. I have explained what the five extremely important components of Jewish education in my eyes are, and what I believe the means to achieve them are.

The five goals are the following:

1. Making the Hebrew calendar an organic part of the life cycle for the members of the community.

2. Fighting Hebrew illiteracy and by teaching people to read Hebrew making them feel more comfortable with the Jewish ceremonial life.

3. Moving from the level of symbolic traditionalism to the level of a deeper commitment to traditional lifestyle. It includes helping the community members to be more independent in the celebration of the holidays. I also claimed that the rabbis have a crucial role in giving a personal example of continuous commitment to Torah study. Torah study must become a basic value for every member of the community.

4. The methodology of our educational activity also has a crucial role. My thesis is that first of all we have to teach the positive, experience centered contents. Since in most of the Jewish families in Hungary the parents are unable to teach the children, we have to educate the members of our community to acquire the ability to “look up” things by themselves and not to be afraid to ask.

5. Since the informal educational experience in the Jewish camp and in the youth movements is very important to the young generation, the rabbis have to make a special effort to turn the synagogues into a meeting point for campers and for the members of the youth movements. It can be accomplished through outreach to the madrichim.