

Harmonized Alignment in Ethical Leadership: Synthesizing Maimonides' Rational Allegiance and Dessler's Giving Paradigm



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Abstract: This article offers a comparative analysis of leadership paradigms articulated by Maimonides and Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, emphasizing their enduring relevance to contemporary ethical and organizational leadership. Maimonides' Dual Allegiance model integrates intellectual rigor, ethical autonomy, and social responsibility into a rational, duty-bound framework. In contrast, Rabbi Dessler's Giving Paradigm, as presented in *Strive for Truth*, centers on relational ethics, moral intentionality, and the transformative power of altruistic giving. Despite their differing emphases – cognitive clarity versus emotional insight – both approaches converge in promoting a multidimensional, ethically grounded vision of leadership. This study introduces Harmonized Alignment, a synthesis that balances intellect, empathy, and moral action, grounded in classical Jewish thought. The model offers practical guidance for leaders navigating ethical dilemmas and striving to foster sustainable, value-driven organizational cultures in complex modern environments.

Keywords: Leadership; Ethics; Spirituality; Maimonides; Rabbi Dessler; Harmonized Alignment; philosophical analysis.

I. Introduction: Harmonized Alignment in Leadership – Integrating Rational Excellence and Relational Ethics

How can contemporary leaders harmonize intellectual rigor with ethical sensitivity to promote sustainable societal well-being? This foundational question lies at the heart of current debates across philosophy, ethics, organizational theory, and psychology (Ayoko 2022). In a world marked by moral complexity and rapid transformation, leadership must extend beyond technical expertise to incorporate a principled balance of reason, compassion, and relational awareness.

Within the Jewish philosophical tradition, two influential figures – Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon 1138–1204) and Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892–1953) – offer complementary frameworks that illuminate this challenge. Maimonides articulates a rationalist vision of leadership grounded in ethical autonomy, disciplined intellect, and moderation. His concept of *Dual Allegiance* reflects the leader's ongoing tension between

the cultivation of individual intellectual excellence and commitment to the collective good (Greene 2024; Hoch 2025; Kellner 2015). In contrast, Rabbi Dessler's *Giving Paradigm*, as elaborated in *Strive for Truth*, centers on relational ethics, emphasizing altruistic love (*chesed*), moral intentionality, and the transformative potential of mercy and trust (Ben Yair, Ronel, & Enright 2024).

This article proposes a conceptual synthesis of these two models in the form of *Harmonized Alignment*: a leadership framework that integrates Maimonides' rational discipline with Dessler's relational sensitivity. Rather than positing intellect and emotion as opposing forces, this approach affirms their interdependence, equipping leaders to respond to moral complexity with clarity, empathy, and purpose (Claussen 2019; Miao & Nduneseokwu 2024; Shatz 2020). Building on existing scholarship in philosophical ethics and leadership theory, the article introduces Harmonized Alignment as a multidimensional model for ethical leadership. The goal is to offer a spiritually informed yet practically grounded framework that enables leaders to align intellectual excellence with relational virtue. The following sections outline its theoretical foundations, examine its practical applications, and assess its significance for promoting a value-driven, progressive approach to leadership in contemporary society.

II. Maimonides: Leadership through Rational Excellence and Dual Allegiance

Intellectual Cultivation as an Ethical Imperative

Maimonides – one of the most influential figures in Jewish philosophy and halakhic jurisprudence – conceives of leadership as a continuous process of intellectual refinement and ethical self-mastery. Genuine authority, in his view, stems not from charisma or coercive power but from the disciplined pursuit of wisdom and moral integrity. Across *The Guide for the Perplexed* and *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides depicts the ideal leader as one who channels philosophical understanding into concrete contributions to the moral and civic well-being of society. At the heart of his model lies the principle of **Dual Allegiance**: the ongoing effort to balance personal intellectual development with unwavering responsibility toward the public good (Kellner 2015).

Virtue, Justice, and Concerns about Elitism

Drawing heavily on Aristotelian virtue ethics, Maimonides argues that intellectual cultivation must be inseparable from the pursuit of justice and moral character. For him, rational inquiry is not an abstract pursuit; it finds its highest expression in ethical conduct and civic engagement (Burger 2022; Greene 2024). However, this emphasis on intellectual excellence has prompted critical debate. Some scholars contend that his apparent

preference for a philosophically elite leadership may risk excluding broader populations and reinforcing hierarchical social structures (Greene 2020). Nonetheless, Maimonides' integration of reason, virtue, and communal responsibility continues to offer a resilient and adaptable model for ethical leadership – one that transcends religious boundaries and resonates within contemporary secular discourse.

III. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler: Leadership Through Relational Ethics and the Giving Paradigm

Giving Paradigm and Emotional Intelligence

Whereas Maimonides' model centers on rational self-governance, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler offers a contrasting leadership paradigm grounded in relational ethics and emotional intelligence. As a pivotal figure in twentieth-century Jewish moral thought, Dessler foregrounds the ethical significance of interpersonal relationships and the spiritual growth that emerges from selfless giving. His **Giving Paradigm**, as articulated in *Strive for Truth*, draws a fundamental distinction between “givers” and “takers,” asserting that authentic leadership is rooted in sustained moral commitment, character development, and the cultivation of trust. Leadership, in this view, is a spiritual endeavor shaped by humility, intentionality, and the prioritization of others’ well-being (Ben Yair, Ronel, & Enright 2024; Eytan & Ronel 2023; Saiman & Chizhik-Goldschmidt 2024).

Justice, Mercy, and Interpersonal Responsibility

Dessler’s ethical vision is anchored in the dialectical relationship between justice (*din*) and mercy (*chesed*), framed within the Jewish ideal of **Tikkun Olam** – the moral responsibility to repair and elevate the world. This ethical tension informs a nuanced leadership approach that balances accountability with compassion and judgment with empathy. His emphasis on humility and moral intentionality resonates with contemporary leadership theories, particularly **servant leadership**, which prioritize authenticity, care, and value-driven influence (Brown & Treviño 2006). While some scholars caution that Dessler’s strong focus on emotional proximity may complicate strategic detachment in high-stakes environments (Carmeli, Tishler, & Edmondson 2012), his paradigm serves as a vital corrective to overly rationalist frameworks – broadening organizational ethics to encompass integrity, empathy, and the promotion of human flourishing.

IV. Harmonized Alignment: Synthesizing Maimonides and Dessler

Integrative Pillars of Harmonized Alignment

The contrast between Maimonides' rationalist ethics and Dessler's relational moral vision provides fertile ground for an integrative leadership model. The **Harmonized Alignment** framework weaves together Maimonides' commitment to intellectual clarity and ethical autonomy with Dessler's emphasis on emotional intelligence, humility, and altruistic giving. As a multidimensional paradigm, this approach responds to the ethical and organizational complexities contemporary leaders routinely face (Hoch 2025; Miao & Nduneseokwu 2024). This integrative framework rests on three interrelated pillars:

Rational Clarity

Grounding ethical and strategic decision-making in rigorous intellectual inquiry and principled reasoning, as modeled by Maimonides.

Relational Ethics

Cultivating trust, compassion, and moral responsibility through sustained and intentional interpersonal relationships, in line with Dessler's vision.

Dynamic Balance

Maintaining ethical equilibrium between self-cultivation and social responsibility, navigating the inherent tensions between autonomy and interdependence.

Leadership as an Ethical Endeavor

Echoing the Socratic tradition, Harmonized Alignment conceives leadership as a continual ethical endeavor – rational, dialogical, and morally formative (Abenoza & Lozano 2024; Frank 1993; Hoch 2024). By integrating reason and empathy, this framework offers a principled yet flexible model for navigating pluralistic, value-laden environments, promoting both personal excellence and the common good.

V. Practical Implications for Contemporary Leadership

Bridging Rationality and Relational Depth

Harmonized Alignment offers a versatile ethical framework suited to the complexities of twenty-first-century leadership. By bridging rational analysis with relational depth, it empowers leaders to act with clarity, compassion, and moral responsibility in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments.

Practical Applications

- (1) *Balancing Rationality and Empathy* – Fostering decision-making that is both analytically rigorous and emotionally attuned (Ben Yair Ronel, & Enright 2024).
- (2) *Promoting Ethical Integrity* – Aligning internal moral convictions with external behaviors to build legitimacy and trust (Brown & Treviño, 2006).
- (3) *Fostering Inclusive Excellence* – Cultivating environments that encourage intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development across diverse communities (Colley & Spyridonidis 2022).
- (4) *Encouraging Transformative Relationships* – Developing trust-rich organizational cultures grounded in humility, generosity, and shared responsibility (Steffens et al. 2021).

Conclusion: Toward a Harmonized Leadership Paradigm

The synthesis of Maimonides' rationalist tradition with Dessler's relational ethics yields a comprehensive and forward-looking model of ethical leadership. **Harmonized Alignment** dissolves conventional binaries – reason and emotion, individual development and social responsibility – into a unified, philosophically grounded, and practically relevant framework. This paradigm equips leaders to act wisely, feel deeply, and lead ethically across organizational, cultural, and spiritual domains. By aligning intellectual clarity with ethical sensitivity, it supports principled, inclusive, and transformative leadership. Subsequent chapters will elaborate on both the philosophical foundations and applied dimensions of this model, demonstrating how classical Jewish wisdom can illuminate contemporary ethical leadership. In an era that demands both wisdom and empathy, **Harmonized Alignment** stands as a timely and actionable paradigm for cultivating leaders capable of advancing ethical progress.

VI. Leadership and Responsibility in the Thought of Maimonides and Rabbi Dessler

Comparative Foundations of Ethical Leadership

This section deepens the discussion of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's philosophy of selfless giving as a foundation for moral leadership by placing his insights in direct dialogue with Maimonides' rational and ethical leadership model. Within the Jewish intellectual tradition, leadership is not defined by authority or status but by an ethical obligation to harmonize personal development with the well-being of the community.

Maimonides: Intellectual Excellence and Dual Allegiance

Maimonides articulates a vision of leadership grounded in disciplined intellectual excellence and unwavering moral integrity. Drawing from classical philosophy and halakhic principles, he emphasizes the leader's dual responsibility: to pursue personal perfection while actively promoting justice within society. This dual obligation is encapsulated in his concept of **Dual Allegiance** as a continual balancing between individual cultivation and communal service (Kellner 2015).

Rabbi Dessler: Selfless Giving and Relational Ethics

By contrast, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler places giving at the heart of his leadership philosophy – not merely as an ethical value but as a spiritual imperative. His **Giving Paradigm**, elaborated in *Strive for Truth*, distinguishes between ego-driven action and selfless devotion. Dessler's model advocates for leadership shaped by humility, relational ethics, and personal transformation through acts of altruistic giving (Ben Yair Ronel, & Enright 2024).

Toward Harmonized Alignment

Through comparative analysis, this chapter explores points of both convergence and divergence between these two approaches. It ultimately builds toward a refined leadership framework – **Harmonized Alignment** – that integrates intellectual rigor, emotional sensitivity, and ethical responsibility. This model provides a comprehensive and actionable paradigm for addressing the complex moral demands confronting contemporary leaders.

VII. Leadership in Maimonides' Philosophy: The Intellectual and Ethical Ideal

Intellectual Mastery and Ethical Duty

Maimonides envisions leadership as fundamentally rooted in intellectual mastery and ethical duty. In *The Guide for the Perplexed* (III:27), he describes the ideal leader as a philosopher-king guided by divine wisdom – whose knowledge enables just governance infused with Torah ethics (Harvey 2024; Hoch 2025). This leader's intellectual perfection is not an abstract ideal but the practical foundation for moral agency. In *Mishneh Torah* (Repentance 5:1), Maimonides emphasizes free will as the essence of human dignity, empowering leaders to make reasoned ethical decisions that uphold justice (Rozenberg 2023).

Maimonides' Pragmatic Model and Civic Engagement

Maimonides' model is also pragmatic. In *Kings and Wars* (1:1-2), the leader is both a legislator and moral exemplar responsible for cultivating virtue in the community – embodying what this study terms **Harmonized Alignment**, where self-development and societal care reinforce one another (Kreisel 2005). His reliance on Aristotelian virtue ethics stresses that leadership's intellectual virtues extend beyond private contemplation into active civic engagement (Burger 2022). Unlike Aristotle's philosopher who might withdraw from society, Maimonides' leader radiates wisdom to inspire communal moral refinement. Critics warn that this intellectual ideal risks elitism, potentially excluding those without formal education or abstract reasoning skills (Aleksander 2020). This limitation underscores the need to complement Maimonides' model with relational and emotional dimensions of leadership.

Leadership as Intellectual Giving: Sacrifice and Ethical Obligation

Maimonides implicitly presents leadership as a form of intellectual giving. Though he does not explicitly label it as such, the leader's role demands sacrifice – offering wisdom, time, and moral clarity for the benefit of others (Burger 2022). This resonates with Rabbi Dessler's ethic of giving, though framed within a rational and ethical context. Rabbi Dessler explicitly grounds leadership in the ethic of **netina** (giving), arguing that true leadership is marked by selflessness and moral devotion. In *Michtav M'Eliyahu* [Strive for Truth], Dessler contrasts ego-driven motives with genuine giving, stating, "Man has been granted this sublime power of giving, enabling him too to be merciful, to bestow happiness, to give himself" (Vol. 1, 119). He further explains that human character is fundamentally divided between giving and taking, reflecting the ethical dialectic between *din* (justice) and *chesed* (kindness) embedded in the Jewish concept of **tikkun olam** – repairing the world through moral action.

Relational Ethics and Contemporary Leadership

Dessler's model aligns closely with contemporary leadership theories emphasizing empathy and ethical responsiveness, such as servant leadership and emotional intelligence frameworks (Brown & Treviño 2006). For him, giving is not charity but an ethical imperative mirroring divine benevolence, fostering communal unity and moral growth (Solomon 2018; Greenleaf, 1977; Abdillah et al. 2020; Hoch 2024). Moreover, Dessler recognizes leadership as a reciprocal relationship sustained by spiritual and communal support: "Even the greatest tsaddik needs and receives heavenly aid... given in the merit of the community which he serves" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 2, 159). Some caution that Dessler's focus on selflessness may limit assertiveness in crisis situations requiring tough decisions (Claussen 2019; König et al. 2020). Yet, his framework crucially expands

leadership discourse by centering moral vulnerability and relational care.

Toward Harmonized Alignment: Integrating Rational and Relational Leadership

Though originating from distinct dimensions of Jewish thought, Maimonides and Dessler offer complementary leadership paradigms. Maimonides champions rational discipline, intellectual integrity, and moral elevation; Dessler underscores empathy, self-giving, and relational accountability. Together, they form **Harmonized Alignment** – a leadership model integrating cognitive clarity with emotional sensitivity and ethical responsibility. This synthesis transcends the false dichotomy between reason and emotion, proposing leadership as a dynamic balance of wisdom, compassion, and duty. In an era that demands systemic justice alongside authentic human connection, their teachings offer enduring guidance for ethical leadership.

Conclusion: Harmonized Alignment as a Contemporary Leadership Model

Maimonides and Rabbi Dessler provide a unified vision that marries intellectual rigor with ethical selflessness. Their combined insights reveal leadership's transformative potential when grounded in humility, empathy, and moral integrity. **Harmonized Alignment** thus emerges as a holistic model enabling leaders to meet the multifaceted demands of modern governance, nurturing sustainable growth for individuals and communities alike.

VIII. Integrating Personal Ideals with Social Responsibility

Introduction

Maimonides' philosophical framework presents a compelling vision of leadership that harmonizes intellectual and ethical excellence with deep communal responsibility. His model challenges the common dichotomy between personal growth and social engagement, proposing instead a dynamic integration – what we term Harmonized Alignment – that blends rational thought, free will, and ethical action. Building on Maimonides' ethics, this chapter explores the intertwining of individual development and social accountability, enriched by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's moral insights, particularly his concept of *nekudat habechira* (the point of free will). Dessler's perspective emphasizes ethical sensitivity, moral struggle, and personal accountability, offering a vital complement to Maimonides' framework.

Central to Maimonides' thought is free will, understood as the individual's capacity to choose between moral paths. He writes: "Each person is fit to be righteous like Moses, our teacher, or wicked, like Jeroboam (...) There is no one who compels him (...) Rather, he, on his own initiative and decision, tends to the path he chooses" (Mishneh Torah, Repentance 5). This passage highlights moral autonomy as the foundation of ethical responsibility. Through reasoned deliberation, individuals transcend base impulses, orienting themselves toward higher moral ideals. This view resonates with contemporary theories of moral agency, which emphasize the harmonization of personal conviction with communal duties (Ekman 2022).

Although Maimonides shares affinities with Aristotelian and Islamic traditions, especially Al-Farabi's exaltation of reason, he distinguishes himself by embedding rationality within social responsibility. Unlike the somewhat aloof philosopher-king, Maimonides' ideal leader remains actively engaged with the community (Hoch 2025). Dessler complements Maimonides by emphasizing that moral choice arises precisely in moments of internal conflict, highlighting the deliberate effort required for ethical growth: "Free choice occurs only at the precise point where truth and falsehood collide (...) Many decisions are made automatically due to upbringing or habit (...) True bechira happens only when a person consciously faces a moral dilemma" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, Part 2, 53). By framing free will as an internal moral conflict, Dessler highlights the ethical challenges leaders face. His view complements Maimonides', showing that moral growth arises through deliberate choices amid tension and ambiguity, forming a foundation for Harmonized Alignment.

Leadership as Ethical Equilibrium: A Maimonidean Perspective

Maimonides' doctrine of the golden mean, described in Human Dispositions, is not passive moderation but an active, ongoing balance. Ethical virtue is achieved not by avoiding extremes but through continual recalibration of character traits in response to changing circumstances: "The straight path: This [involves discovering] the midpoint temperament of each and every trait (...) is equidistant from either of the extremes (...) Therefore (...) a man must evaluate his traits, calculate them, and direct them along the middle path" (Mishneh Torah, Human Dispositions 1:4).

This lifelong ethical refinement aligns with modern leadership theories that stress adaptability, self-awareness, and social responsibility (Ayoko 2022). Leaders must embody intellectual rigor and moral sensitivity while responding effectively to organizational and societal demands. Maimonides' model transcends personal betterment – it insists that individual excellence serves communal well-being. Ethical leadership is a continuous negotiation between internal virtues and external duties, a core element of Harmonized Alignment.

The Ethical Trajectory: From Self-Development to Social Leadership

While Aristotle's golden mean focuses mainly on individual character, Maimonides expands it to include social responsibility. Virtue supports not only self-perfection but also the cultivation of a just society. Dessler's *nekudat habechira* underscores that free will matures through repeated moral effort: "When the level [of bechira] is changed by one's own choices, he is liable for the new situation that has developed" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, Part 2, 57).

This principle highlights that ethical leadership demands intentional moral growth. By navigating internal conflicts, leaders enhance their capacity to act with integrity and accountability. Both thinkers emphasize ongoing moral refinement **aimed at promoting** communal flourishing.

Personal Excellence as a Means of Societal Upliftment

Maimonides affirms that intellectual and moral advancement must ultimately serve society. In The Guide for the Perplexed he states: "It aims first at the establishment of good mutual relations (...) it seeks to train us in faith, and to impart correct and true opinions when the intellect is sufficiently developed" (Part III, Chap. 27). This twofold process – social order followed by intellectual enlightenment – **reflects** Maimonides' conviction that wisdom must be applied for the public good.

Ethical leadership is thus a communal contribution, not a private achievement. Dessler echoes this dual responsibility: "From the individualistic viewpoint, the human being lives for himself (...) From the communal point of view, he feels responsibility toward the wider public (...) If only one of these tendencies were present, that person would hardly be human" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, Part 2, 147). Together, these insights shape the Harmonized Alignment ideal – leadership that is principled, contextually aware, and socially engaged.

Extending Ethical Leadership: Environmental Dimensions in Jewish Thought

Maimonides **extends** ethical responsibility beyond interpersonal relations to humanity's stewardship of the environment. He warns against needless destruction in even seemingly minor acts: "This prohibition does not apply to trees alone (...) Anyone who breaks utensils, tears garments, destroys buildings, stops up a spring, or ruins food with a destructive intent transgresses the command 'Do not destroy'" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars 6:10). This broad interpretation of *bal tashchit* reflects a holistic ethical vision. Leaders, therefore, bear a moral duty to consider long-term environmental impacts, a concern increasingly recognized in contemporary sustainable leadership

theories (Miao & Nduneseokwu 2024).

Conclusion: Synthesizing Intellectual and Ethical Leadership

The integration of Maimonides' rational ethics with Dessler's relational insights yields a robust leadership framework rooted in Harmonized Alignment. This model goes beyond personal growth to embed intellectual integrity and ethical responsibility within a wider social and ecological context. Maimonides' call for wisdom-based leadership, enriched by Dessler's nuanced understanding of moral struggle, equips leaders to meet complex challenges with clarity, humility, and purpose.

As leadership demands grow more multifaceted, the need for a paradigm balancing excellence with engagement becomes paramount. Harmonized Alignment reminds us that ethical leadership is a dynamic, ongoing interplay between self-refinement and social contribution. Embracing this model, leaders become exemplars of virtue and catalysts for a more just, thoughtful, and sustainable world.

IX. Harmonized Alignment and Leadership: Insights from Maimonides and Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler

Personal Ideals and Social Responsibility in Leadership

Maimonides offers a profound philosophical framework for navigating the dual commitments of human existence: the pursuit of intellectual and moral perfection alongside responsibility toward societal welfare. Rather than treating these aims as conflicting, he proposes a harmonized model of flourishing – Harmonized Alignment – in which personal and communal aspirations dynamically integrate through rationality, ethical engagement, and the exercise of free will. This section builds upon Maimonides' synthesis by examining how his ethical framework mediates the relationship between individual development and social responsibility. Incorporating Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's concept of *nekudat habechira* (the point of free choice), it highlights how inner ethical struggles shape leadership and moral clarity in personal and collective realms.

Rationality and Free Will: Foundations of Ethical Selfhood

At the core of Maimonides' ethics is the principle of free will: the conviction that each person can determine their moral path. He states: "Each person is fit to be righteous like Moses, our teacher, or wicked, like Jeroboam (...) There is no one who compels him (...) Rather, he, on his own initiative and decision, tends to the path he chooses" (Mishneh Torah, Repentance 5:2). This affirmation of moral autonomy situates the individual as central to ethical transformation. Rationality distinguishes humans, enabling them to

transcend instinct and align actions with truth and virtue – echoing contemporary moral agency theories that balance personal conviction and societal expectation (Ekman 2022). While influenced by Aristotelian and Islamic traditions, especially Al-Farabi's emphasis on reason, Maimonides diverges by embedding individual enlightenment within a communal ethic, rejecting the notion of a detached philosopher-ruler. Dessler deepens this view by focusing on the psychological dynamics of moral struggle. He defines *nekudat habechira* as the precise moment of moral choice: "Free will is exercised and a valid bechira made only on the borderline between the forces of good and the forces of evil within that person" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, Part 2, 53). This insight – that ethical growth occurs amid internal tension – complements Maimonides' focus on reason and moral clarity as transformative forces.

Ethical Balance Through Harmonized Alignment

Maimonides' ethical ideal requires not static equilibrium but ongoing recalibration. He writes: "A person who has true knowledge of the whole Law is called wise in a double sense; he is wise because the Law instructs him in the highest truths, and secondly, because it teaches him good morals" (Guide for the Perplexed III, 54). Wisdom here is the synthesis of metaphysical understanding and ethical conduct. The virtuous life involves continuous negotiation between inner perfection and outward responsibility, paralleling modern ethical leadership models that balance personal development with organizational commitment (Brown & Treviño 2006). Unlike Aristotle's golden mean, centered on individual moderation, Maimonides situates ethical balance within a broader social context. Dessler similarly emphasizes that moral refinement emerges through confronting internal dilemmas: "When the level is changed by the person's own choices, he is liable for the new situation that has developed" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, Part 2, 57). For both, ethical development is an ongoing pursuit of moral clarity forged by struggle and choice.

Personal Excellence in Service to Society

While Maimonides values soul perfection, he insists it ultimately serves the common good: "The well-being of the body is established by a proper management of the relations in which we live one to another (...) everyone does that which contributes toward the common welfare" (Guide for the Perplexed III, 27). This holistic view places personal excellence within a framework of societal harmony. Intellectual and moral refinement achieve full realization only when directed outward – to improving human relations and public life. Modern leadership theories similarly prioritize moral influence and collective flourishing over self-aggrandizement (Brown & Treviño 2006). Dessler reinforces this by showing how consistent, value-driven choices in moments of ethical tension shape

leaders as agents of trust and guidance.

Ethical Implications for Environmental Responsibility

Maimonides extends ethics to humanity's relationship with nature: "We should not cut down fruit trees (...) as Deuteronomy 20:19 states: 'Do not destroy its trees'. Anyone who cuts down such a tree should be lashed" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 6:8). This injunction reflects a theological anthropology viewing creation as a divinely governed moral ecosystem. Humanity's role is stewardship rather than domination. Contemporary perspectives, such as Haring's (Haring 2024) concept of eco-immanence and divine transcendence, affirm sustainability as a sacred ethical imperative. Dessler's *nekudat habechira* remains relevant: leaders must navigate complex decisions balancing ecological ethics and economic pressures with clarity, responsibility, and foresight.

Visionary Leadership in Maimonides and Dessler

For Maimonides, ideal leadership combines intellectual depth and moral commitment, likened to the biblical shepherd: "The prophets have described the behavior of a shepherd (...) 'He shall pasture His flock like a shepherd, He shall gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom'" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 2:6). This compassionate ideal anticipates servant and transformational leadership theories that emphasize follower dignity and growth (Ekman 2022; Rahal & Farmanesh 2022). Leadership is an ongoing Harmonized Alignment – balancing personal virtue with collective needs. Dessler adds a psychological dimension, highlighting that leadership is forged by sustained inner work and repeated integrity in difficult moments, inspiring others by example.

Conclusion: Toward a Unified Model of Ethical Leadership

Maimonides' Harmonized Alignment offers a timeless framework integrating intellectual aspiration with social responsibility. Rooted in rationality, moderation, and moral autonomy, it continues to guide contemporary governance, education, environmental ethics, and leadership. Complementing this, Dessler's *nekudat habechira* adds psychological depth, illuminating the internal dynamics of ethical growth and choice. Together, they provide a unified vision where human flourishing arises from the synthesis of individual excellence and communal obligation. Such a philosophical foundation paves the way for further exploration of Maimonides' contributions in subsequent chapters.

X. Practical Applications of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's Philosophy in Contemporary Leadership

Introduction

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's *Strive for Truth* offers profound ethical and philosophical insights that address many challenges faced by modern leadership. His teachings on free will, moral clarity, and the dynamics of giving and taking provide a robust framework for fostering ethical, visionary, and compassionate leadership. This chapter explores how Dessler's ideas inspire transformative leadership today, serving as a practical extension of Maimonides' concept of Harmonized Alignment – the dynamic balance between personal growth and collective responsibility. By integrating Dessler's principles with Maimonides' philosophical framework, this chapter demonstrates how leaders can balance individual excellence with societal well-being, ensuring that their influence fosters both ethical integrity and sustainable progress.

The Giving Paradigm in Leadership Practice

Maimonides emphasizes that authentic ethical development requires active societal engagement rather than isolation. Rabbi Dessler expands on this by distinguishing between "givers" and "takers." In his framework, a "giver" prioritizes others' welfare, cultivating trust, collaboration, and collective advancement. Conversely, a "taker" focuses on self-interest, potentially undermining organizational harmony. This distinction aligns closely with Maimonides' vision of the ideal leader – one who actively shapes a virtuous society through ethical engagement.

Dessler captures the transformative power of giving: "Giving may bring about love for the same reason that a person loves what he has created or nurtured; he recognizes in it part of himself" (*Strive for Truth*, Vol. 1, 127). This resonates with Maimonides' belief that moral excellence and intellectual refinement serve not only the individual but also the broader community. Leaders adopting a giving mindset foster mentorship, empathy, and shared purpose – key elements for cultivating collaborative cultures and sustained progress.

Practical Implications

Leadership grounded in the giving paradigm nurtures trust, loyalty, and long-term success. Satya Nadella's tenure at Microsoft exemplifies this approach (Mashrabjonovich 2024). By prioritizing empathy, collaboration, and empowerment, Nadella transformed the company's culture into one marked by mutual respect and innovation (Mashrabjonovich 2024). Similarly, organizations embracing Dessler's concept cultivate environments

valuing personal contributions to collective success, strengthening relationships and sustaining growth (Abdillah et al. 2020). The contrast between “givers” and “takers” underscores Maimonides’ ethical emphasis on communal well-being and moral excellence.

Moral Clarity and Ethical Decision-Making

At the core of both Maimonides’ and Dessler’s thought lies the conviction that true freedom is moral autonomy. Dessler’s concept of *bechirah* (free will) stresses the capacity to choose ethical actions aligned with enduring truths rather than transient personal gain: “Free will comes into play at the point where the forces of truth and falsehood are equally balanced in the mind” (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, 60). This echoes Maimonides’ view that self-examination and alignment with intellectual and ethical values are essential for moral clarity. Modern leaders can cultivate such clarity by fostering organizational cultures rooted in transparency, accountability, and ethical dialogue (Hoch 2024; Shiundu 2024). Decision-making frameworks prioritizing long-term ethical values over short-term profits exemplify Dessler’s ideals.

Maimonides similarly emphasizes individual autonomy in choosing righteousness over wickedness: “Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his” (Mishneh Torah, Repentance 5:1). This alignment between personal freedom and moral responsibility highlights ethical clarity’s importance for leaders.

Balancing Justice and Mercy in Leadership

Maimonides’ ideal leader balances intellect with moral virtue, navigating the interplay between individual judgment and societal responsibility. Rabbi Dessler, discussing *din* (justice) and *chesed* (mercy), explains that divine governance operates between these principles: justice guarantees fairness and accountability, while mercy allows for growth and redemption. Dessler cautions against overreliance on mercy: “If we were to take this to its logical conclusion, it would mean that we could do whatever we liked (...) and rely on God not to punish us” (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, 48). While discussing divine judgment, his insights apply directly to leadership. Effective leadership requires balancing justice and mercy to foster both accountability and growth.

Conflict Resolution

Leaders can employ restorative justice approaches in workplace disputes to facilitate reflection, growth, and trust-building while maintaining standards (Dartey-Baah, Quartey, & Wilberforce 2024). This balance reflects both Dessler’s vision and

Maimonides' assertion that just leaders must exercise wisdom and compassion. Leaders like Nelson Mandela exemplify this balance. During South Africa's democratic transition, Mandela prioritized reconciliation over retribution, embodying how justice and mercy integration can heal divided societies.

Conclusion

This section demonstrates how Rabbi Dessler's practical ethical framework complements Maimonides' concept of Harmonized Alignment. By embracing the giving paradigm, moral clarity, and a balanced approach to justice and mercy, leaders can cultivate ethical organizations that sustain individual excellence alongside communal prosperity. Through this synthesis of medieval wisdom and contemporary leadership principles, valuable insights emerge for navigating today's ethical challenges with integrity and vision.

XI. Cultivating Relationships Through Giving: Leadership Insights from Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler and Maimonides

Introduction

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler emphasizes that giving is foundational to meaningful relationships, extending far beyond material generosity to foster mutual enrichment and trust. He asserts: "The basis of the love of God is nothing but the quality of giving" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, Part 1, 155). True love – whether directed toward God or others – is nurtured through selfless acts that build deep and enduring bonds.

Team Building Through Giving

In leadership contexts, this principle translates into cultivating strong team dynamics by recognizing and investing in individual contributions. Leaders who prioritize employee well-being and professional growth inspire loyalty and commitment (Miao & Nduneseokwu 2024; Steffens et al. 2021). Dessler's perspective affirms that giving transforms relationships, establishing trust and cooperation critical for effective teamwork.

Vision and Long-Term Ethical Thinking

Dessler's concept of *hashkafah* (vision) underscores the importance of aligning daily decisions with enduring values, promoting long-term thinking over short-term gratification. He explains: "A person's level of bechirah [free will] can be changed by

outside factors and by the person's previous choices (...) When the level is changed by the person's own choices, he is liable for the new situation that has developed" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, Part 2, 57). This highlights a leader's ethical responsibility to intentionally shape their moral trajectory through conscious decision-making.

Strategic Leadership and Sustainability

Paul Polman's leadership at Unilever exemplifies Dessler's principles by integrating sustainability into core corporate strategy while balancing immediate business demands with long-term societal well-being (Ullah 2022; Williams 2020; Mashrabjonovich 2024). Similarly, Maimonides emphasizes visionary leadership: "The general object of the Law is twofold: the well-being of the soul, and the well-being of the body. The well-being of the body is established by a proper management of the relations in which we live one to another" (The Guide for the Perplexed, III:27). Both frameworks highlight leadership rooted in overarching ethical values, offering a model for principled and sustainable decision-making (Aleksander 2020; Colley & Spyridonidis 2022).

Leadership as Role Modeling

Rabbi Dessler underscores that authentic leadership transcends formal authority, focusing on embodying values that inspire others. He writes: "The human being was created not only to fulfill himself but also to influence others. This is one of the senses in which we can understand what is meant by man being created in the image of God. Those good middot [virtues], which were created in man in potential, resemble the Divine middot through which God reveals Himself to His creatures" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 1, Part 2, 148). This suggests that leadership fundamentally involves shaping others through moral character and example.

Practical Implications

Leaders such as Jacinda Ardern, who emphasize authenticity and empathy, illustrate how role modeling fosters trust and organizational alignment. By leading through example, they reinforce organizational values and cultivate cultures of integrity, motivating teams to emulate ethical behavior (Khorana 2022). Thus, role modeling is a cornerstone for inspiring teams and maintaining ethical consistency.

Conclusion: Integrating Dessler's and Maimonides' Leadership Visions

Rabbi Dessler's ethical philosophy complements Maimonides' concept of Harmonized Alignment, both emphasizing the balance between personal moral growth

and societal responsibility. Dessler's insights on giving, moral clarity, and vision align with Maimonides' call for ethical leadership, offering practical guidance for navigating contemporary challenges. By integrating these principles, leaders can foster cultures of generosity, accountability, and sustainability. Together, Dessler and Maimonides provide a unified framework for leadership – promoting both individual excellence and collective well-being and serving as an enduring model for ethical and visionary decision-making (Steffens et al. 2021).

XII. Rational and Relational Ethics in Leadership: Maimonides and Dessler in Philosophical Perspective

Maimonides' Perspective on Justice in Leadership

Building upon prior discussions that highlighted Maimonides' nuanced equilibrium between individual intellectual excellence and communal responsibility, this chapter explores a central dialectic in ethical governance: the interplay and tension between justice and mercy. Both Maimonides and Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler offer distinct yet complementary conceptions of how justice and mercy ought to inform the exercise of authority. Maimonides underscores justice as the fundamental pillar of societal order and moral governance, emphasizing its role in maintaining communal stability.

Justice as the Cornerstone of Governance

For Maimonides, justice constitutes the essential foundation of effective governance – a principle that preserves social order and nurtures the ethical fabric of the community. A leader must embody fairness, integrity, and impartiality in all public duties. As he asserts in *Mishneh Torah* (*Sanhedrin* 21:1): “It is a positive commandment for a judge to adjudicate righteously, as *Leviticus* 19:15 states: ‘Judge your colleagues with righteousness’. What is meant by righteous judgment? Equating the litigants with regard to all matters” (*Mishneh Torah*, *Sanhedrin* 21:1).

Intellectual Foundations of Justice

Maimonides grounds justice in rigorous intellectual and philosophical reasoning. In *The Guide for the Perplexed* (III:53), he writes: “We have thus shown that *hesed* denotes pure charity; *zedakah* kindness (...) whilst *mishpat* may in some cases find expression in revenge, in other cases in mercy.” This perspective insists that justice must be applied judiciously, guided by rational deliberation rather than emotional impulse.

Integrating Mercy Within Justice

Although Maimonides prioritizes justice, he acknowledges mercy's essential role when exercised rationally. Mishneh Torah advises judges to: "consider the individual's capacity for change," thus promoting a restorative justice that tempers strictness with ethical sensitivity.

Dessler's Perspective on Mercy in Leadership

Contrasting with Maimonides' rationalist orientation, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler positions mercy (*rachamim*) as the foundational principle of ethical and spiritual leadership. He draws on the episode of the Golden Calf to illustrate mercy's transformative power: "Moses elevated himself to the supreme level where he completely identified with the people of Israel. He chose to be with them in oblivion rather than to exist without them" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 2, 153). Mercy emerges as a philosophical and theological orientation attentive to human potential and future repentance: "Mercy means that future prospects are taken into account when dealing with the present" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 2, 153–154).

Relational Leadership Through Mercy

Dessler elaborates how a *tsaddik* can redeem a community through mercy (Strive for Truth, Vol. 2, 154–155):

- (1) Self-Sacrificial Love: The *tsaddik* loves the community with selfless devotion, intertwining his survival with theirs.
- (2) Divine Revelation via Love and Mercy: This love, in tandem with divine mercy, reveals God's goodness and validates the community's existence.
- (3) Transformation through Moral Bond: The community experiences moral awakening, inspired to follow the *tsaddik* through a close, non-coercive relationship that fosters *teshuva* (repentance).

Balancing Justice and Mercy

Dessler does not negate justice but regards it as a necessary framework moderated by compassion: "Since there are reasonable prospects that they will repent, it is now possible for Hashem to show them mercy. The attribute of mercy always takes account of future prospects in judging the present situation" (Strive for Truth, Vol. 2, 155).

Comparative Analysis

Both thinkers conceive ethical leadership as a vocation committed to fostering moral development in others while exemplifying personal integrity. Maimonides represents the rationalist tradition, valuing reason, moderation, and intellectual clarity, while Dessler embodies a spiritualist approach, emphasizing emotional depth, empathy, and *chesed*. Despite differences, their perspectives complement one another, offering a multifaceted model of ethical leadership.

Conclusion

The juxtaposition of Maimonides and Dessler reveals a sophisticated framework for ethical leadership. Maimonides foregrounds justice for societal stability, while Dessler highlights mercy to nurture human potential. Synthesizing these perspectives encourages a balance of intellectual rigor and emotional sensitivity, aligning fairness with empathy.

XIII. Final Reflection. Justice, Mercy, and Harmonized Alignment in Leadership

This section proposes a dialogical synthesis between Maimonides' rational conception of justice and Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's relational vision of mercy, integrated within the model of Harmonized Alignment. Maimonides situates ethical leadership in reason, moral clarity, and legal responsibility, whereas Dessler stresses emotional depth, interpersonal commitment, and ethical transformation through compassion.

Harmonized Alignment understands justice and mercy as interdependent dimensions critical to effective leadership. Justice secures structural integrity, accountability, and social order; mercy ensures responsiveness to human complexity and promotes moral growth. Together, they offer a comprehensive ethical framework adept at navigating the nuanced tensions present in modern leadership. This integrative perspective enriches ongoing discourse in moral philosophy and leadership studies by reframing leadership as a dynamic interplay between intellectual rigor and emotional intelligence.

Future research may explore practical applications of this model across fields such as education, public administration, healthcare, and organizational leadership. Empirical studies examining its impact on ethical climates, resilience, and relational accountability would further validate its relevance. Harmonized Alignment presents a normatively robust yet flexible vision of leadership – advancing human dignity, institutional justice, and moral responsibility amidst modern complexities.

XIV. Conclusions. Harmonized Alignment in Leadership – An Integrative Ethical Framework

The convergence of Maimonides' intellectual rigor and Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's relational ethics within Harmonized Alignment offers a comprehensive model for ethical leadership. Maimonides emphasizes rational clarity, justice, and disciplined self-mastery, while Dessler highlights compassion, humility, and profound interpersonal bonds. Effective leadership emerges not from intellect or empathy alone, but from their dynamic synthesis. Leaders who embody Harmonized Alignment navigate tensions between individual development and communal responsibility, fostering environments where both individuals and communities flourish.

This framework bridges philosophical reflection and practical application, rendering it highly pertinent to contemporary challenges across diverse fields. It positions leadership as a dynamic, ongoing ethical practice requiring both intellectual rigor and emotional intelligence – rooted in classical wisdom yet responsive to modern complexities. The model invites interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue, opening avenues for comparative analysis with other religious and philosophical traditions.

Future research may examine the empirical application of Harmonized Alignment across organizational contexts, assessing its impact on ethical decision-making, trust-building, and moral climate. Leadership development programs can integrate this framework to cultivate holistic growth, harmonizing cognitive rigor with emotional awareness. Embracing Harmonized Alignment offers leaders a principled, compassionate, and sustainable approach to ethical leadership – anchored in enduring ethical traditions and attuned to the evolving moral demands of a globalized world.

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