Flexible Leadership: Maimonides, the Buddha, and Warren Buffet

**Abstract**

A leader’s flexibility can be expressed via a multi-dimensional structure containing a variety of dynamics and context-dependent adaptations. Leaders who possesses these abilities can inspire a wide range of people to trust and follow them. This article focuses on the leadership style of Maimonides, a medieval scholar who became one of the most influential figures for the Jewish people. Beyond the quantity, quality, and depth of Maimonides’ writings, the wide range of people with whom he corresponded teaches much about his distinctive leadership ability. The article also ~~briefly~~ addresses two other major leaders: the Buddha, the central figure in Buddhism, and Warren Buffet, a significant figure in the contemporary global economy. These leaders’ success in appealing to and influencing vast and varied populations can be explained and demonstrated using the structure of the Flexible Leadership (F.L.) model. This leadership style offers an effective and ethical way to lead others. These three examples and the model enable research on other leaders in various fields.

**Key Words:** Maimonides, Flexible Leadership, *Guide for the Perplexed, Mishneh Torah*, Epistle, Buddha, Warren Buffett

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**Introduction: Flexible Leadership**

This paper deals with flexibility in leadership style**.**

Purpose: - Demonstrate how a flexible leadership style was manifest by three leaders: Maimonides, Buddha, and Warren Buffett.

Methodology / Approach: Analyzing the means of operation,opinions, and influence of these three leaders.

The study of Maimonides is based on the source literature of his own writings and books and articles about him.

The research on Warren Buffett is based on the annual reports published by his corporation, a book and articles written about him and his economic approach, and YouTube videos showing his ideas.

The discussion of the Buddha is based on articles about the flexible leadership style expressed in his teachings, as well as Buddha's premise about the changing reality.

Research Limitations: This study deals with only three leaders.

The results of the study and practical implications: The study shows that these three leaders, who spoke different languages, operated in different cultural worlds, and lived at different times, manifest the same leadership style.

Practical Implications: This study can form the basis for research on additional leaders from different times and in diverse fields. Future studies will expand and enrich understanding about the situations in which a flexible leadership style is appropriate and when is it inappropriate.

Leadership flexibility is linked to consciousness of change. Maimonides had a profound consciousness that the period in which he lived was characterized by dramatic changes. Buddha expressed the consciousness that if there is anything constant in reality, it is the constancy of change. In Buffett's view, success is the result of identifying opportunities for change in what he calls the "economic sky," which is the potential for tremendous economic success.

Flexible leadership refers to adapting one’s leadership style, method, or approach to diverse and changing contexts (Kaiser & Overfield, 2010). Flexible leadership requires a broad repertoire of behaviors that may be adapted to many types of situations. It also requires the ability to know when to express each behavior, with the skill to accomplish what is necessary.

Flexible leadership theory draws on ideas from several areas: leadership, human resources management, strategic management, organizational theory, and organizational change (Yukl, 2008). Flexible leadership can be manifest in various contexts (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). A resilient leader has the ability to balance competing values and contrasting behaviors in a way that is suitable to a complex situation.

Novicevic et al. (2011) identify three types of leadership: charismatic leadership, ideological leadership, and pragmatic leadership. Pragmatic leadership refers to the ability to initiate change with a profound understanding of social interaction. According to Wilkes, Yip, and Simmons (2011), performance leadership and performance management are fundamentally different; managing performance takes place in the context of known situations, whereas leading performance occurs in unknown or changing environments.

Jia, Chen, Mei, and Wu (2018) find that transformational leadership enhances

performance of organizational innovation, while transactional leadership reduces it.

According to Jones and Nieto (2015), the most important organizing initiative is development of human resources, which is the most powerful tool for change management, knowledge management, and flexibility. The foundation for empowered leadership is the ability to adapt thoughts, actions, and responses to a complex reality. Leadership presents constant challenges, and requires the ability to give sincere praise for success, respond compassionately to failure, and offer courageous guidance through times of crisis. Therefore, the basis of effective leadership is flexibility in terms of thought, response, and action. (Landin, 2017).

This article emphasizes that because the current period is one of rapid and significant change in multiple areas (political, cultural, and industrial), leaders must be able to adapt to the demands of this reality. Followers need to trust a leader, believe the leader is working on their behalf, and perceive the leader is operating in a way that suits each particular situation.

In exploring the beneficial effects of flexible leadership and how they may be developed, Baron, Rouleau, Grégoire, and Baron (2018) find that several dimensions of mindfulness—the psychological process of bringing non-judgmental attention to the present moment—are positively correlated with flexible leadership. In the past, flexible leadership has also been attributed to cognitive skills and/or emotional intelligence. The authors suggest that mindfulness techniques may help leaders develop the flexibility necessary to successfully cope with changing situations. While the present article does not deal with this or other techniques for enhancing F.L, it does address the characteristics of F.L. These include the ability to navigate ever-changing situations, which require concentration and focus, and which cannot always be understood using knowledge from the past. Furthermore, new situations cannot be judged on the basis of past precedents.

Hurtado and Mukherji (2015) present a construct of a leader’s cognitive flexibility, referencing *The Leader’s Brain* (Heemsbergen, 2006). In that book, Heemsbergen emphasizes how nonconscious processes play a strong role in the ability to view the world from various perspectives. Hurtado and Mukherji (2015) also refer to Langer’s comprehensive study (1997) on ways that categories of perception influence mindful learning and increase the potential for adaptive change through using multiple perspectives to assess a situation.

Their article also refers to *Your Brain and Business: The Neuroscience of Great Leaders* (Pillay, 2011) in which brain science is used to illuminate issues related to cognitive flexibility. As Hurtado and Mukherji (2015, p. 9) explain, cognitive flexibility includes abilities such as sense-making and framing, the ability to lead processes of change, persuasive communication and the ability to motivate others. They suggest that cognitive flexibility and its corresponding abilities require self-awareness, other-awareness, task-awareness and situational awareness

**Maimonides and His Leadership Style**

Maimonides (1138-1204) was one of the central Jewish philosophers, an important *posek* (person determining religious laws), an astronomer, and a polymath. He was born in Cordoba, Spain and fled with his family, to Fez, Morocco, then to the Land of Israel, and from there to Egypt. He lived in a predominantly Muslim culture (Goodman, 2000; Halbertal, 2013; Kiener, 2011, Seeskin, 2017; Stroumsa, 2004, 2008).

One of the most influential figures in the Jewish world, he was a skilled physician (Shemesh, 2018), influencing and inspiring a wide, diverse range of people (Jacob, 2011). This article analyzes his influence through his ideologies, management style, morality, leadership principles, personal qualities, and ethics (Ahn, Ettner, & Loupin, 2012; Dion, 2012).

This article demonstrates that Maimonides’ leadership style can be characterized as flexible leadership, which enabled him to affect people in a dynamic and clear manner, adapted to the particular audience. The way he communicated his ideas depended upon the situation, context, and target audience. He had a creative ability to convey one message in different ways and to relate to the same issue in different ways. He could exchange an old perspective with a new one, identify a situation, adapt his proposed solution to it, and offer a new perspective on the changing reality. He saw his responsibility as not only bringing his target audiences closer to him, but also bringing himself closer to them, and adapting his message accordingly.

**Maimonides: Spiritual Leadership and Flexible Leadership**

An examination of Maimonides’ leadership teaches us that a flexible leadership style was embodied by leaders in the past, long before the current terminology came into use. Maimonides was a philosopher and well-respected religious authority. People turned to him for spiritual guidance to help them act in a righteous manner and to follow a path of truth. In fact, Maimonides was viewed as a type of mediator; he was perceived as an intermediary between the metaphysical and physical world, between God and man. The crises he addressed were related to his spiritual mission (Halkin & Hartman, 1993).

**Maimonides: Between Dogmatism and Pragmatism**

In examining Maimonides’ broad range of activities, one can note certain contradictions. On the one hand, he exhibited flexibility and the ability to adapt to a given situation and specific cases. On the other hand, Maimonides established dogmatic elements of the Jewish faith. In his early commentary on the Mishnah (the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions), Maimonides formulated 13 principles of faith (Maimonides, commentary on the Mishnah tractate, Sanhedrin, chapter 10). Before Maimonides, there was no set of compulsory beliefs, and certainly none so clearly defined as obligatory. His monumental project the *Mishneh Torah* is the compilation of all the laws of Judaism, which essentially eliminates the basic Talmudic (the central text of Rabbinic Judaism) ideal and culture of controversy. A major concern addressed in the Talmud is the presentation of a variety of arguments and a fruitful debate on each topic. According to Kellner (2016, p. 60) Maimonides was the first known Jewish leader to emphatically assert that Judaism is based on dogmatic beliefs. Maimonides was one of the first to see Judaism as a "religion" in a way that is similar to the modern meaning of the word.

Seemingly, there is a contradiction between Kelner’s assertion that Maimonides is the primary founder of Jewish dogmatism and Maimonides’ flexible style of leadership. However, it should be emphasized that the assertion made in this article that Maimonides had a flexible leadership style does not imply that he encouraged people to be flexible in their religious practice. It can be argued that it is precisely his flexibility that enabled Maimonides to arrive at the deep understanding that most people crave dogmatism. Many people are attracted to dogmatism because it contributes to stability in thought.

However, encouraging flexibility of thought is certainly evident in Maimonides’ philosophical book *Guide for the Perplexed*. This book is aimed at advanced scholars, and it is clear that Maimonides offers them a wide range of ideas. This is the exact opposite of dogmatism. Students must maneuver between the variety of ideas presented in the different chapters of this book, and by doing so, they design their worldview (Kreisel, 2012, p. 264). It should be noted that Maimonides asserts that only flexible-minded people can swim in the multifaceted sea of knowledge addressed in his book. Moreover, he guides them to flexible thought patterns as a condition for understanding the depths and secrets of the book. Advanced scholars are not obligated to accept dogmatism, but must be open-minded, active, and flexible in seeking the truth.

**Flexible Leadership as a Model for Analyzing Leaders**

The analysis of the leadership styles of Maimonides, the Buddha, and Warren Buffett demonstrates that the F.L. model can be used to examine leaders from different fields and to understand the relationship between their use of this structure and their success and ability to influence others. In other words, this model is not limited to current leadership but is equally relevant to past and future leaders. This broad perspective enables us to explore and sharpen definition of additional principles of leadership. It can assist in the study of leadership, as well as in the study of leadership in general and in the study of F.L in particular.

Abilities such as sense-making and framing, leading change processes, communicating persuasively, and motivating others are grounded in the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the ability to self-regulate at the emotional level, and it requires clarity of perception and thinking, and emotional intelligence. Mindfulness and emotional intelligence are exercised in several dimensions, which include self-awareness, other-awareness, task-awareness, and situational awareness.

## **Expressions of F.L in Maimonides’ Writings**

“*A man shall always be as soft as a reed and shall not be as stiff as a cedar.” (Ethics of the Fathers*)

Several of Maimonides’ prominent personal qualities and methods of influence are instructive about his tremendous impact. F.L is Maimonides’ dominant quality. His writings indicate an understanding of the psychological complexity that occurs when people encounter an approach that differs from their own. Reflecting this understanding, Maimonides wrote in such a way that made the reader feel comfortable. His flexibility is demonstrated in his ability to adapt his communication to his audience. This skill works in two ways. Maimonides was able to adapt himself to his target audience, while at the same time successfully bringing his target audience closer to his viewpoint (Hoffman & Frost, 2006; Kiener, 2011).

**Polemics Surrounding Maimonides’ Religious and Philosophical Work**

While Maimonides is one of the most significant figures for the Jewish people, like other historical figures who were “ahead of their time,” his writings aroused great debate and controversy (Friedberg, 2002; Silver, 2012). Some of the great Jewish sages disagreed with Maimonides’ rulings on matters of Jewish law (*halacha*), which he sometimes determined independently, without bringing the traditional sources to support his verdicts. He arranged laws in an order that differs from the one that appears in the Talmud (the central text of [Rabbinic Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbinic_Judaism)). Maimonides’ affinity for philosophy aroused the anger of many sages, who viewed him as a grave danger to the tradition. They banned his writings and even denounced him to the authorities. The controversy over Maimonides' writings began during his lifetime. It related to the intensive introduction of Greek philosophy into Jewish thought, as reflected in *The Guide for the Perplexed* and *HaMadda* (Knowledge), which is part of the *Mishneh Torah*. Maimonides’ innovative approach aroused the wrath of many sages, who regarded him as a danger to tradition. The debate over Maimonides’ work began in his lifetime (Friedberg, 2002; Langermann, 2000). In Montpellier, France 1232, some forty years after the publication of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, a boycott of Maimonides books was imposed in the Jewish communities of France and Spain. This led (according to the testimonies of Avraham ben Maimonides and David Kimchi) to the confiscation and burning of his books (Dobbs-Weinstein, 1997, p. 275). In the next section, we refer to some of Maimonides’ specific works, namely the *Mishneh Torah (Book of the Laws of Religion)* and his philosophical book *Guide for the Perplexed.* Theseare Maimonides’ two greatest writings that solidified his name both in the Jewish world and with worldwide philosophers. We also refer to several of his letters.

The juxtaposition of his two greatest projects, *Mishneh Torah* and *Guide for the Perplexed,* demonstrates that Maimonides was flexible enough to simultaneously be one of the greatest arbiters (*poskim*), whose rulings were clear and almost unequivocal, and also a teacher willing to embark on a journey together with his ‘perplexed’ students and intellectual equals in a search for Truth (Lorberbaum, 2002).

***Mishneh Torah.*** This monumental work is a comprehensive [code](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_code) of [Jewish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism) [religious law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_law) presented “in clear and concise terms, so that the entire Oral Law could be organized in each person’s mouth without questions or objections” (*Mishneh Torah*, Introduction [1](javascript:doFootnote('1a901656');)). Maimonides wrote this book both for people with basic knowledge of Jewish religious law as well as for those with a broad and deep understanding of it; in other words, for the Jewish people as a whole. Through this book, Maimonides made the Torah (the central holy book of the Jewish people, which includes the religious commandments) more widely accessible, enabling more people to learn Torah, to understand *halacha,* and to live a religious life more independently. Consequently, the sage and the layman had access to the same knowledge. Even if the sage was better informed, the gap between them was reduced, and the difference became quantitative rather than qualitative. The sages now were no longer an exclusive and superior guild. This was a dramatic shift within Judaism. Because it was so dramatic, it was explosive. In part, this was because it raised the possibility that the spiritual aristocracy of the Jewish people would be considerably diminished by the empowerment of ordinary people (Fenton, 1982).

It appears that in matters of Jewish law (*halacha*), which is expressed in daily life, Maimonides believed in the ability of the common person to observe the Torah with almost no mediation. *Mishneh Torah* is the ultimate expression of the ability to lead processes of change on the basis of flexible thinking, a clear and deep perception of reality, and a vision for the future. The change that Maimonides led was paradigmatic, making knowledge, which until then had been available only to the intellectual elite, accessible to the entire Jewish public. In this book, Maimonides was able to lead processes of change, communicate persuasively in order to motivate people to adopt a new idea, and to consolidate all the Jewish laws and commandments in one comprehensive monumental work.

## ***Guide for the Perplexed*.** The *Guide for the Perplexed* was written for a religious person with persistent and fundamental questions and difficulties. It was aimed at people whose psychological character was in tension with religion and religious obedience, and those who did not find answers within traditional explanations. Until Maimonides, such people had no source of explanation within Jewish thought (Altmann, 1972).

In *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides accompanies and guides his students and then lets them continue on alone, placing his hope and trust in them. As he wrote, “This is all that I thought proper to discuss in this treatise, and which I considered useful for men like you. I hope that, by the help of God, you will, after due reflection, comprehend all the things which I have treated here” (Maimonides, 1910, p. 576). Whereas the *Mishneh Torah* was written for the entire Jewish people, the *Guide for the Perplexed* is like God’s approach to Abraham in Genesis, in the sense that Abraham had a special personality and a holistic intellect, and therefore communication with him was on a different level and in a different style than with others (Hoch & Kellner, 2012).

The writing in the *Guide for the Perplexed* is an expression of Maimonides’ vast knowledge of philosophy as well as an expression of his high level of emotional intelligence when addressing individuals facing with a crisis of faith. Maimonides wrote the *Guide for the Perplexed* with other-awareness, self-awareness, and an understanding that he had a unique ability to help the “perplexed” religious person. **Maimonides’ Letters.** Maimonides’ various writings illustrate the substantial efforts he made to offer knowledge to a wide range of people, including Jewish community leaders who held authority, political power, and influence. In his efforts to make the Torah widely accessible and to encourage and instill hope among those struggling to understand or accept it, Maimonides corresponded with congregation leaders and answered their personal letters. He also corresponded with private individuals, heartening them, contributing to their personal development, and trying to alleviate their difficulties. In this section, we demonstrate, by analyzing his words, that his advice and recommendations and the way he relates to those he writes to are close to the FLC model presented above.

***Letter on Apostasy*.** Maimonides’ approach allowed a Jew to acknowledge Muhammad’s prophecy yet remain part of the Jewish people (Soloveitchik, 1980). This was unprecedented. The following is the background: At the time, Moroccan Jews were required by local law to acknowledge Muhammad’s prophecy and declare, “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.” According to Jewish tradition, a person who makes this statement was no longer considered part of the Jewish people, based on the biblical statement, “*And the person who does it with an uplifted hand, this person shall be cut off*”(Numbers 15:30).

Maimonides opposed the traditional religious concept that a person who leaves the Jewish religion cannot ever return to it. Based on verses from the Torah and Talmud, Maimonides differentiates between those who leave the religion voluntarily and those are coerced to do so. Maimonides was not interested in being a revolutionary in this matter, but rather to reinforce what he saw as an accepted path. In our opinion, he was an innovator who tried to present his decisions as if they were based on old and accepted ideas:

Throughout the Talmud, we find that a person who was compelled to commit a transgression is exempt from punishment in accordance with the laws of the Torah, for example: “God exempts the transgressor under compulsion,” (Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 27, 1). This is based on the verse: “For as a man attacks his friend and murders him, so is this thing” (Deuteronomy 22: 26) (Stitskin, 1977, p. 115)

Here Maimonides’ leadership qualities are appropriate to the F.L model, which takes into account the special and unprecedented (at the time) circumstances. Maimonides teaches ethical action in a complex reality. Of course, this advice would not have to be given in an ideal world, in which it is easy to know right from wrong. However, in practice, there is often tension between religious commitment and real life. Dealing with this complex dilemma requires a high level of self-awareness, willingness to offer an unconventional response to a complex situation, and the ability to convince others to accept this response (Landin, 2017). Maimonides’ advice is not to follow the extreme and erroneous thinking of “all or nothing,” but rather to try to do one’s best within the existing limitations.

Another example of Maimonides clarifying his opposition to extremism and offering a realistic course of action is found in the following quote:

A person who is caught in this persecution should conduct himself according to the following lines: let him set his sights on observing as many of the mitzvot (religious commandments) has he can. If he transgressed often or desecrated the Sabbath, he should still not carry what he is not allowed to carry...Let him be as careful about observing the mitzvot as he can. (Maimonides quoted in Finkel, 1996, p. 74)

Thus, Maimonides describes a type of “conversion” to Islam in which Jews only make a statement acknowledging Muhammad’s divine mission but do not commit any acts of idolatry. Maimonides’ flexibility allowed one to escape the death penalty and still continue to be part of the Jewish people. It seems that such flexibility in the face of a complex reality receives sympathy and appreciation today, with the benefit of hindsight; during Maimonides’ lifetime, however, it was perceived with suspicion and as heresy. His letter indicates a high level of self-awareness, situational awareness, and the understanding that he was an individual who could convince others, as described in papers dealing with flexible leadership (Baron et al., 2018; Hurtado & Mukherji, 2015; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010; Landin, 2017; Wilkes et al., 2011; Yukl 2008; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

## ***Letter to the Sages of Lunel.*** In this letter to the community of Lunel, France, Maimonides expresses his desire to raise the generation of potential leadership that will follow his death. Maimonides wrote this letter in response to twenty-two questions posed by Rabbi Jonathan Hakohen on a variety of subjects arising from the *Mishneh Torah*, as well as to a request by the scholars of Lunel for a Hebrew translation of *The Guide* *to the Perplexed* (Stitskin, 1975).

Maimonides communicated the urgency of the Jewish people’s catastrophic spiritual state to the sages of Lunel. He then empowered them with the role of spiritual leadership. He remarked that during this difficult time, people did not ‘stand upright’ with Moses’ teachings, in the words of Rav Ashi in the Babylonian Talmud:

Be therefore strong and fortify yourself for the sake of our people and our God. Strive to be courageous men, for everything depends on you. Upon you devolves the command of fulfilling the levirate precept. Do not rely upon me to carry on the battle as I can no longer navigate. I am an old man and grey, not from aging but from a weak, worn out body. May the Creator support your efforts and render you a famous name and praise you in the midst of the earth. (Stitskin, 1975, p. 191)

Maimonides gave the sages of Lunel the feeling that the fate and future of the Jewish People depended on them, that there were no others who could carry out this holy work, and that they were carrying the holy scepter of the Torah. He encouraged them and expressed his belief that they would find their own ways to lead and to teach the Torah.

Flexible leadership, in this case, is expressed in the ability to delegate authority and to encourage other people to take leadership, (Jones & Nieto, 2015) even if they take a different direction. This letter is an expression of Maimonides’ self-awareness and clear understanding of the complex reality being faced by future generations. Maimonides led a process of change manifested in his effort to support and empower new leaders of the Jewish people from his unique source of authority. This letter demonstrates the characteristics of “ability to lead change processes, ability to communicate persuasively and the ability to motivate” as described in texts dealing with flexible leadership (Baron et al., 2018; Hurtado & Mukherji, 2015; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010; Landin, 2017; Wilkes et al., 2011; Yukl 2008; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

***Letter to Yemen*.** Maimonides also wrote a letter of encouragement to the Yemenite Jews, who were at that time in a great spiritual crisis resulting from decrees against Jews and the appearance of a false messiah (Mazuz, 2014). Through their leaders, Maimonides encouraged them with the following words:

To the honored, great, and holy Master and Teacher, Jacob, wise and genial, dear and revered sage, son of the honored, great, and holy Master and Teacher, Nathaniel Fayyumi, distinguished Prince of Yemen, president of its congregations, leader of its communities, may the spirit of God rest upon him, and upon all his associates and upon all the scholars of the communities of Yemen. (Halkin & Hartman, 1993, p. 93)

Maimonides wished to convey his words through the mediation of the leader of Yemenite Jewry in order to encourage and strengthen their broken spirit. His involvement in Yemen was not limited to giving advice from afar. His advice involved speaking against Muhammed to strengthen the Jews there, which posed a risk to his own safety:

I beg you to send a copy of this missive to every community in the cities and hamlets, in order to strengthen the people in their faith and to put them on their feet. Read it at public gatherings and in private, and you will thus become a public benefactor. Take adequate precautions lest its contents be divulged to the Gentiles by an evil person and mishap overtake us (God spare us therefrom).

When I began writing this letter, I had some misgivings about it, but they were overruled by my conviction that the public welfare takes precedence over one’s personal safety. Moreover, I am sending it to a personage such as you, “and the secret of the Lord may be entrusted to those who fear Him.” Our sages, the successors of the prophets, assured us that persons engaged in a religious mission will meet with no disaster (Pesahim 8b). What more important religious mission is there than this. Peace be unto all Israel. Amen. (Halkin & Hartman 1993, p. 131).

Maimonides’ awareness of the crucial task of encouraging and inspiring the community of Yemen, which was in a dire religious and social situation, as shown in this letter, characterizes his ability to motivate and his sensitivity “to task-awareness and situational awareness” as described in texts dealing with flexible leadership (Baron et al., 2018; Hurtado & Mukherji, 2015; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010; Landin, 2017; Wilkes et al., 2011; Yukl 2008; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010

Maimonides’ did not write only to heads of congregations and communities. He also answered letters to private individuals of various types, from laymen to sages. These letters, several of which are described below, show Maimonides’ adaptability to the audience.

***Letter to Joseph Ibn*** ***Gaber.*** Maimonides’ ability to make the Torah accessible and flexible can be seen in his letter to Joseph Ibn Gaber, an ordinary Jew from Baghdad who did not know Hebrew well. Maimonides sent Ibn Gaber a relatively long letter, encouraging him and giving him advice regarding the appropriate way to continue his studies, as it was clear that Ibn Gaber was not an ideal student. Maimonides adapted his advice to suit the man’s simple level, and suggested that he refrain from dealing with major philosophical questions. He even allowed Ibn Gaber to hold beliefs that Maimonides rejected as false (Kraemer, 2008, pp. 415-416), indicating his recognition that not everyone is able to understand abstract philosophical thoughts. Maimonides gave people advice on how and what to believe according to their intellectual level.

Maimonides understood this individual’s abilities and limitations, and presented him with a personalized educational program, even though Maimonides clearly objected to some of his own recommendations. This is consistent with Maimonides’ traits of empathy and caring. We learn how Maimonides perceived his letter to Ibn Gaber from another letter he sent to his disciple, Joseph Ben Yehuda, in which he mentions this matter. The second letter indicates that Maimonides was aware of the “negative visibility” of writing a letter to a simple person, and that it could be misconstrued that he was not ‘particularly busy.’ His response to Ibn Gaber’s appeal, and the personalized education program that included the possibility of adopting foreign beliefs, demonstrates his flexibility and his desire to make knowledge accessible even to the common person.

Maimonides was aware that Ibn Gaber was not a scholar, so it was appropriate to guide him in a way that was suitable to his abilities and to present him only with challenges that he had a chance of meeting with success. With deep emotional understanding and awareness of the specific situation, Maimonides built a curriculum specific to Ibn Gaber, which differed from Maimonides’ conventional approach, and was adapted to the situation. The way in which Maimonides guided Ibn Gaber demonstrates Maimonides’ deep understanding of the individual, his emotional intelligence, and his “ability to self-regulate at the emotional level,” ~~(Baron et al., 2018; Hurtado & Mukherji, 2015; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010; Landin, 2017; Wilkes et al., 2011; Yukl 2008; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).~~

***Letter to Ovadiah the Proselyte*.** Another famous appeal is to the convert Ovadiah Ger Zedek (Kellner, 2016). (The term *ger zedek* is Hebrew for “righteous convert” and can be used to refer to any person who became a Jew for all intents and purposes.) Maimonides teaches Ovadiah Ger Zedek how to pray like the rest of the Jewish people, while acknowledging that his prayer may differ somewhat from that of other Jews (Birnbaum, 2005). It was important for Maimonides that Ovadiah should not feel inferior, but that his thoughts and his activity would be enhanced through self-awareness. For example, Maimonides suggested that it would be permissible for Ovadiah to adapt the wording of prayers that speak from the perspective of the Jewish nation, such as those that praise God for “bringing *us* out of the land of Egypt” while at the same time noting that Ovadiah would be allowed to use the original wording of the prayers, because he had “come under the wings of the Divine” and there was no difference between him and someone born a Jew (Kobler, 1978, pp. 195-197).

This is an example of how Maimonides was prepared to adapt the prayer text so that it would be perceived as natural and in a language with which Ovadiah felt comfortable. This requires flexibility of thought, thinking outside the box. Through emotional intelligence and awareness of Ovadiah’s special situation, Maimonides opened up a number of possibilities to him and treated him in a welcoming and gentle manner.

The way in which Maimonides guided Ibn Gaber and Ovadiah reflects his deep understanding of humans and shows Maimonides’ emotional intelligence and self-regulation, ~~as described in texts dealing with flexible leadership (Baron et al., 2018; Hurtado & Mukherji, 2015; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010; Landin, 2017; Wilkes et al., 2011; Yukl 2008; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).~~

**Maimonides as a Prototype for the Flexible Leadership Model**

Since relying on past knowledge is not sufficient to provide solutions to new situations and dilemmas, there is a need for flexible thinking in order to deal with new problems. There is a need for openness and courage to think “outside the box” (Baron et al., 2018)*.* In the significant decisions facing us, the past cannot help, because the situation is unprecedented. The results of the response to that reality are not guaranteed at all. Maimonides’ solutions are an expression of flexibility (Wilkes et al., 2011) and understanding that conventional solutions may be irrelevant, and that the new reality cries out for an innovative way of thinking (Jia, et al., 2018). This flexibility may provoke fear, since it is a change from the traditional course and raises suspicion that one change will lead to instability and a total break from convention. When such approaches come from a religious leader, innovation can be interpreted as a reform that deviates from the traditional path, as a distortion of sacred scripture. Creative and innovative thought simultaneously raises the suspicion of heresy while also instilling sympathy and appreciation for flexibility in adapting to new situations.

One of the practical expressions of flexibility is the ability to make knowledge accessible and adapt it to different realities and to different people (Lucas, van Wee, & Maat, 2016; Peters & Bradbard, 2010). Maimonides was aware that conventional solutions were irrelevant to the problems of his generation, and the new reality required completely different thought. To overcome current and future distress and provide solutions to people with specific difficulties, Maimonides proposed solutions that reflected flexibility of thought and the ability to stretch the possibilities to extremes without destroying their foundations.

When Maimonides addressed audiences and individuals, he placed them in the center, and adapted his words to their level, needs, and style, thus creating a unique relationship with each group and individual. The examples and analysis presented in the article demonstrate that many aspects of Maimonides’ leadership style correspond to the F.L model.

The article shows how the F.L. model is reflected in Maimonides’ leadership style. Although Maimonides was probably not the first leader to fit this model, one primary reason for focusing on Maimonides is his vast and varied writings. Furthermore, the F.L. model can be used to understand other popular leaders, founders of religions, and contemporary leaders pressing for social and economic change. Thus, the article briefly examines two other major figures. The first is the Buddha, the central figure in Buddhism, who lived more than 1500 years before Maimonides. The second is the billionaire and renowned investor Warren Buffett, who lived 800 years after Maimonides. Both seem to be characterized by the F.L. model.

The reference to Buddha and Buffett provides an opening for future research. It is possible that “rules”, from the perspective of the Buddha, were very open and flexible. Buddha made every effort to make his ideas available to the diverse people he taught. This manifests in what can be called flexible leadership. In addition, Skye (2016)claims that the Buddha’s creativity sometimes caused confusion among his followers, because his flexible and non-dogmatic words seemed to be contradictory (Skye, 2016).

The Buddha’s flexible leadership style also relates to organizational aspects of the religion. The balance element, which can be considered a leadership trait, is expressed in the middle path recommended by the Buddha; essentially a balanced approach to life. Leaders with a balanced approach communicate effectively with employees, enabling a flexible atmosphere suitable for change and innovation. A core idea in Buddhism is the understanding of the infinite transformation of reality. Everything is changing and one should not fear this, but rather flow with it. This approach envelops change and innovation and does not try to escape or avoid it (Tripathi, Guru, & Liddle, 2015).

Next we examine Warren Buffett, one of the central economic leaders of the late 20th century and beginning of the 21st century (Awasarikar, 2015; Bohl, 2019; Shafique & Loo-See 2018; Solomon & Steyn, 2017). Who leads and controls the Berkshire Hathaway, a US-based multinational conglomerate holding company (Benzinga, 2018).

Buffett’s flexibility is reflected in his recognition that each person being addressed has a unique personality structure and desires. In accordance with this recognition, Buffet encourages his students to act courageously according to their personal desires~~(Jaffer, 2013; Wartiovaara, 2011)~~. (Schroeder, 2008).  “Warren always gave students advice to pursue their passion” (p. 647). Buffett recognizes the fact that different people have different desires. He wants people to realize their own dreams and ideals, not his. Buffett's flexibility is reflected in his ability to accept different personality styles and desires.

Buffett describes a formative event that changed his entire approach to matters of investment (Patel, 2018). The idea arises in his annual letter of 2013 (p. 20) in which he relates that in 1949 he bought Ben Graham’s book, The Intelligent Investor. Graham’s ideas were presented elegantly and simply and in a logical process, without Greek letters or complicated formulas (Gabriel, 2008). The simple conveyance of this message seems to motivate Buffett to do the same; that is, to disseminate his insights in a simple and clear way, and above all, in a flexible manner adapted to the time and place. One of Buffett’s ten tips is “Keep it Simple” (see‘Warren Buffett's Most Inspirational Speeches’ in Buffett, 2017).

The desire to access knowledge, to see things through one another's eyes, to modify and adapt explanations according to the recipient are the manifestations of Buffett's flexible leadership style.

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In the annual reports, (~~Lynch, Bogle, Ellis, Fridson, & Fisher 2005~~) (Hagstrom 2013).  one can discern the flexible line that Buffett describes. For example, in the early 1980s, Buffett says, ~~"Our abundant capital and investment flexibility will enable us to do everything we think makes perfect sense,"~~ "Our abundant capital and investment flexibility will enable us to do whatever we think makes the most sense…” (1980 report) (Buffett, 1981). Three points are noted for correct investment: capital, flexibility, and common sense. Buffett sees an advantage in his company’s financial stability, because it allows him greater flexibility. Similarly, he said, "Our financial situation offers us maximum flexibility" (Report 1981).

Buffett links financial successes with flexibility (Otuteye & Siddiquee, 2019). As he stated in a more recent report, "Our flexibility in capital allocation gives us a significant advantage over companies that limit themselves only to acquisitions they can operate." (Buffett, 2012, p. 5) When Buffett talks about self-limiting companies, he may be referring to the fact that some companies limit themselves to lack of economic power, or they may understand the rules of the game differently. He notes that they limit themselves, while his company is flexible (Report 2012).

An expression of flexibility is a willingness to invest. One of the practical applications for Berkshire's flexible style is reflected in the company's passive investment. Passive investment is an investment strategy that tracks a market-weighted index or portfolio (Asness, Frazzini, Israel, & Moskowitz, 2015). In Buffett’s words: "Our flexibility in capital allocation – our willingness to invest large sums passively in non-controlled businesses ... passive investments doubles our chances for finding sensible uses for our endless gusher of cash," (Buffett, 2014). ~~passive investment in uncontrollable businesses~~ ~~, to activate the organs of society beyond the immediate range of movement and thought~~. This flexibility makes it possible succeed in new areas, where other businesses have not yet invested. Berkshire's advantage lies in the flexibility with which power is translated into flexibility and flexibility is translated into power. ~~"Every decade or so, dark clouds will fill the economic sky, and they will be full of gold for a short time, and when such a flood happens, it is necessary that we rush out with boats, not with spoons," Buffett writes. (The quote in the 2014 report also appears in virtually the same words in the 2015 report).~~ . "Every decade or so, dark clouds will fill the economic skies, and they will briefly rain gold. When downpours of that sort occur, it’s imperative that we rush outdoors carrying washtubs, not teaspoons. And that we will do" (Report 2012). Rigidity and dogmatic thinking are limitations, while flexibility and creativity provide the potential for success. If this is the case, we have seen that Buffett's leadership is reflected in the fact that he advises his students to be themselves and not to follow a formula someone else has created; in his passion for accessing knowledge and making it simple and suitable to a wide range of people; and the realization of flexible management of Berkshire Hathaway over the course of several decades.

A key part of Buffett's flexible leadership is to teach the people around him to be flexible and adapt to changing situations and environments. Thus, the F.L. model, as reflected in Maimonides’ leadership style, could well be used as a tool for researching more leaders as diverse as the Buddha and Warren Buffett.

## **Conclusion**

The flexibility of a leader is expressed by a multi-dimensional structure that contains a variety of dynamically activated forces and changes in a context-dependent manner. This type of leadership requires a high level of emotional intelligence, logic, intuition, ability in interpersonal interaction, ability to assess a situation, adjust to it, and to adopt the correct course of action. A leader who possesses these abilities can convince a wide range of people to trust and follow him. His influence will take into account the nature of the audience being addressed. flexibility of a leader requires deep recognition of the person or audience to which messages are directed. Without knowing the specific needs and character of the audience to which a message is intended, it is not possible to convey an accurate message.

Maimonides is one of the most significant figures for the Jewish people. He led diverse audiences through his many writings. He wrote a monumental book containing all Jewish religious laws (*Mishneh Torah*) that was designed for the entire Jewish people, and a philosophical book (*Guide for the Perplexed*) for scholars for whom philosophical questions make their religious beliefs difficult. In addition, Maimonides wrote letters to various communities suffering from crises and especially crises of faith. He also wrote letters to individuals with hardships. Beyond the quantity, quality, and depth of Maimonides’ writings, the wide range of people to whom he wrote indicates that his leadership ability can be explained by the model of Flexible Leadership. In many ways Maimonides is the ideal type of flexible leader. The fact that Maimonides asserted that Judaism was based on dogmatic beliefs does not diminish his flexible leadership style. An analysis of his leadership style provides an opening for research on other leaders through the F.L. model.

Buddha is a prime example of a flexible leader. He creatively communicated his ideas in different ways to different people. His flexible style sometimes caused his students to think that his words were contradictory. The basic starting point of Buddha’s teaching is that everything is changing all the time and so it is not appropriate to treat all situations in the same way.

Warren Buffett's leadership flexibility is reflected in his recognition that every person he addresses has a unique personality structure and desires. In keeping with this recognition, Buffett encourages his students to act courageously and fulfill their passions. Buffett disseminates his insights in a straightforward and clear way, and above all, in a flexible manner that is tailored to the time, place and target audience he is addressing.

Buffett links financial success with flexibility. In his opinion, the advantage of Berkshire (the company he runs) lies in its flexibility.

The three leaders are characterized by a consciousness of changing reality and their leadership flexibility is the result of this consciousness.

The F.L. model can be used as a tool for understanding leadership and explaining the success of leaders from different times and disciplines, as indicated through the added analysis of the leadership style and actions of the Buddha and Warren Buffett.

This study demonstrates the application of flexible leadership through the analysis of three leaders: their actions, advice, opinions, and impacts. This could serve as the basis for research on additional leaders from different times and in other areas that will increase understanding of in which situations the flexible leadership style is appropriate and in which situations it is inappropriate.

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