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February 2004

The following excerpts from the *Lamp* are available for your review:

[Rabbi's Desk](#)

[Cantor's Notes](#)

[Back to top](#)

From the Desk of Rabbi David E. Fass

A Prayer in Winter

You say

Here in the cemetery, Rabbi
The rain sky weeps for Dad
We are weeping
God is weeping

You say

Now isn't that just like Mom
To give us a sky blue day
A not-to-be-a-bother
Sunday day

Most of the time

It's the assisted ones to bury
Cane and walker slowly
Knowing us sometimes, sometimes not
Most of the time

But sometimes

The impossible, I-don't-believe-you times
The doctor says, the police sergeant says
I have to say: a child, a young wife,
Dad's not coming home
No, not possible, impossible, impossible

You say

Things, howling things
Of hurt beyond hurting
In a language no one understands

Least of all you

**You say
Rabbi, I couldn't do that
How can you do that
Gray stones, damp earth, some pebbles
Covering, covering**

**I say
No one begins to want to
One learns a great blessing
To comfort people whittled down
To being just people**

**I say
Words of old prayers, new prayers
How we... why we... what we...
Personal words
Silent no-words**

**You say
It helps
At least a little
I hope it does
I pray it does**

[Back to top](#)

Cantor's Notes

“From Moses to Moses, there never arose another like Moses.” These words are written on the tombstone of one of the most influential figures in Jewish history, Moses Maimonides, also known as Rambam. This year is the 800 year yahrzeit (anniversary of his death) of this most distinguished Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages. He was not only a Jewish scholar, but also an astronomer, a linguist, and a physician. Born in Cordova, Spain, Rambam’s nonreligious works were studied more by Moslems and Christians than by Jews. He wrote on diet, drugs and medical treatments and was regarded as one of the world’s leading doctors.

Somehow Maimonides found time to pursue Judaic studies and to write a comprehensive code of Jewish Law. Maimonides believed that the Sages, the Heads of the Babylonian Jewish academies, were leading some Jews astray by giving complicated answers to legal and ritual issues. (We can say that he was the first Progressive, Reform Jew). His codification was known as the Mishneh Torah or Repetition of the Law. It was the first effort to organize the laws of the Talmud into a logical code. Maimonides’s other work, Guide of the Perplexed, was an attempt to reconcile the Bible with the world of science, and is held to be the most important Jewish theological-philosophical tome produced during the Middle Ages.

Maimonides is also known for his “Thirteen Articles of Faith,” which spells out what he considered to be a basic Jewish creed. Each Article of Faith begins with the words Ani Ma’amin, “I believe.” One of these statements was frequently chanted by inmates of Nazi concentration camps as a sign of their faith in God’s goodness.

Maimonides died in 1204. Both Jews and Moslems mourned for three days in Fustat, the town near Cairo where Maimonides had lived.

Now on a more optimistic note. I would like to invite you to adult education classes which

I will be teaching on February 10th and 17th. We will be talking about the development of the Cantorate in the United States throughout the 20th Century. And, of course, if you receive this issue before February 6th, don't forget about the Shabbat Shirah (Shabbat of Song) special event with participation from the Klezmers.

On February 22 at 3:00 PM, please come to RCC to enjoy and support our Adult Choir, which will participate in the annual B'nai Brith concert.

Have a great and not very snowy month!

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