

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

By Rabbi Moshe Becker

Contemporary study of *Moreh Nevuchim* has become almost exclusively the occupation of academics and students of medieval philosophy. Little, if any, serious attention is given to Rambam's great philosophical treatise in many Yeshivas. This is perhaps too broad a generalization, and certainly the issues are more complex, yet such a trend can be discerned. The following essay will suggest that, in contrast to the attitude mentioned, *Moreh Nevuchim* can in fact be a relevant text and source of inspiration to a Torah student even today. I will be using Rambam's treatment of the creation as our model. This is not to imply that study of *Moreh Nevuchim* in the context of medieval Jewish philosophy alone is not a worthwhile pursuit. My intention here is to present what I believe to be the overall purpose of *Moreh Nevuchim* and its primary content, and thereby address some objections that could be raised against studying *Moreh Nevuchim* as a relevant text or as a fulfillment of Talmud Torah.

To clarify the context of the discussion, I will begin with an overview of the main schools of thought regarding the purpose and content of *Moreh Nevuchim* and some of the difficulties associated with them.

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

The natural place to expect to find the purpose of a book is in the author's introduction. Yet, Rambam's description of the content of *Moreh Nevuchim* appears to fall short of actually providing this information. A simple reading of the Introduction to *Moreh Nevuchim* reveals two purposes the author attributed to the book. The first is to explain certain terms and phrases found in the Torah which appear to be incompatible with an all-encompassing rational understanding of the world. Here Rambam describes his reader as an individual who is committed to Torah, perfected his person, and has studied the natural sciences and philosophy. This person has come to appreciate the place of the intellect, and feels that a rational position at times conflicts with a simple reading of the Torah, such as where anthropomorphic references to G-d are found. The second objective of *Moreh Nevuchim*, writes Rambam, is to identify, and at times explain, sections of the Torah that are to be understood allegorically. Chief among these are the doctrines of Ma'ase Bereishis – the story of creation, and Ma'ase Merkava – the description of “G-d's chariot” as described by Yechezkel. Rambam says that these esoteric doctrines, along with several others, were intended to be understood figuratively, and Rambam wished to explain as much of their message as possible.²⁹

However one wishes to broaden the meaning of these statements in the Introduction, it is clear that *Moreh Nevuchim* goes well beyond exegesis, even of the complex matters referred to. Lengthy argumentation detailing the precise logical foundations for proving G-d's existence³⁰; attacks against proofs that Rambam felt were incorrect³¹; a lengthy discourse on G-d's incorporeality and

²⁹ *Moreh Nevuchim*, Introduction. See also H. Davidson, Moses Maimonides, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005] pp. 327-329.

³⁰ Beginning of Section 2 of *Moreh Nevuchim*.

³¹ *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 2, Chapter 8, 19.

attributes³², and a detailed analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of the creation versus eternity question³³ are but some of the areas where Rambam extends himself far beyond instruction in an intellectually satisfying and rational reading of the Torah. At the same time, it is hardly fair to ignore the words of an author describing his book and its purpose, and I believe that my essay will also serve to address this difficulty³⁴.

To all appearances, *Moreh Nevuchim* seems to be a philosophical work, addressing all or most of the issues facing philosophers in the middle ages. Rambam brings the opinions of the different philosophers on these issues and argues for those which he felt were correct, usually favoring Aristotle's positions. In general, Aristotle's opinions are the logical framework for much of Rambam's discussion, and one need not be full versed in Rambam's works to realize that he held Aristotle in very high esteem.³⁵

Most medieval readers of *Moreh Nevuchim* viewed the work as a reckoning between the Torah and Aristotelian science³⁶. Rambam does not only align the Torah with Aristotelian thought as much as possible; a general characteristic of *Moreh Nevuchim* is the attempt to rationalize more oblique elements of the Torah and place them in a more understandable conceptual framework³⁷.

This reading of *Moreh Nevuchim* led to two types of reactions. Readers who were philosophically oriented and viewed Aristotelian science as

³² *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 1, from Chapter 68.

³³ *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 2, Chapter 13-30

³⁴ See H. Davidson, Moses Maimonides, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005] p. 332-333

³⁵ See *Moreh Nevuchim* Section 1:92, Shemona Perakim, 8

³⁶ See J. Guttman, The Philosophy of Judaism, [Northvale, NJ]: Jason Aronson, 1988] from p. 183.

³⁷ As he does with his explanations of various Mitzvos, for example.

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

authoritative embraced *Moreh Nevuchim* as a synthesis between two important sources of truth - the Torah and philosophy. On the other hand, those who were not inclined to accepting philosophy as a viable source of truth felt that *Moreh Nevuchim* was quite dangerous. The enterprise of reconciling Torah and philosophy obviously carries with it an endorsement of something other than Torah as a source of truth. This was at best a foreign, at worst a dangerous, idea threatening to undermine basic acceptance of Torah as the ultimate source of wisdom.³⁸

The two opposing viewpoints, and the reactions to *Moreh Nevuchim* that they engendered, evolved into an ongoing controversy. Beginning already in Rambam's lifetime, the ensuing, centuries-long dispute led to much acrimony in the Jewish community. Early on already, *Moreh Nevuchim* was banned by some communities, eventually leading to Christian authorities publicly burning the book³⁹.

For their part, the individuals and communities who embraced *Moreh Nevuchim* concentrated their efforts on interpretation and exploring precisely how Rambam went about resolving conflict between the Torah and philosophy. A large number of Torah scholars and philosophers wrote commentaries on *Moreh Nevuchim* with this goal, including those who translated the work from its original Arabic to Hebrew; every translation necessarily containing an element of interpretation as well.

To a certain degree, the prevailing attitude towards *Moreh Nevuchim* in the Jewish community today, which I described at the beginning of this essay, is really a modern, perhaps more passive form of the same

³⁸ See J. Guttman, *The Philosophy of Judaism*, [Northvale, NJ]: Jason Aronson, 1988] p. 184, and n. 11.

³⁹ See I. Dobbs-Weinstein, "The Maimonidean Controversy" in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, [London: Routledge, 1997] from p. 331, and Y. Dan "הפולמוס ם" על כתבי הרמב"ם", *Tarbiz* 35 (1965) from p. 295.

conflict. Some of the greatest opponents to *Moreh Nevuchim* and study of philosophy in general were the great leaders of their generation, and respected as towering figures in Torah and Halachic ruling. For this reason, their position regarding *Moreh Nevuchim* was accepted by many - if not outright at the very least by default: as teachers, they were the ones setting the patterns of study for students, ultimately affecting the entire constituency. Study of philosophy, which had actually been formally banned for younger students⁴⁰, came to be regarded as a less than legitimate occupation and *Moreh Nevuchim* remained an object of some suspicion. Eventually this approach pervaded a good deal of the Jewish community, adumbrating the current situation in many Yeshivas, where *Moreh Nevuchim* is largely ignored. Among those who do study *Moreh Nevuchim*, the approach has remained similar to that of the medieval readers, and *Moreh Nevuchim* is seen as some type of reckoning between the Torah and the Aristotelian science which Rambam adopted. Once again, to a strict traditionalist the suggestion that Aristotelian science is something to be reckoned with is itself a problematic position. There is however, one major difference between then and now. In the middle ages much more was at stake, as Aristotle's description of the natural world was largely accepted as true. In our times, it is rationalism itself that has come to be looked upon as incompatible with Torah, while Aristotelian science can hardly be viewed as a serious threat. I believe that this difference leaves more room for the approach I am going to suggest.

The difficulties with understanding *Moreh Nevuchim* as an attempted reconciliation between the Torah and Aristotle go beyond the "religious" issue of Rambam having accepted foreign sources of truth. In the first place, if it is true that Rambam's goal was to present a rendering of Torah compatible with Aristotle's philosophy, he failed to do so. Aside from the very obvious point of creation ex

⁴⁰ She'elot U'teshuvot HaRashba Responsa 415

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

nihilo, where Rambam openly rejects Aristotle's position, the basic ideas of providence and reward and punishment are not reconciled with Aristotle. Furthermore, the idea of a G-d given Torah is hardly a concept that fits in with Aristotle's conception of G-d's role in the world. Aristotle's view of natural law is purely deterministic, and G-d, although causally prior to the universe, cannot in fact change anything about the world. As Rambam himself points out, this position is entirely at odds with the concept of G-d giving the Torah to a chosen people⁴¹.

Different authors sought to resolve these difficulties in various ways, some of their conclusions highly original. On the one hand the most extreme "harmonists" truly believed that Rambam was teaching a doctrine that interpreted the Torah as Aristotelian philosophy. Faithful to this understanding, they wrote commentaries explaining and clarifying *Moreh Nevuchim* and revealing the "secrets" of the collusion of Torah and Aristotelian science. They had no compunctions about doing this and stated clearly that where there appears to be an ambiguity in *Moreh Nevuchim*, the passage should be interpreted so as to agree with Aristotle. In their own original works as well, the attempt at achieving an interpretation of the Torah in accordance with Aristotelian science can be seen.

At this point, the idea of an esoteric message in *Moreh Nevuchim* formed. There are in fact many vague statements and even entire sections in *Moreh Nevuchim* which are puzzling, but the main catalyst for this idea is Rambam's declaration in his introduction that the book contains contradictions⁴². Locating these contradictions and discovering their meaning is a pursuit that was taken up soon after

⁴¹ *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 2, Ch. 25

⁴² End of Introduction to *Moreh Nevuchim*.

the book's appearance and continues today⁴³. This enterprise was crucial in the development of the various approaches to *Moreh Nevuchim* and to Rambam as an individual.

In the Middle Ages it was thought by many authors that Rambam was actually perpetuating an existing secret philosophical Jewish tradition that he concealed beneath the surface of *Moreh Nevuchim*, and they in turn saw themselves as the bearers of that tradition, cognizant as they were of Rambam's true message. Their method focused on using the contradictions as keys to the areas where Rambam sought to indicate that Aristotle's position is the true opinion of the Torah.

The opposite of this view, in terms of methodology, agreed that the key to understanding *Moreh Nevuchim* is by way of the esoteric message, particularly by using the tool of locating contradictions. However, the method they used was not one of harmonization, but rather of bringing out the full extent of the contradiction. In this way they attempted to show that the hidden message in *Moreh Nevuchim* is that often Aristotle's positions are to be adopted over those of the Torah. The scholars who followed this approach maintained that Rambam used the contradictions to conceal his true beliefs as an Aristotelian⁴⁴.

⁴³ See A. Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the "Guide to the Perplexed" between the thirteenth and twentieth centuries" in *History and Faith*, [Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1996] from p. 246.

⁴⁴ The full extent of this approach was developed relatively recently with the work of Shlomo Pines (English translation of *Moreh Nevuchim*) and Leo Strauss (Persecution and the Art of Writing and Introduction to Pines' translation). For several centuries *Moreh Nevuchim* had been "left alone", and speculation and creative interpretation slowed down. Renewed interest in *Moreh Nevuchim* was awakened by the writings of Shmuel D. Luzzatto in the 19th century.

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

Between these two very different methods and conclusions is a wide range of attempts to grapple with the difficulties in *Moreh Nevuchim* without adopting either extreme. These attempts were characteristic of Torah leaders and scholars in the 16th – 18th centuries, when the need to contend with the Aristotelian elements was no longer so great. It is not necessary to review them in this context, though it is interesting to note that the turmoil and confusion surrounding *Moreh Nevuchim* was so great as elicit such curious resolutions as denying Rambam's authorship of *Moreh Nevuchim*⁴⁵, or conversely, of Rambam's Halachic work, Mishne Torah⁴⁶.

All the approaches mentioned take for granted that *Moreh Nevuchim* is somehow intended to deal with Torah versus Aristotelian science. What is the true message, and how one goes about finding it, are fascinating and perhaps important questions. From the Torah perspective though, there is a more troubling and fundamental issue. That is, the conclusion one is bound to reach if in fact *Moreh Nevuchim* is a work centered on Aristotle's science. Setting aside the objection to recognizing philosophy as an independent source of truth, Aristotle's physics, which form the basic foundation of Rambam's logic and philosophy, is no longer relevant. Modern science has an entirely different understanding of the world than that held by Aristotle⁴⁷. Consequently, Rambam's opinions as expressed in *Moreh Nevuchim* are basically fossilized, frozen in time and of interest only as a remarkable work of medieval philosophy. It has virtually no

⁴⁵ R' Yaacov Emden (18th century), *Mitpachat Sefarim* 64, 70.

⁴⁶ Yosef ben Yosef. (16th century). See G. Scholem "ידיעות חדשות על ר' יוסף אשכנזי", *Tarbiz* 28 (1958).

⁴⁷ To the Greeks, "philosophy" included study of the natural world, what would be considered today biology, physics etc. Aristotle used logic and reasoning based on simple observation in these areas, which nowadays would amount to speculation. The modern scientific method, which began its development in the 16th century, is rooted in applying mathematics to natural science and requires rigorous experimentation for establishing the validity of a theory.

relevance to us, and perhaps would not even be valued as Torah study, based as it is on an obsolete, secular system. Even if one were to align oneself with those medieval Torah scholars who subscribed to the Aristotelian content of *Moreh Nevuchim*, he would have difficulty finding justification for such an approach today. We began with what the author describes as a work of Torah literature, designed to clarify and explain difficult concepts in the Torah, and are left with basically a fascinating relic.

A careful look at one of the topics treated in *Moreh Nevuchim* suggests an alternative approach. The topic of creation has not been overlooked by earlier authors; on the contrary, it provides much material for the ongoing discussion of Rambam's intentions. The problems with the "Creation discussion" in *Moreh Nevuchim* are well known. On the one hand, Rambam insists, repeatedly, that creation ex nihilo is the position of the Torah⁴⁸. On the other hand, in his discussion of prophecy, Rambam equates three views of prophecy with the three positions on creation. The view of prophecy which Rambam says is the Torah one⁴⁹ is parallel to the opinion that matter is eternal, the Platonic position, and not to creation ex nihilo⁵⁰. Moreover, at the very beginning of section two of *Moreh Nevuchim*, Rambam enumerates the axioms which form the logical background for proving G-d's existence⁵¹. Paradoxically, the 26th axiom is the eternity of the universe⁵² - the position Rambam so strongly argues against later in the book!

⁴⁸ *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 2, Chapter 13 – 30.

⁴⁹ That while it is necessary for the person to perfect his intellect as a prerequisite, prophecy is not a natural, automatic outcome of that perfection, rather a Divine will is still needed.

⁵⁰ Ibid, Section 2, Chapter 32

⁵¹ Beginning of Section 2.

⁵² Strictly speaking, eternity of the universe fits far better with the monotheistic ideal of Rambam than creation does. Creation implies a change, at the very least a change of will, in G-d. Rambam stresses many times that no change whatsoever can be attributed to G-d.

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

These very challenges in understanding Rambam led to some of the most extreme readings of *Moreh Nevuchim* referred to above. Various commentators sought to explain or explain away these contradictions, and their resolutions in turn have been duly examined⁵³. The conclusions are unsatisfying and often stretching credulousness. It is not my intention to address these issues here. I would however, like to make a few simple observations.

If we strip the core points of Rambam's discourse on creation of the language and philosophical context it is presented in, we see a striking phenomenon. Rambam's position, which he presents unequivocally as that of the Torah, is simply stated, with virtually no justification or philosophical support. True, Rambam devotes several chapters to addressing the theories of eternity. Yet very little argumentation is actually given to establish the scientific or philosophical validity of creation ex nihilo. For Rambam, the simple point that creation ex nihilo is a necessary part of the Torah suffices. This point is very straightforward and is repeated several times by Rambam: If the world exists eternally, G-d is not a willing Creator, rather the 'prime mover' of Aristotle, and is subject to natural law. In this deterministic model, G-d cannot perform miracles, nor give His Torah to the Jews and elevate them as the chosen people. Reward and punishment, the results of a G-d appointed ethic, are impossible. Belief in creation on the other hand, is an affirmation of G-d's free will, as well as man's, enabling man to fill a designated role in the universe.

In his insistence that we accept creation ex nihilo and reject eternity, Rambam is making a theological statement - not taking a scientific stance on cosmology. This can be seen in his arguments against eternity. Rambam hardly makes any effort to refute the arguments for

⁵³ To mention a few: A. Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the "Guide to the Perplexed" between the thirteenth and twentieth centuries" in *History and Faith*, [Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1996] from p. 246, and H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005] pp. 387 – 402.

eternity; the only arguments that he does treat seriously are the ones that carry theological significance. For example, Aristotle points out that the idea of creation *ex nihilo* necessarily implies a change in G-d. At one point G-d did not will the world's existence, and then subsequently willed its creation. G-d changed from a potential Creator to an active Creator, and any change in G-d is a direct violation of Rambam's concept of monotheism⁵⁴. Change is a positive 'act' which cannot be attributed to G-d. Rambam admits this difficulty, and is ultimately left with something of a dichotomy, but most of his arguments against Aristotle consist of the claim that Aristotle himself did not hold that eternity was proven. That, and the simple fact that creation lies at the foundation of belief in the Torah make up the entirety of Rambam's argument. While the entire section in *Moreh Nevuchim* dealing with creation is formulated with a clear philosophical reasoning, at the end of the day Rambam is not making a scientific point, rather relying on a religious, almost dogmatic, appeal.

Perhaps most telling in this respect is Rambam's statement in Chapter 23, where he exhorts the reader to carefully consider all sides of the discussion. After delivering a pep talk about not being swayed by one's upbringing or preconceived notions, Rambam insists that one must accept creation *ex nihilo* as it provides the foundation for the Torah. What happened to the carefully considered rational analysis that Rambam always advocates? What was the meaning of his encouragement that one be aware of their prior conceptions?

Clearly, Rambam is presenting a theological position that he believed to be highly important. Creation *ex nihilo* is a concept validating G-d's free will. Rambam is not dealing with the scientific question of the origins of the world. As far as Rambam is concerned there are no two sides whose evidence must be examined and weighed. To maintain

⁵⁴ *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 1, Chapter 70?

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

G-d's role as giver of the Torah, it is necessary to believe in creation ex nihilo as an expression of G-d's freedom to act as he wishes. Encouraging his reader to carefully consider the options is not an admission that two sides in fact exist, rather a reminder of the theological consequences of belief in eternity.

I believe that this reading can be extended to other parts of *Moreh Nevuchim* as well. Throughout *Moreh Nevuchim*, topics are treated in rational, logical fashion usually following Aristotelian reasoning. However, in so many crucial areas Rambam's conclusion departs from Aristotle's. It is easy to become confused and wonder how it is that a work on philosophy winds up with such un-philosophical conclusions when the author appeared to have been treating Aristotelian logic so seriously. This confusion lay at the root of the creative interpretation of *Moreh Nevuchim* which has abounded over the centuries. However, using creation as our model, we see that in fact Rambam's only goal is to teach us the Torah position on these complex matters. In the chapters on creation this can be seen very clearly, as shown earlier, in other areas perhaps the point is more subtly made.

Evidently, while the methodology and reasoning was borrowed from Greek sources, primarily Aristotle, the substance of Rambam's statements is derived from the Torah alone. Furthermore, there is no attempt on Rambam's part to justify or reconcile the Torah views with those of Aristotle. Aristotelian philosophy, science, and logic, all provide the context and logical framework for Rambam's discussion, but they are not the actual subject matter of *Moreh Nevuchim*.

Understood in this vein, *Moreh Nevuchim* certainly bears relevance today as much as in Rambam's generation. Rambam the teacher and codifier, who labored his entire life to clarify and categorize many parts of the Torah, is instructing the reader of *Moreh Nevuchim* in some of the most difficult aspects of Jewish thought – the “secrets”

of Torah, as it were. The language of rationality in Rambam's time was the science of Aristotle, and Rambam made his presentation in that language. The theological essence of *Moreh Nevuchim* holds fast, unaffected by shifts in the world of science.

The point is perhaps put forth best by R' A.Y. Kook. In a beautiful essay written as a counterpoint to the claims of Z. Yaavetz that *Moreh Nevuchim* was an exception to the generally high quality of Rambam's works, R' Kook writes that this approach, similar as it is to the critiques of Rambam in his own time, is entirely mistaken. R' Kook stresses that the Aristotelian content of *Moreh Nevuchim* is not its primary feature or function. According to R' Kook, only the positions and methods of Aristotle which Rambam felt were in accordance with the Torah view were included in *Moreh Nevuchim*. As such, the Aristotelian elements underwent a type of 'purification' at the hands of Rambam. R' Kook insists that *Moreh Nevuchim* is purely a work presenting the fundamentals of Torah belief, and Aristotelian thought was only included where it complimented those beliefs and suited Rambam's purpose.⁵⁵

This approach would also serve to shed light on Rambam's introduction. As noted above, Rambam's statement that his purpose in *Moreh Nevuchim* is to explain some difficult terms in the Torah and point out which passages are to be allegorized, appears to fall short of describing the work. Written by anyone other than the author it may very well be considered an affront. However, if we understand that in truth the essential core content of *Moreh Nevuchim* is in the main points Rambam makes about G-d and the Torah, and Aristotelian science is a methodological device, the description makes perfect sense. Not that *Moreh Nevuchim* serves a minor purpose. The topics and passages dealt with are highly complex and the implications of allegorizing the Torah are always serious. It was therefore necessary

⁵⁵ *Ma'amarei HaRAY"ח*, pp. 105-117.

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

that a work be carefully composed to convey these interpretations in a sensitive manner.

Rambam teaches us another subtle, yet important point alongside the fundamental tenets of Torah he expresses. Making use of the tools available to present and clarify Torah matters is not something to be looked down upon, even if these tools come from sources alien and contradictory to Torah. Instead of discrediting Rambam for using foreign resources in *Moreh Nevuchim* at worst, or writing it off as obsolete at best, we should rather give a more careful reading of the work. Such a reading should allow us to pick out the points which Rambam considered fundamental components of belief in G-d and the Torah. We would then do well to apply those tools which are available and relevant to us in understanding and developing Rambam's statements further. Such a study would not be anachronistic and disloyal to Rambam; on the contrary, I believe that this would be a true application of Rambam's methods, and loyal to the essence of his teaching.

R' Tzadok Hakohen writes in many places that Torah sheba'al peh is the utilization of man's intellect to develop and understand the Torah given by G-d. The human creative aspect is an essential part of the process of Torah study⁵⁶. R' Tzadok specifically writes concerning Greek (Aristotelian) philosophy that it was the 'external' to the Oral Torah, based on the principle of "zeh le'umas zeh" which R' Tzadok often refers to⁵⁷. While it is manifest that Rambam did not express himself in such a manner, I believe that the idea is apparent in *Moreh Nevuchim*. Rambam did not shy away from availing himself of whatever tools he needed to teach Torah, and he therefore incorporated Aristotelian logic into *Moreh Nevuchim*. Having

⁵⁶ *Tzidkat Hatzadik*, 90, at length in Likutei Ma'amarim, and throughout his works as a recurring theme.

⁵⁷ *Pri Tzadik*, Chanuka n. 2, Resisei Layla.

integrated the positive value of that ‘foreign’ source of knowledge, expressing himself in philosophical language did not appear to Rambam to be contradictory to the autonomy of the Torah as the ultimate source of truth.⁵⁸

Perhaps the most powerful message that Rambam taught us is the very timelessness of the issues. The tension between the axioms and basic tenets of the revelatory truth we learn in the Torah do not always accord easily with our rational inclinations. This difficulty is true at all times, albeit to varying degrees. The co-existence in *Moreh Nevuchim* of the ‘secrets of Torah’ and the philosophical language these secrets are presented in can be viewed in two ways. On the one hand we see an example of a successful meeting between the ultimate source of truth – the Torah – and rational human thought. Yet, at the same time the very confusion and difficulty this meeting led to shows how tenuous the co-existence can be. I believe that Rambam intended that both elements be discerned. If there is a secret message to *Moreh Nevuchim*, it is that as Torah students and human beings, we are constantly going to be faced with this tension. The conflict between our physical world and a higher world will at times seem resolvable and at others a chasm too great to bridge. Teaching us to deal with this struggle is one of the underlying purposes of *Moreh Nevuchim*. A complete and satisfying resolution is not necessarily possible, but we must have the tools to face the challenge, and this is the ‘secret message’ of *Moreh Nevuchim*. In this respect scholars such as Strauss and Pines were in line with the message of *Moreh Nevuchim*. Far out as their conclusions may be, the fact that 800 years after Rambam’s life the issues are still fresh and relevant is itself a measure of Rambam’s success.

⁵⁸ For an extensive treatment of the relationship between the Torah and secular wisdom in R’ Tzadok’s thought, see Y. Elman, “The history of gentile wisdom according to R. Zadok ha-Kohen of Lublin”, in *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 3,1 (1993) 153-187.

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

Earlier I observed that while Aristotelian science may have been perceived as a serious threat to the autonomy and authority of the Torah at one point, we are no longer contending with this struggle. Realizing this should make it that much easier to incorporate the invaluable Torah content of *Moreh Nevuchim* into our contemporary Torah consciousness. What has indeed become something of a struggle today is a rational approach to Torah. This challenge invites the extremes of either accepting that which is written because of who wrote it, or rejecting it because of a perceived ‘foreign’ element. It is important to realize that *Moreh Nevuchim* certainly cannot be learned in such a way. Now that we are no longer faced with the ‘threat’ of Aristotle, Torah students can give *Moreh Nevuchim* a second chance.

Studying *Moreh Nevuchim* with this attitude should allow us to free ourselves, and *Moreh Nevuchim*, from the questions of the middle ages. The main difficulties I mentioned were: First, if we view *Moreh Nevuchim* as an attempted reconciliation between Torah truth and the truths of Aristotelian science, we will be hard pressed to see this resolution played out, as none of the main points of contention are in fact reconciled. Second, and more problematic for a Torah student, is the question of how we are to relate to a work that is based on a system of thought that is not only secular, but also obsolete. I suggested that a careful examination of the section devoted to the creation versus eternity question shows that Rambam is unapologetically presenting a Torah message – that of G-d’s free will. An honest and careful application of this method to the rest of *Moreh Nevuchim* should give us access to the ‘secrets’ of *Moreh Nevuchim* – its pure Torah message. Rambam was using the tools of his day, and so *Moreh Nevuchim* took on Aristotelian form; our role as loyal students is to take the content and apply ourselves to it with our tools - our own sensibilities and awareness and paradigms of our time.