

Influencing the Non-Jewish World

The two most famous Jews in the non-Jewish world made it their goal to spread the message of one G-d in the world. But they had a tactic that was crucial to the success of their mission.

The Rabbis of the Non-Jews

Which Rabbis (from the Biblical times to this day) could be considered the most famous in the non-Jewish world?

If you think about it, you'll discover that two people can be considered the most famous and well known in the non-Jewish world: Moses and Maimonides.

Last week was the Yahrtzeit of Maimonides, known in the Jewish world as the Rambam.

It's interesting to note that on the Rambam's tombstone in Tiberias, Israel, the following phrase is engraved: "MiMoshe ad Moshe, lo kam k'Moshe"—meaning, from Moses to Moses, there was none like Moses.

What was so special about these two men?

Egypt's Language

In this week's Parsha we read about the Exodus from Egypt.

When we read the story, it seems that Moshe Rabbeinu had one single mission: to take the Jews out of Egypt. But the more the story unfolds, we learn that our Master Moshe had another mission that was just as important: “And Egypt shall know that I am G-d”—to bring Egyptian society to the recognition of the Creator.

Egypt was a world superpower and, as such, only thought about itself and its own power. The Pharaoh promoted himself to be a god; he would relieve himself secretly, early in the morning, because relieving oneself is an inherently human thing to do. As we read in this week’s Haftarah, the Pharaoh would say, “My river is mine, and I created myself.”

It was to this place, to this society, that Moshe had to bring recognition of the Creator of the Universe. Moshe had to find a way to influence the Egyptians.

If we had to influence the world today to believe in G-d, what would be the best way to do so? Which individuals in today’s culture have the most influence? Who has the greatest power of influence?

Who sits on the board of directors of every institution, be it a university, a hospital, a synagogue or any other company? The consensus is: people with money. Whether we like it or not, this is the reality—someone who has money has influence. If Bill Gates were a rabbi, a lot more people in the world would be going to synagogue. “Money talks” is the reality in our day.

Moshe Rabbeinu in Egypt needed to influence Egypt’s high society to change its opinions. But how could he even get them

to listen to a Hebrew man, a second-class citizen? Why would they suddenly even look at him in the first place?

All of Egyptian research and development of those days was invested in black magic. Egypt was filled with sorcerers, with each trying to be a bigger wizard than the next.

So, when they needed to go to Pharaoh and make him listen to them, G-d told Moshe and his brother Aharon that “the first thing he will ask you will be, ‘Give me a sign.’”

In Egypt of those days, if you couldn’t perform a miracle, they wouldn’t talk to you— you simply didn’t count. That’s why Moshe had to come with a miracle in hand: The transformation of the stick into a snake. Only then would the Pharaoh even look at him and give him the “time of day.”

Indeed, when Moshe displayed his wonder, Pharaoh immediately summoned the Egyptian magicians who did the exact same thing. He even laughed at him.

“You’re bringing witchcraft to an Egypt filled with sorcerers!”

When Moshe executed the Plagues of Blood and Frogs, they replicated it as well. But when they came to the Plague of Lice, the Torah tells us that they could not replicate Moshe’s feat. The magicians admitted to the Pharaoh that “it is G-d’s finger” at work here—something beyond the powers of black magic.

But the way that Moshe brought them to this conclusion was through their language—the language of black magic, the language of “signs and wonders.” Without that, they couldn’t

possibly relate to him.

And indeed, Moshe Rabbeinu succeeded, and Egypt's greatest sorcerers were ultimately convinced and even joined the Jewish People, becoming part of the "mixed multitude" of non-Jews who joined the Jewish exodus from Egypt. As Rashi (Shmos 32:4) tells us, "The magicians of the Eirev Rav [mixed multitude] who rose up with them from Egypt came and performed witchcraft."

The Language of Medical Science

In his generation too, the Rambam took upon himself the goal of bringing the non-Jewish world to faith in G-d. As he writes in his own book, it is an obligation upon every Jew to influence non-Jews to observe the Seven Noahide Laws (Laws of Kings 9:10). But how do you get the non-Jewish world to listen in the first place?

Why should they suddenly want to hear what a Jewish rabbi with a beard has to say?

In the Rambam's era, science in general, and the medical sciences in particular, were just beginning to grow. The entire world was filled with excitement at the scientists and the scientific discoveries that were being introduced.

That's why the Rambam knew that if he were to influence the enlightened world to believe in G-d, he'd need to speak their language—the language of science. That's why the Rambam studied science, philosophy and medicine—because he knew that only when he spoke the language of science, the scientists

as well as everyone else would be prepared to listen to him.

Indeed, he not only meant well, he succeeded well too. He personally tried to influence the non-Jewish world. As he wrote in his letter to his disciple Rabbi Shimon Ibn Tibon about his daily schedule, he got up every morning to ride his donkey three-and-a-half kilometers to the Egyptian Sultan's court in Cairo to tend to the royal family, and when he'd return home in the afternoon, a long line of ill people would be waiting for him, "non-Jews and Jews, important and undistinguished, judges and police officers, friends and enemies, a mixed multitude," all waiting to see him to receive "a prescription for medication"—and he'd treat all of them.

The Rambam didn't do all that because he needed the income. Just the opposite—he would frequently treat poor patients for free. The reason he did so was because he wanted to provide a living example of how a Jew needs to influence and work with everyone, even non-Jews.

Learn Their Language

That's why specifically these two leaders are the most known in the non-Jewish world. There is no "Rabbi Akiva Hospital"—but there are quite a few "Maimonides" hospitals. As for Moshe Rabbeinu, the name Moses is certainly the most famous throughout the world (even before Christians began studying the Bible).

Why is this so? Because these two individuals made it their goal to influence the non-Jewish world to believe in G-d. That's why the Rambam wrote all his books (except for the Mishneh Torah)

in Arabic, the most spoken and popular language in those days—because he wanted to influence everyone, not just Jews.

In our generation, we find that the Rebbe had the same philosophy. He followed in the Rambam's footsteps and studied the sciences: engineering, physics and more in the universities of Berlin and Paris—because the Rebbe wanted to bring faith in the Creator of the Universe to everyone, not just Jews.

And he knew that the way to do that was only by speaking their language, the language of science. That's also why the same Rebbe also popularized the Noahide Code to the whole world, influencing American presidents to call upon all American citizens to study and observe the Code. That's also why the Rebbe became the most famous rabbi in the non-Jewish world in our generation.

This past week, someone asked me that if I believe what I just said, then why don't I study medicine? Then I could influence the whole world as a rabbi.

First of all, I'm too old to start everything anew. For me, it's too late. Secondly, when I see even a little blood, I get dizzy. But it's more than that. There's something called Medical Student Syndrome, you see—medical students reading about various symptoms tend to start thinking that they're suffering from those very same symptoms. For that reason, I'd be so busy imagining symptoms that I'd never get to learning about treatments—so it's better that I continue doing what I know how to do, and to try influencing everyone, including non-Jews, in this career.

But we all need to try to spread the concept of faith in G-d today, and faith in the Noahide Code, among all the acquaintances and working people with whom we come in contact. Because bringing Jews to Torah and Mitzvos won't be enough to bring Moshiach—we need to bring the non Jews to observe to Noahide Code too.

And the best way to teach—whether Jews or non-Jews—is by speaking their language.