

Moses Maimonides

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), one of the most important philosophers in Jewish history, played a seminal role in infiltrating Sufi ideas into the heart and soul of Jewish practice. His well-known works on Jewish life and law – the *Guide for the Perplexed*, *Mishneh Torah*, and other writings, all of which are still studied in Yeshivas today – were deeply infused with Sufi philosophy. For instance, his *Guide for the Perplexed* developed and conveyed to the general Jewish population ideas which had been occupying the Muslim mind for centuries; in addition, it utilized for the first time the Jewish/Sufi device of justifying new, Sufi-inspired ideas by attaching them to the far-off Jewish Biblical and Talmudic past. Ultimately, this hybrid work was studied closely and even taught by *Muslims*, to both Jewish and Muslim students.

Maimonides' idea of Jewish prophecy became suffused with specific Sufi concepts. Harkening back to the Prophet Muhammad, Maimonides believed that the prophet had a divinely ordained social role. In general, the mixture of religious awareness and social mission was essential to Islamic thought and, hence, became essential for Maimonides, as well.

Maimonides also gently turned ideas of Jewish prayer away from his contemporary Jewish practice and towards the Sufi manner. He raised silence in importance in the pantheon of Jewish prayer methods. "Silence" as a method of approaching God led to solitude as a prayer method, which ran contrary not only to the practice of 12th century Jews, but to the Jewish tradition of the community of prayer rituals – and specifically, the idea of a minyan, or minimum of ten men necessary to perform specific prayers – that had underpinned Jewish worship for the 1000 years prior to Maimonides' life. Ultimately, as the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* points out, "the influence of

Maimonides on the future development of Judaism is incalculable.” And with this influence, the floodgates to Sufi infiltration into Jewish mysticism were opened.