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Table of Contents

English Section

Foreward		5
Geoffrey Herman	“A Great Man Is Coming from the West”: Aspirations of Power by the Rivers of Babylon	7
Howard Kreisel	“All Israel has a Portion in the World to Come”: Attempts to Create a Coherent Narrative of Reward and Punishment in Medieval Jewish Philosophy	23
Alex Green	Trust, Hope, and Fortitude as Theological Virtues in Joseph Albo’s <i>Sefer ha-Ikkarim</i>	55
Tamás Visi	False Dreams in the Thought of Menahem Shalem	75
Contributors		93

Hebrew Section

Foreword		5
Vered Raziel Kretzmer	Our Father Abraham’s Share: Concluding Liturgies in the Palestinian Prayer Books from the Cairo Genizah	6
Arie Copperman	The Evolution of Nahmanides’ Messianic Perception	22
Shalom Sadik	Descriptions of the Messianic Era in Jewish Averroist Thought: Between Anti-Zionism, Political Zionism and Practical Zionism	52

Dov Schwartz	A Few Comments on Dreams in Late Medieval Jewish Byzantine Thought	74
Michal Aziza Ohana	“To Do the Will of His Creator, for Thereby Happiness Shall Be Attained”: Halakhic Religiosity of Obedience and Servitude in Early Modern North African Jewish Communities	96
Noam Lefler	Abraham Yakhini’s <i>Dreams</i> – Annotated Edition	114
Nicham Ross	The Mechanism of Innovation and Integration in the Chain of Tradition: Ahad Ha’Am, Berdichevsky, Bialik, and Golomb	134
Dan Tor	“My Messiah Is Not the Messiah for Whom the Revisionists Are Waiting”: Between Love and Rebuke, Hillel Zeitlin on Uri Tzvi Greenberg (1929–1936)	153
Isaac Slater	Aharon Shmuel Tamares and the Dark Side of Religious Humanism	177
Sarit Schussheim	The Authentic Person: The Core of the Philosophical Teachings of Josef Schächter	208
Uziel Fuchs	“Torat Eretz Yisrael”: The Revival of a Rabbinic Expression and Some of its Contemporary Trends	230
Contributors		245

Foreword

It is with great pride that we present the fifth issue of the annual journal, *Jewish Thought*, sponsored by the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. This issue is devoted to the topic of hopes, dreams and aspirations in Jewish thought. It consists of 15 articles – 11 in Hebrew and 4 in English. Many of the contributions are based on lectures on this topic delivered at the international conference in Jewish thought sponsored by the center in May 2022. The head of the organizing committee was Prof. Adiel Kadari, who was invited to be a guest editor of this issue.

As in the case of the journal's four previous issues, most of the articles in this issue were written by established scholars, while some were written by young scholars who are at the beginning of their scholarly career. All submitted articles underwent a rigorous selection process involving at least two reviewers. The five issues of the journal, as well as the other electronic resources of the center, can be accessed at the following link:

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The editors

“A Great Man Is Coming from the West”: Aspirations of Power by the Rivers of Babylon¹

Geoffrey Herman

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Abstract

The Talmudic account of the arrival and reception of Rav in Babylonia is considered alongside a contemporary Manichaean account of Mani's visit to the royal Sasanian palace, found in the Kephalaia. In both, it is proposed, the new leader is portrayed as posing a threat to the existing power establishment. In both accounts, furthermore, the elevation of the river, and cosmological notions which, it is suggested, are indigenous to Babylonia, play a key role. Indeed, it is through the shared experience and symbolism of the rivers of Babylonia and their interpretation that the inhabitants of the region, both Jewish and Manichaean, convey their fears and hopes, their new tidings and their aspirations.

It is often the case that major historical change, which is invariably the result of a multiplicity of factors stretching over a period of time² and affected by many agents, is perceived, typically from a distance, as having been brought about by a single individual or as being linked

¹ I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Neri Y. Ariel for reading this paper and offering helpful comments and suggestions.

² See, for instance, on the issues surrounding this early period in history and in modern scholarship, Moshe David Herr, “A Zoroastrian-Sasanian and a Babylonian Talmudic ‘Renaissance’ at the Beginning of the Third Century: Could This Be a Mere Coincidence?” [Hebrew], in *Between Babylonia and the Land of Israel: Studies in Honor of Isaiah M. Gafni*, ed. Geoffrey Herman, Meir Ben Shazar, and Aharon Oppenheimer (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2016), 51–78; broadly on the history and historiography in the formative years of the rabbis in Babylonia, see Isaiah Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era: A Social and Cultural History* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1990), 68–91. See also Moshe Beer, “The Political Background of Rav's Activities in Babylonia” [Hebrew], *Zion* 50 (1985): 155–72 (repr. in Beer, *The Sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud: Teachings, Activities and Leadership*, ed. Emmanuel Friedheim, Daniel Sperber, and Refael Yankelevitch [Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2011], 10–26).

to a single event. The emergence of Babylonia as a major rabbinic center is traditionally dated to one sage, Rav, arriving there in the early third century CE.³ Later sources would mark this as a pivotal moment when Babylonia achieved its independence from Palestinian hegemony in certain matters of rabbinic law.⁴ While the arrival of an important sage, bearing in his person the authority and teaching of Palestine and its Patriarch,⁵ was perceived as a moment of enormous promise for Babylonia, Rav was not a pioneer charting unknown territory. Indeed, there were already senior scholars there to receive him. A story appearing in *BT Shabbat* 108a, which is full of symbolism, portrays his arrival as challenging the existing rabbinic leadership and highlights determined local resistance to the new sage. The aim of this intervention is to show that behind this description, there are striking allusions to contemporary Babylonian cosmology, which can be better appreciated through a comparison with an evocative contemporary Manichean parallel.⁶

Rav Comes to Babylonia

The talmudic source, cited in *BT Shabbat* 108a, is as follows.⁷

א. שמואל וקרנא הוו יתבי אגודא דנהר מלכא.
חזוניהו למיא דקא דאלו ועכירי.

³ The traditional date of Rav's arrival in Babylonia is the year 530 of the Seleucid era, as given in the Epistle of Rav Sherira Gaon. For discussion and references, see Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia, Volume 2: The Early Sasanian Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 126–28; Isaiah Gafni, "On the Talmudic Chronology in *Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon*," in Gafni, *Jews and Judaism in the Rabbinic Era: Image and Reality - History and Historiography* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 123–24.

⁴ *BT Eruvin* 28a; *BT Bava Qamma* 80a; *BT Gittin*. 6a. See H. Norman Strickman, "A Note on the Text of Babylonian Talmud *Git. 6a*," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s., 66 (1976): 173–75, who demonstrates how a less assertive tradition is later developed to establish Rav's arrival in Babylonia as a determining factor for a legal ruling.

⁵ *BT Berakhot* 43a; *BT Bezaḥ* 22b; *BT Sanhedrin* 5a; *BT Hullin* 54a; 137b.

⁶ The halakhic questions that feature in this narrative, notwithstanding their interest, are not critical for *this* study, and so will not be closely examined. For an in-depth discussion on this topic, see Yuval Fraenkel, "Sniffing the Jar: Metaphor and Body in the Story of the Encounter between Shmuel and Rav," *Prooftexts* 40 (2023): 1–37. I am very thankful to him for providing me with his study ahead of publication and for discussing this narrative with me.

⁷ According to MS Oxford 366, which is the manuscript chosen by Ma'agarim: The Historical Dictionary of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. Punctuation has been added.

Aspirations of Power by the Rivers of Babylon

אמר ליה שמואל לקרנא : גברא רבה קא אתי⁸ וחייש במיעיה, וקא דאלו מיא לאקבולי אפיה. זיל תהא ליה בקנקניה.
אזל ונפק לאפיה ואשכחיה לרב.

ב. אמ' ליה מנין שאין כותבין תפלין אלא על גבי עור בהמה טהורה בלבד.
אמ' ליה דכתי' למען תהיה תורת יי' בפין מן המותר בפין
מנין לדם שהוא אדום שנא' ויראו מואב מנגד את המים אדומים כדם
ומנין למילה שהיא באותו מקום נאמ' כאן ערלתו ונאמ' להלן ע(ר)לתו מה להלן דבר
שעושה פרי אף כאן דבר שעושה פרי ואימ' לבו דהא כתי' ונמלתם את ערל' לבבכם ואימ'
אזנו כדכתי' ערלה אזנם דנין ערלתו תמה מערלתו תמה ואין [דנין] מערלתו שאינה תמה
ערלתו תמה

ג. אמר ליה : מה שמך ? קרנא. אמר : יהא רעוא דתיפוק קרנא בעינך. נפק ליה קרנא בעיניה.⁹
לסוף עייליה שמואל לבנייתיה¹⁰ ואוכליה נהמה דשערי [בהרסנא] ואשקיה שיכרא ולא אחוי
ליה בית הכסא. סבר כי היכי דלישתלשל. לייט רב על דצערין : לא ליקיימו ליה בני, וכן הות.

1. Samuel and Qarna were sitting on the bank of the Royal Canal.
They observed that the water was rising and was turbid.
Samuel said to Qarna: A great man is coming [from the West¹¹] and he
has stomach trouble, and the water is rising to receive him. Go, sniff
his jar! He went out to him and encountered Rav.

2. He asked him: Whence is it derived that one may write phylacteries
only on the hide of a clean animal?
He answered: As it is written, “So that God’s Torah will be in your
mouth” (Exod 13:9) – from what is permitted in your mouth.

Whence do we learn that blood is red?

As it is said: “And the Moabites saw the water from afar, red like
blood” (2 Kings 3:22).

Whence is it derived that circumcision is in that [particular] place?

It is said here “[and the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of] his
foreskin [is not circumcised]” (Gen 17:14), and it is stated elsewhere,
“[you shall count the fruit thereof as] uncircumcised” (Lev 19:23). Just
as there, [it refers to] something that bears fruit, here, too, [the
reference is to] something that bears fruit.

⁸ Here, the Vilna edition, the manuscript testimony from JTS Rab. 501/1-6, Wien N: Heb 184, and Oxford Heb. C. 27/10-15 (gloss), and the geonic responsum of Rav Hayy Gaon add the word ממערבא. MS St. Peterburg, Yevr III B 942 adds מנהרדעא.

⁹ Besides this manuscript, this phrase is also attested in Oxford Heb. C. 27/10-15 (as a gloss) and in MS Vatican 108, but it is absent from the other main textual witnesses.

¹⁰ All other textual witnesses have לבייתה here.

¹¹ See above, n. 8.

[He rebutted:] Say [that circumcision were performed on] the heart, as it is written: “And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart” (Deut 10:16)? Or, perhaps, the ear, as it is written: “their ears are uncircumcised” (Jer 6:10)?

[Rav responded:] One draws a comparison between the unmodified word “foreskin” from [another case of] the unmodified use of “foreskin”; but one does not draw a comparison between the modified use of the word “foreskin” and the unmodified term “foreskin.”

3. He asked him: What is your name? [He answered:] Qarna.

He said: May it be that a horn emerges in your eye. [And] a horn emerged in his eye.

Eventually, Samuel brought Rav into his home and fed him with barley bread [in (a cup¹² of) small fish] and gave him beer to drink, but did not show him the lavatory, intending for him to have a loose bowel. Rav cursed whoever made him suffer that he should have no sons. And so it was.

Samuel and his subordinate, Qarna,¹³ sit on the bank of the Royal Canal, the major artery that carries water, and indeed traffic, from the Euphrates across Mesopotamia to the metropolis of Ctesiphon, where it meets the Tigris.¹⁴ Two exceptional signs are manifest to the sages: the rising water and the fact that it is turbid or murky. Samuel interprets these signs as the river honoring a great man suffering

¹² The textual witnesses vary in their description of the cup of small fish. At any rate, two of the three elements here, the fish and the beer, are described in *BT Bava Batra* 91b as food products that decline in quality with age.

¹³ Qarna features only a few times in the two Talmuds and the way he is portrayed in both, but particularly in the Bavli, is atypical for *amoraim*. In *JT Bava Batra* 5:5 (15a-b), he appears as a subordinate to Rav in an unclear source where (there with the title “Rav,” and in MS Escorial as קרני) he seems not to follow Rav’s instructions. In the parallel to this same source in *BT Bava Batra* 89a, Qarna is subordinate to Samuel rather than Rav. On these two sources, see Geoffrey Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom: The Exilarch in the Sasanian Era* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 162–66. He appears elsewhere in the Yerushalmi as a transmitter of *baraitot*, and in *BT Sanhedrin*, 30b there is a vague reference to נויקין דבי קרנא. In a halakhic disputation in *BT Qiddushin* 44b, he appears as an equal alongside other first-generation sages, Samuel, Rav, and Mar ‘Uqba, but his opinion is forcefully rejected by his peers Samuel and Rav. He is described as a judge in *BT Ketubbot* 105a, and in *BT Sanhedrin* 17b he is declared to be the subject of the statement “the judges of the Exile” (רייני גולה קרנא).

¹⁴ Jacob Obermeyer, *Die Landschaft Babylonien im Zeitalter des Talmuds und des Gaonats* (Frankfurt: Kauffmann, 1929), 246.

from stomach trouble and sends Qarna to “sniff his jar”¹⁵ in order to clarify the identity and worthiness of this exceptional traveler. The newcomer happens to be Rav. Rav is now asked three halakhic questions, to which he responds well. His response to the third question is further challenged, but he also provides an answer to this challenge. The latter, upon grasping that he has unwittingly been tested, presumably feels insulted or frustrated, and, at any rate, curses Qarna. Samuel now steps in and hosts Rav in his home, but feeds him food that gives him loose stools while denying him access to the privy. He, too, receives a curse. Thus, both Samuel and Qarna intend to harm Rav, and both ultimately emerge injured themselves.¹⁶

This narrative, in the course of its three sections, can be understood as seeking to establish the superiority of Rav over Samuel in Babylonia, and indeed as relating the unique miraculous circumstances of his arrival, when nature participated in his reception.¹⁷ It also provides an etiological explanation for Samuel’s lack of sons, a fact that features elsewhere in the two Talmuds.¹⁸ It is, however, striking for its grotesque and coarse style, its choice of sanguinary and somewhat distasteful halakhic topics, and its scatological references, as well as its discomfiting interaction between the rabbis.¹⁹

The early Talmud commentators were indeed quite perplexed by this account and embarrassed by Samuel’s conduct towards Rav, and they attempted to spare the dignity of these two pillars of Babylonian

¹⁵ On this phrase, see Moshe Beer, *The Babylonian Amoraim: Aspects of Economic Life* [Hebrew], 2nd ed. (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1982), 165 n. 26; and now Fraenkel, “Sniffing the Jar”, 8–9, 12–15.

¹⁶ On this interaction, see Richard Kalmin, “Saints or Sinners, Scholars or Ignoramuses? Stories about the Rabbis as Evidence for the Composite Nature of the Babylonian Talmud,” *AJS Review* 15 (1990): 188; Shmuel Faust, “Criticism in Sage Stories from the Babylonian Talmud” (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2010), 189.

¹⁷ The actual relationship between Rav and Samuel, the hierarchy between them, beyond this story, and how this hierarchy is perceived by the medieval legal commentaries are not examined here. The Bavli itself cites rules concerning which is to be followed in which areas of law. See, for instance, *BT Bekhorot* 49b; *BT Niddah* 24b; *BT Shabbat* 22a.

¹⁸ The account of the captivity and release of Samuel’s daughters is found in *BT Ketubbot* 23a; *JT Ketubbot* 2:6, 26c. See also *BT Mo’ed Qatan* 18a.

¹⁹ For a focus on the grotesque in this narrative, see Fraenkel, “Sniffing the Jar.” More broadly on the grotesque in the Bavli, see Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

rabbinic Judaism.²⁰ Rav Sherira Gaon, for whom this account might have been a pertinent prooftext in his account of the history of the oral law and the emergence of the Torah centers in Babylonia, omits it from his epistle. In a responsum, Rav Hayy Gaon, who is explicitly asked about it, seeks to account for the entire episode as if Samuel had genuinely sought to help Rav and heal him from his discomfort, and this apologetic approach was also embraced by other medieval commentators such as Rashi.²¹ And yet, this understanding is in opposition to a clear and straightforward reading of the story, and also to the style of the Babylonian Talmud, which does not shy away from portraying its heroes abusing one another.²² To understand this account is not to gloss over or deny elements that might be uncomfortable to us today and offer a sanitized version, but rather to contextualize them.

Samuel senses that he is about to lose his supreme status among the sages of Babylonia. It is for this reason that he seeks to clarify for

²⁰ This tendency is not surprising. Another example of Geonic apologetic interpretation can be found in Rav Natronay Gaon's explanation of the common talmudic term of abuse פחתי בר. For close study of this term in its various forms, see Aaron Amit, "The Epithets בר פחתי, בר פיהה, בן פיהה, and Their Development in Talmudic Sources" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz*, 72 (2003): 489–504. The references to Rav Natronay Gaon's citation can be found on 493 n. 26.

²¹ See Benjamin Menashe Lewin, *Otzar haGeonim*, vol. 2: *Shabbath* (Haifa, 1930), 97–98. Rav Hayy Gaon also offers more rational explanations for Samuel's interpretation of the signs. Rav's curses, according to this apologetic stance, were the result of a misunderstanding, or miscommunication, and Rav was contrite upon learning of Samuel's intentions. Most scholars, however, have maintained that Samuel deliberately intended to harm Rav. See, for example, Faust, "Criticism," 189; Isaiah Gafni, "On Talmudic Historiography in the Epistle of Rav Sherira Gaon: Between Tradition and Creativity," in Gafni, *Jews and Judaism*, 144–45; Yonatan Feintuch, "The Story of R. Ada b. Abba – Multiple Contexts and Multiples Messages in a Babylonian Talmudic *Sugya*" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 27 (2014): 7–8; cf. Israel Ben-Shalom, "'And I Took unto Me Two Staves: The One I Called Beauty and the Other I Called Bands' (Zach. 11:7)" [Hebrew], in *Dor leDor: From the End of Biblical Times up to the Redaction of the Talmud. Studies in Honor of Joshua Efron*, ed. Aryeh Kasher and Aharon Oppenheimer (Tel-Aviv: Bialik Institute; Jerusalem: Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, 1995), 244–45; cf. Fraenkel, "Sniffing the Jar."

²² After all, as the Babylonian Talmud acknowledges elsewhere, "these are the sages of Babylonia who destroy one another in Halakha" (*BT Sanhedrin* 24a).

himself the nature of the man who is arriving, and if necessary, to preemptively eliminate the threat he poses.²³

Signs and Symbols

This story begins with what might be thought of as a natural phenomenon, the seasonal high-water level in the river. However, nothing is said here about the season. In fact, it is unexpected. This is confirmed by Samuel's response. Samuel indeed interprets it semiotically not as a natural affair, but as a portent heralding the arrival from the *West*, a metonym for Palestine, of a "great man;" namely, a great rabbi.²⁴

There is a certain logic if not precision in Samuel's deduction. The Royal Canal brings water from the Euphrates. The Euphrates itself, in a tradition attributed to Rav, is imagined as being attached to Palestine, as he states that "the Euphrates is a great witness of rain in the West."²⁵ The water has risen, however, not because a great deal of rain has fallen upstream, as hydrometeorology would have it, but because the water has come from another source. In *BT Bekhorot* 55b, Samuel expresses the view that the increased amount of water in the river comes from its *banks* ("a river is blessed from its banks"), the implication being that this water derives from beneath or beside the river.²⁶

²³ In this sense, the plot conforms with the parallel account in *BT Bava Batra* 22a, relating to Rav Dimi of Neharde'a, on which see especially Barry Scott Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 140–41; and Kalmin, *Sages*, 7 n. 20. The sniffing of the jar metaphor is intertextually related to this parallel. There, too, the newcomer is put to the test, and the loss of his merchandise, as described there, is equal to the elimination of the potential threat he poses. See Fraenkel, "Sniffing the Jar," 8–9.

²⁴ On גברא רבא as specifically a great *rabbi* in the Babylonian Talmud, see, for example, *BT Berakhot* 30b; *BT Bezaḥ* 40a.

²⁵ *BT Bekhorot* 55b: פרת מיטרא במערבא סהדא רבא פרת. See, too, *Sifrei*, 'Eqev 86. Cf. Obermeyer, *Die Landschaft*, 45; Raphael Patai, *Mayim* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Debir, 1936), 154.

²⁶ *BT Nedarim* 40b: נהרא מכיפיה מיבריך. Cf. Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*, 2nd rev. ed. (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2020), 534. He, however, understands this to mean that the river increases "from water which flows into it from tributaries and not from rain."

Samuel declares that the river has risen in honor of the new arrival, in order to greet him. The setting for this story is Babylonia, with its particular geography, topography, climate, rivers, mythical cosmology, and religious heritage. While the rivers had been divine in earlier times,²⁷ in late antiquity people still spoke of the “spirit” of the rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris, as attested in the text of an incantation bowl.²⁸ In the rabbinic imagination, however, the rivers of Babylonia are subordinated to the world of the rabbis, and the cosmos is responding to their itinerary. They react to the demise of great sages²⁹ and here rise to pay homage to one. Such behavior also features in other rabbinic sources – the water of the well rises for the biblical Rebecca and for the goat herds of Abraham, according to the Palestinian midrash, *Genesis Rabbah*.³⁰ Moreover, what is seemingly true for the unpretentious wells of the land of Israel is on a completely different scale with the colossal rivers of Babylonia.

“The Water Was Rising and Was Turbid”

The river water is not only rising, but it is also turbid or cloudy. One recalls the rebuke against the ancient Israelites that “if you had been worthy, you would have been settled in Jerusalem, drinking the water of the Siloam whose waters are clean and sweet; now, since you are not worthy, you will be exiled to Babylonia and drink the water of the Euphrates whose waters are turbid and smelly”,³¹ in the Palestinian midrash *Lamentations Rabbah*. In contrast, the Bavli (*BT Ketubbot* 77b) praises the quality of the water from the Euphrates in the name of the Palestinian R. Yoḥanan. In our Babylonian account, we should prefer the Babylonian assessment of the quality of their

²⁷ In Zoroastrian literature, for references, see Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: Brill, 1997), 138–39. Closer to this topic, the first-to-second-century mosaic from Zeugma shows an anthropomorphic image of the river god Euphrates.

²⁸ See Stephen A. Kaufman, “Appendix C: Alphabetic Texts,” in *Excavations at Nippur: Eleventh Season*, ed. McGuire Gibson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 151–52 (IM 76106): רוחי פרת ורגלה נהרה – “spirits of the Euphrates and the River Tigris.”

²⁹ *BT Mo’ed Qatan* 25b. This is indeed part of a broader tendency within rabbinic literature in which nature is subordinated to the will of the rabbis. See, for example, the famous account of the oven of Akhnai in *JT Mo’ed Qatan* 3:1 (81c–d) and *BT Bava Meṣi’a* 59b.

³⁰ *Gen. Rab.* (ed. Theodor–Albeck), 582, 645.

³¹ *Lam. Rab.* 19.

river water. Furthermore, the internal logic of this Babylonian account dictates that the water of the Royal Canal is usually different and *not* turbid. This is therefore an exceptional occurrence, one that Samuel sees as worthy of comment and interpretation.

What, however, would the initial assumption have been before Samuel's symbolic interpretation? The curt and casual way in which the sight is mentioned is deceptive. A rising river is an existential threat in Mesopotamia, a cause for great trepidation. Where is the water coming from and why is it different than usual? Could it be rising from the abyss (תהום)?³² In the rabbinic worldview, one might not expect the abyss to be rising, since it was seemingly "closed" after the biblical flood (Gen 8:2). Yet, rabbinic traditions would acknowledge that not all the springs of the "Great Abyss" had been closed,³³ and an elaborate midrash appearing in both Talmuds relates how they had even threatened to rise in the days of David.³⁴

The turbidity provides a clue to the origins of the water. The abyss is referred to as the "black waters" in the accounts of the Gnostics of this region, a term that also appears in contemporary Aramaic and Mandaean incantation bowls.³⁵ It is turbid because it is understood as filthy, as the Manichaean stench. Indeed, the Talmud includes a tradition attributed to R. Yishmael (according to the manuscripts), but lacking Palestinian parallels, that describes the water that rose from the abyss of the biblical deluge as being "thick and hard as semen" (עבין וקשין כשכבת זרע).³⁶ The change in the river, then, at first sight, is the ominous harbinger of imminent and massive

³² On the abyss in biblical and rabbinic sources, see the brief survey in Patai, *Mayim*, 150.

³³ *BT Sanhedrin* 108a.

³⁴ *BT Sukkah* 53a-b; *JT Sanhedrin* 10:2 (29a). This story, which imagines the magical suppression of the abyss and its rise, includes comments on what contemporaries understood about the subterranean water and whether it comes from the abyss or from elsewhere. Evidently, this was a matter of debate among them.

³⁵ See the British Museum bowl with the signature BM 91767 with corrected reading and discussion in Matthew Morgenstern, "The Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Magic Bowl BM 91767 Reconsidered," *Le Muséon* 120, nos. 1-2 (2007): 9, 17-18: אין אתון מלאכין דישרן בתהומי תחתיי ובמיי סיי דארעא ("you are angels that dwell in the lower abysses and in the black waters of the earth") and the Klagsbald Collection bowl, Jerusalem, published in Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985), B13 (198-200): בני אתרא דמיא איסייר ("sons of the place of black waters").

³⁶ Cf. *BT Sanhedrin* 108b.

devastation. Samuel and Qarna recognize the change in the river and fear the uncontrolled rise of the abyss.

Such a situation, and the anxiety it engenders, is not uncommon to notions of the region and to the cosmology and mythology of the inhabitants of Babylonia. Indeed, non-talmudic contemporary texts, such as the incantation bowls from this region, when juxtaposed with this story, help to contextualize it. Such texts frequently make precise reference to the concern for the elevation of the primordial waters and emphasize the subdual of the primordial waters of the abyss.³⁷ The texts of incantation bowls frequently extoll the ability of supernatural powers to subdue the abyss.

The opening of this account might indeed recall a familiar setting. Samuel and Qarna sit precisely where the magician imagines himself to be, as in one incantation bowl text: “I stand beside the seashore, on the great bank of the ocean” [אכין ימא קינא ואכיפא רבא] [דרביתא].³⁸ Samuel is seemingly able to diffuse the situation. The river rises to greet Rav in a cosmic response to a unique event, his arrival in Babylonia. But this is a controlled event; Samuel’s symbolic interpretation allays the greatest fears. The intimidating constitution of the water is also resolved. Samuel, like a dream interpreter, reads the sign to avert the danger: “And as he interpreted it, so it was.”³⁹ The water is turbid – עכירי – so he explains that the newcomer is suffering from pain in his stomach. We see later that his ailment was constipation, and this offers Samuel the means to remove the threat by causing him immense shame and embarrassment. This interpretation is achieved through employing the alternative sense of the same root, a homonym, a sense attested in the Babylonian Jewish Aramaic of the incantation bowls – עכר as *hold back*, and here, evidently, *stop up*.⁴⁰

³⁷ Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls, Volume One* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 140 (JBA 25:3). Some bowl texts begin with כבשינן בתהומא תיתא or כבשינן לתהומא תיתאי (AS 13). On the extent of water in the abyss, see *BT Yoma* 76a. The primordial waters are also the abode of evil spirits of various forms; see text cited above, n. 24, and (text T28003) אשבעית עלי רוחא בישתא דיסליקת מן יומא ומן תהומא תחתא.

³⁸ Moussaieff 145, published in Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003), 100–102.

³⁹ Cf. *BT Mo’ed Qatan* 18a.

⁴⁰ Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, 831, who cites two incantation bowls with this meaning; Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, bowl 9 (formerly in the possession of V. Barakat, Jerusalem), 174–75; and CBS 2916 (J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic*

Aspirations of Power by the Rivers of Babylon

This story shows that Rav's passage into Babylonia is divinely ordained, and Samuel's failure to stop him paves the way for the future history of Babylonian Jewry, with a new hierarchy, whereby he is perceived as being superior to Samuel. Samuel had sought to change fate, but his hopes were frustrated.

Mani and the Inundation of Ctesiphon

Many of the features of this talmudic source, I suggest, can be fruitfully compared with a Manichaean account. First, however, it will be useful to comment briefly on the study of Manichaean literature within the context of the Babylonian Talmud, which has been little explored. Indeed, scholarship on Manichaeism has tended to evade the gaze of scholars of Babylonia in the Talmudic era, and the inverse is equally true. This is despite the obvious temporal and geographical synchronism of the emergence of Manichaeism and the Babylonian rabbinic teachings, both of which took root in third-century Babylonia. Those who have examined Jewish aspects related to Manichaean literature have focused on gnosis, early Jewish traditions, and lore.⁴¹ Those interested in Jewish history have tended to accept

Incantation Texts from Nippur [Philadelphia, 1913], no. 6:6 (141) which Sokoloff reads as *אכרנא* against Montgomery's: *אכרנא*. James Ford (oral communication), however, suggests here *אכרנא*. This meaning is explained in Jacob Nahum Epstein, "Gloses Babylo-Araméennes I. Les textes magiques araméens de Montgomery," *Revue des études juives* 83 (1921): 34, who refers to this meaning in additional Aramaic dialects. See, too, Matthew Morgenstern, "On Some Non-Standard Spellings in the Aramaic Magic Bowls and Their Linguistic Significance," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 52, no. 2 (2007): 249. For Syriac, see *Peshitta Wisdom of Solomon*, in A. A. di Lella, ed., *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version, Part II Fasc. 5. Proverbs; Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiastes; Song of Songs* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 2:12, 19:17.

⁴¹ See, especially, John C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the "Book of Giants" Traditions* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992); Werner Sundermann, "Mani's 'Book of Giants' and the Jewish Book of Enoch: A Case of Terminological Differences and What It Implies," in *Irano-Judaica III: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1994), 40–48 (repr. in *Manichaica Iranica, Ausgewählte Schriften von Werner Sundermann*, ed. Christiane Reck, Dieter Weber, Claudia Leurini, and Antonio Panaino [Rome: Istitutio Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2001], 2:697–706). The main focus has been on the Book of Giants in Enochide literature and the Jewish roots of this literature. On the whole, scholars do not believe that this literature reached Mani directly from the Jews. For an article that compares the Manichaean field of cosmogony

the judgment that Mani did not particularly like Judaism and so excluded it from his system.⁴² And yet, irrespective of what Mani might have thought of Judaism, he created his system in geographical, linguistic, and chronological proximity to the rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud. This alone offers possibilities of interest to students of the rabbinic texts. One should not, therefore, be surprised to find certain parallels of diverse genres, including a shared lexicon, modes of thought, and expressions.

There have been but a handful of more recent efforts to consider the Manichaean religion in comparison with Babylonian Judaism, and some recent studies have shown certain possible borrowings between Manichaeans and Babylonian Jews. Jewish magical formulae, for instance, found their way into Manichaean magic texts.⁴³ Some years

with rabbinic traditions (but not particularly those of Babylonian origin), see Eugenia Smagina, "The Manichaean Cosmological Myth as a Re-Written Bible," in *In Search of Truth: Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism. Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Albert van den Berg, Annemaré Kotzé, Tobias Nicklas, and Madeleine Scopello (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 201–16. See, too, Werner Sundermann, "Der Manichäismus und das Judentum," *Iranzamin. Echo der iranischen Kultur* 11 (1998): 180–81. On the other hand, for discussion of the legends found in Enochide literature in the incantation bowls, see already, with further references, Jonas Greenfield, "Notes on Some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1973): 149–56.

⁴² Its relationship to Judaism is unclear. As is known, despite Manichaeism's syncretistic tendency, it apparently demonstrated hostility towards Judaism. On the absence of Judaism in Mani's religious system, for instance, see Neusner, *A History of the Jews of Babylonia*, 21 ff. On the condemnation of the Magi, implicated in Mani's suffering as "brothers of the Jews" and similar expressions, see Ps 225 and 241 in C. R. C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book: Book II* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938), 15.9–12. Although Jews are not usually mentioned explicitly, the negative comments about the Bible may imply condemnation of them. At the same time, hostility towards the Jews may be overstated. See, too, Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 1999), 12–14.

⁴³ Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, "The Apotropaic Magical Text M389 and M8430/1/ in Manichaean Middle Persian," *Aram* 16 (2004): 141–60. Ithamar Gruenwald, "Manichaeism and Judaism in Light of the Cologne Mani Codex," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 50 (1983): 29–45; Yishai Kiel, "Reimagining Enoch in Sasanian Babylonia in Light of Zoroastrian and Manichaean Traditions," *AJS Review* 39 (2015): 407–32; Kiel, "Study versus Sustenance: A Rabbinic Dilemma in its Zoroastrian and Manichaean Context," *AJS Review* 38 (2014): 275–302; Kiel, "The Wizard of Āz and the Evil Inclination: The Babylonian Rabbinic Inclination (*yeẓer*) in Its Zoroastrian and Manichean Context," in *The Evil Inclination in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James Aitken,

ago, I myself undertook a comparison of Manichaean and talmudic narratives, proposing not a borrowing, but a shared narrative trope.⁴⁴

The account I shall present below, which has a clear geographical and historical setting,⁴⁵ is also concerned with the frightful rise of the river in Babylonia. Moreover, it deals with the interpretation of this event and alludes to a discourse of power. It is found in the Coptic *Kephalaia*, a composition that was discovered in Egypt, dating to the fourth century CE. It claims to reproduce the discussions and conversations between Mani, who is referred to as “the apostle,” and his disciples, and is apparently based on an Aramaic *Vorlage*. I shall reproduce a section of this source in the English translation by Iain Gardner.⁴⁶

Once again, at one of the times when the apostle entered [in] to the presence of King Shapur. He gave him a greet[ing], turned, and went away from before King Shapur.

He st[o]od on a quayside that was built upon the bank of the mighty river Tigris. At that time it was the month of Ph[ar]mouthi. The river Tigris was engorged with many waters; it had [surged up] and swelled and [burst forth] beneath the great force of the flood, so that the waters flowed do[wn ... and] poured into the gates of the city, they [...] only, but the waters flowed into the {} of the city until they submerged the market place of the city [...] are few and the city goes [under ... comes to] be fear of its wind. Even his

Hector M. Patmore and Ishay Rosen-Zvi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 294–314; Kiel, “‘Playing with Children’: A Talmudic Polemic against Manichaean Sexual Ethics,” *Jewish Law Association Studies* 28 (2019): 112–36; Kiel, “Creation by Emission: Recreating Adam and Eve in the Babylonian Talmud in Light of Zoroastrian and Manichaean Literature,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 66 (2015): 295–316; Jae Han, “Mani’s Metivta: Manichaean Pedagogy in its Late Antique Mesopotamian Context,” *Harvard Theological Review* 114 (2021): 346–70.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Herman, “The Talmud in Its Babylonian Context: Rava and Bar Sheshakh; Mani and Mihrshah” [Hebrew], in Herman, Shahar, and Oppenheimer, *Between Babylonia and the Land of Israel*, 79–96.

⁴⁵ Michel Tardieu (“Gnose et Manichéisme,” *École pratique des hautes études, section des sciences religieuses. Annuaire* 93 [1984]: 372) suggests that it alludes to events belonging to the *beginning* of the reign of King Shapur I.

⁴⁶ Iain Gardner, ed. and trans, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher: The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: Brill, 1995), 160–62. I claim no expertise in Coptic and therefore the discussion of the Coptic text is based on the translation provided.

kingdom was in great terror because of the enormous size of the flood of these waters.

So the apostle was standing there on the quay, with also three disciples standing by him, [le]aders of his church. They were watching the river engorged with these many waters. They saw that the waters rose up against the city walls, and the flood was even inside the walls.

One of the disciples then spoke. He says to the apostle: H[o]w great is the power of the garment of the waters? How far shall [it extend]? That it should enter with the roar of its flood and fill th[is] river Tigris in its vastness like the mighty [s]ea! It has carried waves from river bank to bank, and run from wall to wall. The source from which a[l]l these waters burst forth, how great will it be? For they come and come each year at their [ap]pointed season!

Then the apostle says to him: What are you astonished at the vastness of the Tigris waters, and why are you amazed by its flood? Still, listen to what I am about to tell you, and be truly astonished about th[e r]iv[er] that came into being during the first time.

The apostle, Mani, is summoned to the royal palace of the Persian king, Shapur I, and returns to his disciples after an audience with the king. Soon thereafter, the river floods its banks. They sit on the bank of the Tigris and observe a dramatic, but natural and familiar phenomenon. The month of Pharmouthi, the date provided in the account for this event, falls in the spring (27 March until 25 April), so a high-water level is not unusual at this time of year, and the river flows with great force. This flooding was a constant feature of the Tigris, as, indeed, of life in Babylonia near the rivers and canals, as noted earlier.⁴⁷ In the course of the next century, the force of the river would ultimately split the city in two.⁴⁸

After witnessing this sight, the disciples express their wonder at the power and quantity of the water. Whence comes the water that arrives anew every year? The disciples understand that the source of the water is the abyss, the “garment of the waters” according to the

⁴⁷ For talmudic references to flooding and concern about it, see *BT Berakhot* 60a; *BT Eruvin* 21a; *BT Ta’anit* 22b; *BT Bava Batra* 41a.

⁴⁸ *BT Eruvin* 57b.

terminology current in Manichaeism. The event is taken as an opportunity for Mani and his disciples to discuss certain aspects of Mani's cosmological doctrine about the "garment of the waters" and its enormity. Like Samuel, Mani interprets the river, and he now contextualizes it according to his religious mythology⁴⁹ as but a "small stream." The waters of the Tigris in the spring are a tiny portion of the immense water swallowed by the primordial *archontes* in order to extinguish the fire burning in their intestines, which is then spat out after the summer.⁵⁰

And yet, what draws attention here is both the timing of the flood and the effect it has on the royal palace and the capital city. We are not told the purpose of Mani's visits to the palace, yet one hardly needs to note the inequality between Mani and the king, with the powerless yet aspiring new prophet struggling to advance his message before the Zoroastrian "king of kings." This account juxtaposes two sources of immense power. Yet the power of the Sasanian kingdom is as naught in the face of the greater power that seems to have manifested itself precisely in coordination with Mani's visit. This account, in how it is structured and what it chooses to tell us, seeks to link Mani and the river, as if he brings the river flood with him. Mani, too, may be perceived as powerful, far beyond anything that is in the possession of the Sasanian kingdom.

Like the rabbis, Mani believed that the river's high-water level comes from the subterranean abyss, the *tehom*, "the garment of the waters." Its size and power are beyond any capability in the hands of the Sasanian Empire. The Persian royal palace is shaken to the core by the release of a large quantity of water, but the "garment of the waters" is vast. The Tigris is "only one river from thousands of rivers of water, from the secrets that are not revealed."⁵¹ Mani's "dominion," so to speak, in comparison with that of the Persian king, is found in his possession of this secret knowledge, the hidden knowledge of the world, the gnosis, although this is not spelled out in the Manichaean source itself.

⁴⁹ This is an example of a broader approach to natural phenomena; see Gábor Kósa, "The Manichaean Attitude to Natural Phenomena as Reflected in the Berlin *Kephalaia*," *Open Theology* 1 (2015): 255–68.

⁵⁰ Tardieu, "Gnose et Manichéisme," 371.

⁵¹ Gardner, *Kephalaia*, 162.

In these two sources, the Talmud and the Kephalaia, the river water rises from the abyss and is turbulent, dangerous; thus, we are dealing with cosmic phenomena. The two differ in that the elevation of the river in the situation described is treated as a regular occurrence in the Manichaean source, whereas in the Talmud, it is seen as exceptional. Yet in both, it is closely linked, either explicitly or implicitly, to the appearance of a great man, a sage, Rav or Mani, in the early third century. In both of these sources, regarding Rav and Samuel and Mani and the royal palace, the river, in its force and behavior, intimates the change – the presence of an aspiring sage who threatens the existing reality, a new “prophet” who must be taken into consideration and who cannot be overcome. It is indeed through the shared symbolism of the rivers of Babylon and their interpretation that the inhabitants of the region, both Jewish and Manichaean, convey their fears and hopes, their new tidings and their aspirations.

“All Israel has a Portion in the World to Come”: Attempts to Create a Coherent Narrative of Reward and Punishment in Medieval Jewish Philosophy

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Abstract

Various notions pertaining to future reward and punishment are mentioned in biblical and rabbinic literature – e.g., the messianic era, the World to Come, the resurrection of the dead, the Garden of Eden, Gehinom – but no attempt was ever made to create a coherent narrative from these different notions. It was left to the medieval Jewish thinkers to fill this void, basing themselves on the sources of Jewish tradition and their own philosophical views.

In this article, I explore the approaches of four medieval philosophers: Saadiah Gaon, Joseph Ibn Zaddik, Maimonides (1138–1204), and Ḥasdai Crescas. My primary focus will be the ultimate fate of the individual. The issue of naturalism vs. supernaturalism remains a central one in my treatment of this subject – that is to say, how God’s governance of the world is to be conceived. At the same time, I will take a closer look at another major issue that has not been sufficiently emphasized in previous studies; namely, how these thinkers conceived of the nature of the individual in their approaches to one’s final state. In other words, how did they think of the “I,” whether in this world or the next? Their various approaches to this problem find their clearest expression in the attempts to understand the nature of the World to Come and how the cardinal rabbinic belief in the resurrection of the dead fits into the story of ultimate reward. As I will try to show, more often than not one can detect a dissonance in their approaches due to their conflicting religious and philosophical commitments, particularly due to the strong body/soul dichotomy that infiltrated medieval Jewish thought from Greek thought.

Introduction

From biblical times to the present, there have been numerous attempts to reconcile the notion of divine justice with the sufferings experienced by the young and by those who are faithful to God and

the divine commandments, or alternatively, with the success and pleasures experienced by the wicked. The solution, at least from rabbinic times, was to regard the balance of justice being restored and the final recompense being meted out as taking place in some future state – “in a world that is entirely good” and “entirely prolonged.”¹ Yet aside from scattered and divergent statements as to future reward or punishment, literature from the rabbinic period presents no detailed discussion of this topic.² It was left to the medieval Jewish thinkers to fill this void, basing themselves on biblical verses, rabbinic sayings, and their own philosophical views.

The attempt to create a coherent narrative from these variant sources was an exceptionally challenging one. The results were more often than not problematic, either from a philosophical perspective or from a religious one.³ Ultimately, the thinkers had to steer a course between their loyalty to the sources of Jewish tradition and to their philosophical commitment – between how far they were willing to go in interpreting the traditional sources figuratively in light of their philosophical views, in addition to the problem of reconciling seemingly conflicting views in the traditional sources themselves, and how far they felt they could stretch or modify their philosophical views to accommodate a literal belief in the teachings found in these sources.⁴

Previous studies touching upon the topic of eschatology and ultimate reward in medieval Jewish thought have tended to focus on the tension between medieval philosophical naturalistic approaches and the supernaturalistic ones that appear to underlie Jewish traditional sources. They also tend to dwell upon the final state of the nation – that is to say, the messianic era – in addition to the final state

¹ See, for example, *BT Qiddushin* 39b; *BT Hullin* 142a.

² For a study of rabbinic notions of future reward, see Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 1:649–90.

³ For a detailed study of medieval Jewish philosophical approaches to the subject of reward and punishment, including those of the philosophers discussed in the present article, see Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, trans. Batya Stein (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2017).

⁴ While other issues are also relevant to the narratives developed by these thinkers, such as interfaith controversies and pedagogical concerns, I will not deal with them in this study.

of the individual, and the relation between the two.⁵ In this study, my primary focus will be the ultimate fate of the individual. The issue of naturalism vs. supernaturalism remains a central one in my treatment of this subject – that is to say, how God’s governance of the world is to be conceived. At the same time, I will take a closer look at another major issue that has not been sufficiently emphasized in previous studies; namely, how the thinkers conceived of the nature of the individual in their approaches to one’s final state. In other words, how did they think of the “I,” whether in this world or the next? Did they think of one’s true self as essentially a corporeal being and hence that there could be no ultimate reward without the soul being attached to the body? Or, alternately, did they think of one’s true self only in terms of the soul, with the individual’s soul being capable of enjoying a far better and more purified state of being when it is no longer weighed down by the body and the desires it prompts? Or did they think of the essence of the individual solely in terms of the intellect and the impersonal knowledge of eternal truths that it attains? Their various approaches to this problem find their clearest expression in the attempts to understand the nature of the World to Come and how the cardinal rabbinic belief in the resurrection of the dead⁶ fits into the story of ultimate reward. More often than not, one can detect a dissonance in their approaches due to their conflicting religious and philosophical commitments. While I will offer no novel interpretations of the philosophers I will discuss, I think that a juxtaposition of their approaches to this subject will help to clarify the picture of the problems they faced in thinking of the nature of the final reward and attempting to form a cohesive image of the aspects of this reward as taught by Jewish tradition.

The present study will examine the views of four different thinkers. I will begin by dealing with the thought of Saadia Gaon (892–942), who played a pioneering role in this issue, as he did in so many different areas. Essentially, he was the first thinker to attempt to create a coherent narrative of the various forms of reward and punishment – i.e., the messianic age, the Garden of Eden, Gehinnom,

⁵ See Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, as well as the studies mentioned in n. 44 below.

⁶ “These are the ones who have no portion in the World to Come: one who says that [belief in] the resurrection of the dead is not from the Torah (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10.1).”

the resurrection of the dead, and the World to Come. Next, I will study the approach of one of the earliest Jewish philosophers in Spain, Joseph Ibn Ṣaddik (1075–1149), who also attempted to show the relation between the different notions pertaining to this subject. I will then turn to Maimonides (1138–1204), whose approach to ultimate reward and punishment provided the starting point for the approaches of all subsequent Jewish philosophers who grappled with this subject. Finally, I will analyze the post-Maimonidean Jewish philosopher Ḥasdai Crescas (1340–1410), whose approach to this subject offers the most detailed and comprehensive critique of the philosophical view that appears to underlie Maimonides' approach.

A

Saadia Gaon devotes three sections of his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* to a discussion of this topic: Resurrection, Messianic Redemption, and the World to Come (sections 7 to 9). The views he presents in these sections follow his discussion of the nature of the human soul (section 6), upon which they are predicated.⁷ Moreover, belief in divine justice necessitates positing belief in life after death in which one earns one's reward or punishment, as Saadia argues in his discussion of merits and demerits in section 5.⁸

Saadia regards the rational soul as an entity made of luminous matter, similar to but purer than that of the planets and spheres.⁹ It is

⁷ The Judeo-Arabic edition of the treatise (*Kitāb al-Amānāt w-al-ʿItiqādāt*) that I utilized is that of Joseph Kafih (Jerusalem: Sura, 1970), which also contains a Hebrew translation. The treatise was translated into English by Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).

⁸ The good experienced by the wicked and the suffering of the righteous can thereby be explained by their effect on the individual's final state. In Saadia's view, those who are evil are often remunerated for their good deeds in this world, as the righteous are for their bad ones, with the situation being reversed in the World to Come.

⁹ The rationality of the soul attests to the purer nature of its matter. Only God is incorporeal in Saadia's ontology, thus he views even the soul as a corporeal entity. However, he does not specify the precise substance from which the soul is created. He does not hold the Aristotelian theory of the "ether" from which the stars and spheres are composed, but rather the Platonic theory that they are composed of pure fire; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 1.3 (eighth theory of creation). Thus, it would appear from his juxtaposition of the soul with the spheres that the soul is composed of a finer gradation of the same substance. Yet in his

created at the moment the body is completely formed, with its seat being in the heart.¹⁰ It is separate from the body, leaving room for the continued existence of the rational soul, not just the intellect, after the deterioration of the body. Nevertheless, the soul cannot function without the body. This view is crucial for Saadiah's understanding of the various forms of reward and punishment. All reward and punishment must involve the body and not the disembodied soul alone. Moreover, each soul, in his view, is designed to function in a particular body.¹¹

The primary form of reward and punishment – namely, the World to Come – does not occur at the moment of death in Saadiah's view. Rather, it will occur at a time decreed by God. Until that time, God stores the disembodied souls, keeping those of the righteous on high and those of the wicked below. Yet prior to their storage and while the body decomposes, the souls – and here Saadiah appears to be thinking only of those of the wicked – continue to wander in this world and experience misery at what is happening to their bodies.¹² This could be construed as the first stage of punishment, since the

discussion of the soul, Saadiah explicitly dismisses the view that it is composed of either air or fire; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.1. Aside from the four elements, he labels the only other substance that he posits as “light” or “luminosity” (*al-nūr*), which is the purest substance created by God and characterizes the created Glory or the *Shekhinah* in Saadiah's ontology; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 2.10 (Kafih, 104). It is not clear whether the angels were created from a lower gradation of this luminous substance or from a purer gradation of fire. Saadiah's juxtaposition of the angels with the spheres suggests the latter possibility; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 4.2; 6.4. This is also the view found in the *Book of Creation*, as Saadiah is well aware, as seen from his *Commentary on the Book of Creation*; see Saadiah Gaon, *Sefer Yezirah 'im Perush ha-Gaon Rabbenu Sa'adya b. R. Yosef Fayyumi*, ed. and trans. Joseph Kafih (Jerusalem, 1972), 125. In the final analysis, it appears that Saadiah is not entirely consistent in his view of the substance of the soul and of the heavenly entities beneath the rank of the Glory.

¹⁰ *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.3. For a discussion of Saadiah's theory of the soul and his sources, see Herbert Davidson, “Saadia's List of Theories of the Soul,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 75–94.

¹¹ Saadiah is acquainted with the view of the transmigration of human souls from one body to the next and presents a series of arguments against it; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.8.

¹² See *BT Shabbat* 152b. Saadiah appears to be inconsistent in his view as to whether the soul is capable of feeling when it is not attached to the body. Even in this case, however, the suffering is brought about due to some connection it experiences to the decomposing body.

misery they experience is in proportion to their deserts, in his view. Saadiah cites numerous verses and alludes to a number of rabbinic dicta in support of his approach to the fate of the soul after its separation from the body.¹³

With his view of the soul and what happens to it at death established, the first type of reward that Saadiah discusses is the resurrection of the dead. Since the first section of his treatise proves God's creation of the world *ex nihilo* and the previous section establishes the continuous existence of all souls after their separation from the body, he sees no problem in accepting the belief that God can resurrect the dead, based on biblical verses and rabbinic teachings. The Deity who created the world in its entirety from nothing certainly has the power to return souls to their bodies. The main question Saadiah addresses is when this event will occur – at the time of redemption, or in the World to Come? He favors the former view, which was held by most Jews, and which he sees as more in harmony with a literal interpretation of biblical verses pertaining to the subject, citing it at length. Yet in his view, not everyone will be resurrected at the beginning of the period, but only those Jews who died virtuous or repentant. All others will be resurrected at the end of the period, and each of them will be resurrected from the very same elements from which his body was composed beforehand, a point that is important to Saadiah given his view that each soul was created to function in a specific body. Saadiah shows why there is no impossibility that this is the case, arguing that God does not employ these elements in the creation of future generations, for there is no shortage of the four basic elements from which human bodies are composed. He also addresses numerous other problems in discussing the state of the resurrected individual, such as whether he will be resurrected wearing clothes (which he answers in the affirmative) or with the same blemishes he had in his previous lifetime (which he answers in the negative). More interesting is the problem of whether the resurrected will earn a greater reward for their good conduct at the time of redemption and whether they are capable of sin. According to Saadiah, God would not have resurrected them if He had known that they would engage in sin, and they certainly will earn added reward as a result of their good conduct after their resurrection.

¹³ *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.7.

The period of redemption itself is the next topic that Saadia addresses. He assures his readers that this period will definitely occur based on divine promises and even offers a calculation of when it will begin.¹⁴ From the many verses touching upon this period, Saadia attempts to frame a coherent narrative of how it will unfold, offering different scenarios depending upon whether Israel repents or not. It will be a period when the other nations will serve Israel, which once again will be a sovereign state in its land, and they will help to transport all Jews there. There will be no disease and infirmity in this period, only joy and gladness. People will also live much longer. The light of God's Indwelling (*Shekhinah*) will become visible and it will extend from heaven to earth, shining upon the Temple so that it can be seen from great distances. All Jews will possess the gift of prophecy. All people will believe in the unity of God, and there will be no more wars. Even the animals will be at peace with one another, as stated in Isaiah 11:69, though Saadia leaves open the possibility that this may be a parable referring to the wicked making peace with the righteous.¹⁵ He goes to great lengths to disprove the view of certain Jews that all the promises of redemption refer to the Second Temple period and that many of these promises were not realized due to the sins of the Jewish people at that time. In a similar vein, he attacks the Christian beliefs regarding this matter.¹⁶

Saadia sees the period of redemption as an exceptional *historical* one. Nature will remain, for the most part, intact. He ignores rabbinic dictum regarding the numerous miraculous events that will characterize this period, such as how the land will produce cakes and processed wool.¹⁷ The two most exceptional supernatural events that will occur in this period are the resurrection of the dead and the appearance of the light of the Indwelling, referred to elsewhere as the Created Glory,¹⁸ which will now be visible to all. The appearance of this special light may well be the reason that all Israel will attain prophecy, yet another supernatural event that will occur at this point, though Saadia does not make this point explicitly. Yet for all the

¹⁴ *Beliefs and Opinions* 8.3–4.

¹⁵ *Beliefs and Opinions* 8.8.

¹⁶ *Beliefs and Opinions* 8.7; 8.9.

¹⁷ See *BT Shabbat* 30b. In general, Saadia makes only limited use of *midrashim* in developing his views.

¹⁸ *Beliefs and Opinions* 2.10.

miraculous events that will occur in this period, he insists that the Torah in its entirety will remain completely obligatory.

It is in his discussion of the World to Come that Saadiah presents his most novel views. After the messianic period, God will create a new world, as mentioned in Isaiah 66:22, to which He will transfer the living. At the same time, He will resurrect the rest of the dead. He will then destroy our present world. The World to Come will be characterized by its pure luminosity. While all souls will still exist together with their bodies, people will no longer engage in drinking, eating, procreating, or pursuing a livelihood. Instead, everyone will be sustained by the special light, as indicated by the rabbinic dictum: “The righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the Indwelling” (*BT Berakhot* 17a).¹⁹ Since people will no longer require the amenities offered by the present earth in order to supply themselves with their material necessities, the creation of this new world is necessary as it will be more suited to their new physical state. Reward and punishment in the World to Come will be thanks to two special substances created by God, whose essence, resembling luminous fire, is analogous to that of the sun. The substance given to each of the righteous will have a special property that shines for the individual and imparts great pleasure in accordance with the level of reward merited, while that given to each of the wicked will have the property of inflicting a burning sensation upon them in proportion to their deserved punishment. These substances will also preserve their recipients in the same condition for all eternity. The state of everlasting pleasure is metaphorically called the Garden of Eden, and the state of everlasting affliction is referred to as Gehinnom.²⁰

It is clear from this description that most of the commandments will no longer be relevant in the World to Come. Yet it is noteworthy that Saadiah does not absolve humanity from all commandments. Even in the World to Come, one will be obligated to serve God by acknowledging the Deity. One will also be forbidden to curse God or to describe the Deity in derogatory terms, “and similar obligations that are known by the intellect absolutely.”²¹ At least some of the

¹⁹ *Beliefs and Opinions* 9.4.

²⁰ *Beliefs and Opinions* 9.5; 9.8. One could certainly ask why Saadiah did not interpret them as referring to two entirely different places in the World to Come, but he provides no explanation for this.

²¹ *Beliefs and Opinions* 9.10 (*Kafih*, 284; cf. Rosenblatt, 353).

revelatory commandments will also have their counterparts in the World to Come, such as the obligation to travel to certain places at fixed times in order to worship God in the manner that the Deity will then decree. Hence, even in the World to Come, the service of God will remain the human being's prime obligation. In a crucial sense, as much as the World to Come will be radically different from this world, it will also share some fundamental features with it. It too will be a material world in which all who inhabit it possess a body. In the case of human beings in particular, there will be a strong continuity between one's life in this world and that in the next, since one essentially preserves one's previous identity.

In summary, Saadiah presents a fairly coherent narrative of reward and punishment based on biblical verses and rabbinic teachings. This narrative is also in complete harmony with his views regarding the soul and divine activity. For Saadiah, reward and punishment involve both the soul, which is created from a fine luminous substance and is by nature immortal, and the body, which must be re-formed from its original elements and reunited with the soul, since human life in this world and the next is dependent upon both. The individual will remain essentially the same in the World to Come, let alone after resurrection, though they will no longer be subject to the same physical cravings associated with the body. Moreover, even in the World to Come, the individual will continue to live as a social creature surrounded by the same loved ones.

Saadiah's God, at least as far as divine activity is concerned, remains very much the God of Jewish tradition despite being the philosophical incorporeal One. Reason, in Saadiah's view, proves God's creation of the entire world in all its particulars *ex nihilo*. The power and knowledge of God reflected by this act enable Saadiah to interpret many of the verses of the Bible literally with regard to the Deity's personal governance of the world and the performance of miracles, and also to view these interpretations as being at least in harmony with reason. This is certainly true of God's ability to resurrect the dead, as alluded to in a number of verses and underlined by rabbinic tradition. Saadiah shows no awareness of the challenges that Islamic Neoplatonic-Aristotelian philosophy, which had recently started to develop, poses to this picture. He views the messianic period as the first stage of reward, enjoyed by all those living in this period, as well as by the righteous Jews who die and whose souls will once again be reunited with their bodies. The second and permanent

stage is the World to Come. This is a world not yet in existence, but it will be created at the end of the messianic period. It will be a world suitable for the eternal pleasure or suffering earned by each individual in their lifetime(s) on earth. Everyone will be nourished by a special light and their bodies will be preserved by special substances. The individual will also continue to serve God by physical acts, and not with the soul alone, through all eternity.

B

The Jewish philosophers in the two centuries after Saadiah, most of whom were living in Spain, were well aware of his treatise. At the same time, they were generally heavily influenced by Neoplatonic thought,²² which greatly affected their approach to the World to Come. Joseph Ibn Ẓaddik's treatise *Sefer 'Olam Qatan* (*The Book of the Microcosm*) provides a good example of this point.²³ Indeed, what prompted him to write his treatise, he indicates, is a question from his student regarding what the wise – i.e., philosophers – mean when they speak of “the perpetual good and the level of perfection.”²⁴ It is thus fitting that he concludes his treatise with the topic of final reward, explicitly tying this topic to his earlier discussion of the rational soul.²⁵

In keeping with Neoplatonic thought, Ibn Ẓaddik views human beings as having three souls that are bound together – a vegetative soul (possessed by all plants, animals, and human beings), an animate soul (possessed by all animals and human beings), and a rational soul (possessed by human beings alone).²⁶ The rational soul is neither a body nor an accident. Rather, it is a spiritual entity, which employs the body in accordance with its desire and purpose, enabling it to attain perfection and eternal felicity. It is also a potential intellect;

²² Saadiah also absorbed some Platonic and Neoplatonic influences as evidenced by his notion of a tripartite soul in *Beliefs and Opinions* 10.2.

²³ See Joseph Ibn Ẓaddik, *Der Mikrokosmos des Josef Ibn Ẓadik* (*Sefer 'Olam Qatan*), ed. Saul Horowitz (Berlin: Druck von Th. Schatzky, 1903) (henceforth *Microcosm*).

²⁴ *Microcosm*, introduction, 3.

²⁵ *Microcosm* 4.2, 78. For an analysis of Ibn Ẓaddik's doctrine of the soul, see Saul Horowitz, *Die Psychologie bei den jüdischen Religionsphilosophen des Mittelalters von Saadia bis Maimuni*, vol. 3: *Die Psychologie der jüdischen Neuplatoniker: Josef Ibn Saddik* (Breslau: Druck von Th. Schatzky, 1906), 147–207.

²⁶ *Microcosm* 2.1.2, 27–33; 2.2.1, 39–40.

when it is perfected, it becomes an actual intellect.²⁷ Following Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Ibn Zaddik views all existents other than the Deity as being composed of form and matter; spiritual matter in the case of the existents in the spiritual world and corporeal matter in the case of the corporeal existents.²⁸ He does not give a detailed account of the spiritual world, but indicates that it was created *ex nihilo* by God and that God bestows the divine light upon it unceasingly and without intermediary.²⁹ The “matter” of the rational soul, in his view, is the same as that of the world of the intellect – namely, pure luminosity that comes from God’s power without any intermediation.³⁰

Ibn Zaddik identifies the World to Come with the higher spiritual world.³¹ This allows for a simple narrative of future reward. At the end of the treatise, after criticizing those who hold the view that ultimate reward and punishment are corporeal and involve the body in addition to the soul, Ibn Zaddik expands upon his view of the fate of the righteous and the wicked. A soul that has achieved wisdom in apprehending the divine unity and that has imitated God’s actions through one’s own good deeds will return to the spiritual world at the time of separation from the body. This soul will join the ranks of the spiritual entities.³² It will then be illuminated by the light bestowed by God without any intermediary, thereby enjoying eternal felicity that is far superior to any corporeal pleasure. A soul that does not achieve the purpose for which it was created – namely, its purification by attaining knowledge of God and performing virtuous actions – and that pines only for the vices and pleasures of this world will retain these desires at the time of death. It will not rise to the spiritual world.

²⁷ *Microcosm* 2.1.4–2.2.1, 34–39.

²⁸ *Microcosm* 1.2, 9. For a study of Ibn Gabirol’s thought on this issue, see Jacques Schlanger, *La philosophie de Salomon Ibn Gabirol: Étude d’un néoplatonisme* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 216–72.

²⁹ *Microcosm* 2.2.3, 42–43. He insists that the spiritual world was created *ex nihilo*, and subsequently rejects the notion that the world is without beginning. Nevertheless, some of his statements regarding the splendor originating from God and directly and continuously sustaining the higher world may be interpreted as alluding to the doctrine of emanation, though he does not present this doctrine explicitly.

³⁰ *Microcosm* 2.2.1, 39.

³¹ *Microcosm* 4.2, 72–73.

³² *Microcosm* 4.2, 78. In the context of Judaism, this end is attained by serving God by way of the divine commandments in accordance with a true comprehension of the Deity; see *Microcosm*, Introduction, 3; 4.1, 63–70.

Rather, it will remain caught in the sphere of elemental fire, suffering without respite for eternity. While it will no longer be attached to a body, it will remain too weighed down by evil deeds to find true rest.³³

This simple model of reward and punishment does not take into account other basic Jewish beliefs regarding reward and punishment – most notably, the resurrection of the dead and the messianic period. At this point in his discussion, Ibn Zaddik attempts to put all these forms of reward together, but the narrative that results is not a very clear or consistent one. He maintains that God will

resurrect the righteous, the patriarchs, and the prophets. All those who died in Exile unifying God the Exalted will proceed to the reward of the World to Come, and afterwards will be resurrected at the time of the Messiah. They will no longer die, as the sages said: “The dead who God who will be resurrected by God in the future will not return again to dust” (*BT Sanhedrin 92a*). According to the approach of the Torah we have three stages: this world, the time of the Messiah, and the World to Come.³⁴

Ibn Zaddik continues his discussion by indicating that in the messianic period, the resurrected will be sustained by God’s special light and will not need to eat or drink. This is similar to Moses’s state on Sinai. Ibn Zaddik appears to sense, however, that the problem with this approach is that for one who has already achieved an angelic state, resurrection appears to serve no purpose. As a partial solution to this dilemma, he again points to Moses, who despite having attained the level of the angels in his lifetime nevertheless desired to enter the Land of Israel. As for the wicked, their souls will be returned to their bodies and they will be consumed by fire and worms while still alive.

This latter narrative in which eternal reward and punishment belong to the soul and body together stands in sharp contrast to the earlier one, in which both the ultimate reward and the ultimate punishment belong to the soul alone, with the reward taking place in the spiritual world and the punishment confining the soul to the sphere of fire. To make matters even more confusing, Ibn Zaddik then

³³ *Microcosm 4.2, 78–79.*

³⁴ *Microcosm 4.2, 80.*

states that those who have not died before the messianic period will then die and “be conveyed to enduring reward and ever-existent pleasantness. They will all be conveyed to the World to Come, to the eternal good.”³⁵ There, they will enjoy the splendor of the Indwelling, without food, drink, or procreation.

In summary, in attempting to be faithful to both his Jewish sources and his Neoplatonic worldview, Ibn Zaddik creates a very confusing and inconsistent narrative. His Neoplatonic philosophy leads him to see ultimate reward and punishment as occurring immediately at death – namely, when the soul departs from the body and joins the spiritual world. This appears to make any subsequent reward and punishment involving the soul and body together superfluous. Yet the Jewish belief in bodily resurrection and the messianic period to which it is generally connected posits a future reward that is corporeal in nature. Ibn Zaddik attempts to spiritualize the messianic period as much as possible and to somehow reintroduce the World to Come as the final stage, at least for some. At the same time, he upholds the traditional Jewish view that the resurrected will live forever along with their bodies. His philosophy provides us with a good example of how difficult it is to be loyal both to a literal acceptance of the traditional Jewish statements regarding final reward and to the Neoplatonic view of the return of the purified soul to its source in the upper world, where it will continue to exist through eternity. With the attainment of this state, identified as the World to Come, there appears to be no room for any subsequent form of reward.

C

In the introduction to *Pereq Heleq* (*Sanhedrin*, chapter 10) in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides opens his discussion by outlining different views held by his coreligionists regarding the hoped-for future reward for living a life of fulfilling the commandments, all of which are based on biblical and rabbinic texts: 1) One will find one’s reward in the Garden of Eden, where the righteous will enjoy every material benefit without exertion on their part. Gehinnom is the place of punishment, where the bodies of the

³⁵ *Microcosm* 4.2, 81.

wicked will be burned and they will suffer every form of affliction. 2) The messianic era is the future reward. In this period, all people will be like kings, their bodies will be strengthened, and they will inhabit the land forever. The Messiah himself will live forever. Numerous other miracles will also take place in this period, such as the earth producing woven clothes and cooked bread. The punishment of the wicked will lie in their not being alive to enjoy the benefits of this period. 3) The resurrection of the dead is the reward, when a person will return to his family and relatives. He will eat and drink and not die again. Punishment will lie in not being resurrected. 4) Reward lies in the well-being of the body and the fulfillment of one's universal hopes in this world, such as enjoying the benefits of the land, fortune and progeny, a long and healthy life, security, the establishment of an independent monarchy, and the defeat of the nation's enemies. One's punishment lies in experiencing the opposite of this state. The fifth and final view presented by Maimonides, which he treats as being held by most Jews, is a combination of all the ones stated above: "They say that the Messiah will come, resurrect the dead, who will enter the Garden of Eden, eat and drink there, and remain in good health for as long as heaven is above the earth."³⁶

In presenting the different views of reward and punishment held by his coreligionists, Maimonides focuses solely on the individual's bodily state and on all the goods and pleasures accompanying it. Moreover, he deliberately omits the notion of the World to Come, despite the fact that it is with this notion that the first *mishnah* in *Pereq Ḥeleq* opens. His omission suggests that in his view, his coreligionists make no distinction between the World to Come and the messianic era, rabbinic statements to the contrary notwithstanding.³⁷ This in turn serves to underline the sharp distinction he draws between the two notions in the continuation of his discussion. Though there is

³⁶ For Maimonides' introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq*, I have used Moses Maimonides, *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Isaac Shailat (Jerusalem: Maaliyot Press, 1992), 361 (Hebrew translation, 130) (henceforth *Haqdamot*). All translations in the article are my own unless noted otherwise. For an English translation of this introduction, see J. Abelson, "Maimonides on the Jewish Creed," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 19 (1906): 24–58. This introduction was subsequently retranslated by Arnold J. Wolf. It appears in Isadore Twersky, ed., *A Maimonides Reader* (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 1972), 401–8.

³⁷ *BT Sanhedrin* 91b.

evidence to suggest that he was aware of Saadiah's approach to the subject, he ignores this approach completely in his own treatment of it.³⁸

Maimonides' primary purpose in the introduction is to advance the view of what he regards as the individual's true ultimate state – the eternal felicity of the rational soul, or specifically, as he will hint in different passages, the immortality of the incorporeal acquired intellect in its apprehension of God to the extent of its ability. This is how he goes on to interpret the rabbinic dictum, “In the World to Come there is no eating or drinking, no bathing or smearing oneself with oils, and no sexual intercourse, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the Indwelling (*Shekhinah*)” (*BT Berakhot* 17a):

The expression “their crowns on their heads” refers to the continuous existence of the soul by means of the continuous existence of what it knows, the two of them being one. This is mentioned by the adept of the philosophers in a manner whose explanation would be too lengthy to bring here. The expression “enjoy the splendor of the Indwelling” refers to the fact that this soul will take pleasure in what it knows of the Creator, just as the Holy Creatures and the other orders of angels take pleasure in what they grasp of God's existence. The good and the final end lie in reaching this elite company and attaining this level. The continuous existence of the soul throughout eternity, as we stated, is comparable to the continuous existence of the Creator, which is the reason for

³⁸ In his subsequent *Epistle to Yemen*, he explicitly cites from Saadiah's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*; see *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, ed. and trans. by Abraham Halkin and discussed by David Hartman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 114–16. Maimonides also overlooks at least one of the more recent notions of reward and punishment mentioned (and rejected) by Saadiah that would only later become popular in kabbalistic thought – namely, the transmigration of the soul. Since this notion was not mentioned in any of Maimonides' rabbinic sources and he clearly could not accept it due to his philosophical views of the nature of the human soul, he could easily omit any reference to it. As for the approaches of some of his other Jewish philosophical predecessors, he may well have been aware of at least some of them. One can even discern passages in his writings where he may have been directly reacting to some of these views, while in other passages, he may even have been borrowing from them.

the soul's continuous existence by its apprehension of God, as explained in the first philosophy.³⁹

Maimonides treats the notion of the World to Come being a reference to the eternal existence of the incorporeal intellect as one that is no longer known to the Jews, since the rabbinic sages presented it in allegorical terms due to the limited understanding of the masses. The vast majority of Jews, unaware of this fact, interpret their statements on the subject in a literal manner.⁴⁰ They see ultimate reward and punishment in entirely corporeal terms, not realizing that the greatest pleasure is the one that is completely spiritual – that is to say, intellectual – in nature, as Maimonides will go on to argue at length in the continuation of his discussion.

Much of Maimonides' introduction reflects his attempt to reorient his coreligionists' ways of thought from a focus on the corporeal to a focus on the incorporeal in thinking about one's ultimate end and aspiring to attain it. This is analogous to his teachings regarding the Deity being completely incorporeal rather than corporeal. Not only is incorporeal existence real – despite the fact that we tend to think that only what is corporeal exists, for only this can be sensed or imagined⁴¹ – but it is on a much higher level of the chain of being than corporeal existence. The true goal of humanity is to achieve a permanent state of incorporeal being, accompanied by eternal spiritual/intellectual felicity.

In the fifth view he presents, Maimonides essentially sketches a narrative of the various stages of reward and punishment. It is not clear what source he used for this narrative, if any. It may simply be the case that since most Jews are loyal to biblical and rabbinic views, and all the notions found in the first four views have sources in traditional literature, Maimonides himself tried to piece together the various notions in a coherent manner. Since he was not committed to this narrative, he certainly had no interest in addressing the multiple

³⁹ *Haqdamot*, 366 (Hebrew, 136).

⁴⁰ Maimonides devotes a section of his introduction to the interpretation of rabbinic midrash and how very few interpreters understand that many of the *midrashim* were meant to be interpreted allegorically.

⁴¹ Maimonides presents this position in several of his writings. See in particular his *Treatise on Resurrection*, in Halkin and Hartman, *Crises and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, 215.

questions that it raises.⁴² For Maimonides, ultimate reward and punishment will occur immediately on the individual's death – with the punishment apparently lying in the corruption of those soul that do not achieve the state of eternal intellection, as we shall see – and not on some unknown future date.

At the end of his discussion of the nature of the World to Come, and prior to his enumeration of the thirteen principles of faith, Maimonides completes his approach to reward and punishment by presenting his own interpretation of the various biblical and rabbinic notions he mentioned at the beginning of the introduction. His approach to these notions is predicated upon his view that the purpose of human existence is to attain intellectual and ethical perfection, as he already clarified in his general introduction to the *Commentary on the Mishnah*,⁴³ and that this is the end to which the Torah's commandments lead. The goods promised in the here and now to those fulfilling the commandments should primarily be regarded as a means of increasing one's knowledge of God unencumbered by all the physical hindrances that impede intellection – hunger, disease, war, and so forth – thereby enabling one to dedicate oneself more intensively to the goal of attaining the World to Come.

Maimonides treats the Garden of Eden as a fertile land on earth whose location God will reveal to human beings in the future, so that they may take pleasure living there. This land may also contain plants with special beneficial properties. Uncharacteristically, Maimonides does not take a stand as to the significance of Gehinnom, aside from indicating that it refers to the suffering that will afflict the evil and that the nature of this suffering is subject to controversy in the Talmud. One can ascertain from his description that in opposition to the Garden of Eden and the popular view of Gehinnom presented at the beginning of the introduction, he does not regard Gehinnom as a place at all, but rather as a metaphor.

⁴² For example, what is the relationship of the fourth view, which deals with the rewards in this world in a naturalistic matter, to the second view, which deals with the messianic period, a period distinguished by numerous miraculous events? Moreover, the messianic period is characterized by the Jews' return to the Land of Israel, so how exactly does the Garden of Eden fit into this story?

⁴³ See *Haqdamot*, 353–54 (Hebrew, 56–58).

More cryptic is Maimonides' view of the resurrection of the dead. He labels this belief a principle of the Torah and indeed terminates his list of thirteen principles with it, insisting that anyone who does not believe it is not to be reckoned as a member of the Jewish community. As in the case of all principles, a person denying resurrection is labeled a heretic and is excluded from the World to Come. However, resurrection, in Maimonides' view, is reserved for the righteous alone. The wicked will not be resurrected. Moreover, he has nothing to say about when resurrection is to occur and what the fate of the resurrected will be.

Turning to the Messiah and the messianic period, Maimonides focuses on eliminating the overt miracles that characterize some of the rabbinic descriptions of it. According to him, in this period, the Kingdom of Israel will be re-established, wisdom will flourish, wars will cease, and people will live longer since they will be free from adversity and distress. Yet the natural order will not change in any way. The miracles mentioned by the sages should be interpreted figuratively as indicating the ease in which people will earn their livelihood and attain the necessary material goods. The Messiah too will not live forever and will be succeeded by his descendants, though his kingdom may well continue to flourish for thousands of years due to the excellence of its government. The significance of this period, however, does not lie in the materialistic benefits that humanity will receive, as they are solely a means of achieving the true end. All those living in this period will find the ideal physical, social, and pedagogical conditions for attaining the World to Come.⁴⁴

In the presentation of his own view, Maimonides rejects the popular narrative he had ascribed to most Jews and returns to deal with its component parts. For him, all forms of promised material benefits, whether they be in the here and now for observing the commandments or in the messianic period, only serve as a means of pursuing true eternal felicity that belongs to the intellect alone. He

⁴⁴ *Haqdamot*, 366–68 (Hebrew, 137–39). For a discussion of Maimonides' approach to the messianic period, see in particular Aviezer Ravitzky, "To the Utmost of Human Capacity': Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel F. Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 221–56; Kenneth Seeskin, *Jewish Messianic Thoughts in an Age of Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 27–50; Menachem Kellner and David Gillis, *Maimonides the Universalist: The Ethical Horizons of the Mishnah Torah* (London: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 277–301.

appears to regard the Garden of Eden as ancillary to this story. It is not clear from his discussion when this place on earth, in accordance with a literal interpretation of the biblical story, will be discovered or who will move there.⁴⁵ When and where the evil ones will experience Gehinnom is even less clear, given the fact that Maimonides does not treat it as a place at all. Moreover, in discussing the resurrection of the dead, he implies that the wicked completely perish at death. This suggests that he may not have believed that the wicked will suffer after they die. Their “affliction” will lie in their extinction, like his earlier definition of the ultimate punishment, *karet* (being cut off).⁴⁶ His discussion also contains no hint of any temporary purgatory, where the souls of the wicked, along with others, may be purified by the suffering they experience for their sins.

More problematic is Maimonides’ approach to the cardinal Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead, as his readers already discerned in his lifetime. This led to controversies regarding this belief, with Maimonides feeling compelled to write an independent treatise on the subject.⁴⁷ If the messianic period is not characterized by any miracles and nature does not change in any way, when is the resurrection of the dead supposed to take place? Moreover, if the righteous already enjoy the ultimate reward, which is the eternal felicity of the intellect, at their death, what type of reward is it to be returned to their bodies? Rather than a reward, this would appear to be a punishment in the context of Maimonides’ thought. Further

⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that here, Maimonides does not hint towards a figurative interpretation of the Garden of Eden as he will do later on in *Guide* 1:2. In the introduction to *Mishnah Avot (Eight Chapters)*, chapter 8, in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, he does offer a figurative interpretation of part of this biblical story.

⁴⁶ See *Haqdamot*, 366 (Hebrew, 136–37).

⁴⁷ For an English translation of the *Treatise on Resurrection*, see Halkin and Hartman, *Crisis and Leadership*, 21133. A good, if dated summary of the conflict can be found in Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport, PA: Bayard Press, 1935), 39–65. Since then, more studies on the subject have been published, along with a number of important documents that shed added light on it. Of particular interest is the treatise on this issue penned by Maimonides’s disciple to whom he dedicated the *Guide*, Joseph Ibn Shim’on. The Judeo-Arabic original and the medieval Hebrew translation were edited by Sarah Stroumsa, *On the Beginnings of the Maimonidean Controversy in the East: Yosef Ibn Shim’on’s Silencing Epistle Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben-Zvi, 1999).

aggravating this problem is Maimonides' view of the human soul, which he develops in a subsequent section of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*; namely, the introduction to *Mishnah Avot* entitled *Eight Chapters*. His discussion there, and also in subsequent writings, strongly implies that there is no continuation of the human soul after its separation from the body and that only the acquired intellect continues to exist⁴⁸ – a point to which he appears to allude in the present discussion as well. This is how one should interpret Maimonides' citation of rabbinic dictum in his discussion of resurrection – “The evil even in their lifetime are called ‘dead,’ and the righteous even in death are called ‘living’” (*BT Berakhot* 18a)⁴⁹ – with the “righteous” denoting those who attain intellectual perfection rather than only moral perfection. The resurrection of the dead thus signifies the eternal existence of the acquired intellect after death. Hence, it is not only the souls of the wicked that perish at death, but rather all souls. Maimonides' complete failure to address any of these glaring issues in his discussion of resurrection is certainly perplexing, and it appears to hint at an esoteric view on the subject.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the acquired intellect in the context of Maimonides' thought and his sources, see, in particular, Alexander Altmann, “Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics,” in Altmann, *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modern Aufklärung* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 77–84; see also Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 137ff.

⁴⁹ Maimonides, *Haqdamot*, 367 (Hebrew, 138).

⁵⁰ To be sure, most readers of Maimonides, from medieval times to the present day, accept his belief in the literal resurrection of the dead – i.e., the return of the soul to the body – at face value. This is not true, however, of most academic students of his thought. I favor the interpretation that even his *Treatise on Resurrection* is to be read in an esoteric manner. In this work, Maimonides provides his readers with a number of hints that he does not interpret resurrection in a literal manner. Not only does he continuously stress the World to Come as the ultimate reward, but he is also interested in debunking a literal interpretation of most of the verses used to prove resurrection. At the end, he is left with two verses that “prove” resurrection (Daniel 12:2; 12:13), verses that could also easily be interpreted in a figurative manner, though Maimonides, in a not very convincing manner, argues against such an interpretation. He establishes an integral link between belief in resurrection and belief in miracles, but his true stance regarding miracles is also a controversial issue; see above, n. 21. It should also be noted that in this treatise too, Maimonides does not present a narrative tying together the various forms of reward and explaining them, despite the fact that the literal belief in resurrection for the souls who have already merited the World to Come

Reward and Punishment in Medieval Jewish Philosophy

In summary, there is only one true reward for Maimonides, the World to Come – that is, that attainment of the immortal acquired intellect that enjoys everlasting felicity in its continuous contemplation of God. It is also a state in which it is no longer the “I” as one thinks of oneself that continues to exist – no memories, feelings, desires, or anything else that characterizes our individuality and that is linked to our bodily state. For Maimonides, the true “I” is completely confined to knowledge of what is eternal and unchanging, culminating in the apprehension of God to the extent of the intellect’s capability. This state is essentially a natural consequence of the apprehension of God achieved in one’s lifetime, an apprehension that requires one to acquire the moral virtues in order to obtain it. All other forms of reward are not really rewards at all, but serve as aids in attaining this state. The only true punishment is in not attaining the World to Come, with the soul ceasing to exist at death.⁵¹ Much of Maimonides’ approach to reward and punishment appears to be based upon Aristotelian philosophical naturalism, which lies at the basis of his Jewish theological thought in general. This interpretation gains support from his subsequent writings, particularly the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Even in the passage from the introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq* cited above, his references to the “adept of the philosophers” and “first philosophy” – that is, Aristotelian metaphysics – certainly show how his view of the World to Come conforms to the prevalent view of the medieval Aristotelian philosophers, particularly Alfarabi’s earlier

certainly calls for such a narrative. For the argument that Maimonides did not accept a literal belief in resurrection, see, for example, Robert Kirschner, “Maimonides’ Fiction of Resurrection,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 52 (1982): 163–93. Subsequent thinkers who accepted Maimonides’s belief in resurrection, such as Ḥasdai Crescas, attempted to complete his unstated view on the matter and to create a coherent narrative in his name, as we shall see below.

⁵¹ Gehinnom certainly has no place at all in Maimonides’s scheme, for the human soul as such, according to most of the Aristotelian philosophers, has no continuation after death. Maimonides is willing to accept the Torah literally when it refers to a place called the Garden of Eden, though in this case too, he could just as easily have reverted to a figurative interpretation. At the same time, he accords the Garden very little significance in regard to future reward, nor does he see it as a miraculous place, but rather as one containing plants possessing exceptional properties.

position regarding the immortality of the intellect,⁵² and how he interprets the dictum of the sages regarding the World to Come accordingly. His overt rejection of miracles in discussing the messianic age reflects the philosophical view of the inviolability of nature, a point that appears to characterize his approach to miracles in general.⁵³ Certainly, what many had already construed in medieval times, and continue to construe – his *Treatise on Resurrection* notwithstanding – as hints to a figurative interpretation of the resurrection of the dead, equating it with the World to Come, supports the view that the God of Maimonides, like the God of Aristotle, operates solely within the order of nature, of which God is the First Cause.

In a crucial sense, Maimonides creates a simple narrative of reward and punishment, parts of it exoteric and parts of it esoteric, in which all supernatural elements are eliminated, and he interprets

⁵² For Alfarabi's approaches to the intellect and its immortality, see Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 44–73. Shlomo Pines presented the position that Maimonides ultimately adopted a skeptical position regarding the possibility of any metaphysical knowledge and that he accepted Alfarabi's later position denying any possibility for human immortality; see Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82–109. For an in-depth study of the skeptical approach in the interpretation of Maimonides's philosophy, see Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). A number of studies have been devoted to a rejection of Pines's interpretation, most notable among them Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect," 60–129; and Herbert A. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992): 49–103. Both these scholars have interpreted Maimonides as positing a lower level of knowledge, based on Avicenna's view of conjunction with the Active Intellect, than I have presented in this article based on Alfarabi's earlier views.

⁵³ In his various writings, including the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides upholds a belief in miracles, though he attempts to minimize their occurrence. For an argument that Maimonides held an esoteric doctrine on this subject and that he did not see miracles as immediate acts of God, but rather as ones that could be understood in a natural manner, see Howard Kreisel, "Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75 (1984): 106–14. For other approaches to Maimonides' view of miracles, see, for example, Hannah Kasher, "Biblical Miracles and the Universality of Natural Laws: Maimonides' Three Methods of Harmonization," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1998): 25–52; Y. Tzvi. Langermann, "Maimonides and Miracles: The Growth of a (Dis)Belief," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 147–72.

biblical passages and the teachings of the rabbinic sages accordingly. The messianic period is characterized by the optimum natural conditions for attaining the eternal pleasure experienced by the intellect in its continuous contemplation of God and the divine governance of the order of existents, which is the primary reason why one should long for its coming. In the meantime, each individual must strive to attain this goal in the prevailing conditions in which they find themselves. Even in the time of redemption, the Torah will continue to provide the best social path for achieving perfection and will remain forever binding upon the Jewish people. Maimonides would go on to repeat this narrative in his subsequent writings.⁵⁴

D

The most detailed philosophical discussion of human perfection and final reward in medieval Jewish philosophy is found in Ḥasdai Crescas's treatise *Light of the Lord*.⁵⁵ In this treatise, Crescas offers a philosophical critique of Aristotelian philosophy and a philosophical defense of many of the core tenets of Judaism. One of its central topics is the final end of human beings. On this matter, as well as on many others, Crescas wrestles with Maimonides' attitude. As we shall see, he is much closer to Nahmanides's approach to reward and punishment after a person's death, as is developed at great length in the latter's *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul (The Gate of Recompense)*.⁵⁶ Yet ultimately, Crescas's approach is characterized by a similar dissonance to the one encountered in Ibn Ṣadik's thought in his attempt to understand the place of the resurrection of the dead in reference to one's final reward. This reward is primarily conceived in terms of the eternal felicity of the disembodied soul.

⁵⁴ See, for example, "Laws of Repentance," 9:1-2; "Laws of Kings and their Wars," 12:1-5.

⁵⁵ Ḥasdai Crescas, *Sefer Or Hashem*, ed. Shlomo Fischer (Jerusalem: Sifrei Ramot, 1990); Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, trans. Roslyn Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a comprehensive study of Crescas's thought, see Warren Zev Harvey, *Rabbi Ḥisdai Crescas* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2010).

⁵⁶ This composition is part of a larger treatise, *Torat ha-Adam*; see Moses Nahmanides, *Kitvei Rabbenu Moshe ben Nahman*, ed. C.B. Chavel, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1964), 264-311. Chavel also translated this composition into English and it appears in his *Ramban: Writings & Discourses*, vol. 2 (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1978).

Crescas's approach to ultimate felicity finds its most detailed and poignant expression in the second section of the treatise, in his discussion of the sixth of the foundational beliefs without which there cannot be the belief that the Torah is from Heaven – namely, that the divine law has a purpose. In his view, this purpose is to bring its adherents to true human perfection. Reaching this state brings in its wake ultimate felicity. According to Crescas, the human soul, which is the “form” or essence of human beings, is a spiritual substance that is predisposed to receive knowledge, but that in itself does not possess knowledge *in actu*. By defining the soul as a “form,” while the body is “matter,” Crescas follows the view of Aristotle and his followers. Yet as is the case with all entities composed of form or matter, this view entails the corruption of the individual on the separation of the soul from the body at death. Form does not exist independently of matter, thereby precluding the immortality of the soul. Crescas's solution, reminiscent of Ibn Daud's position with which he was familiar,⁵⁷ is to treat the rational soul not only as a “form,” but also as a “substance” (*eẓem*), leaving open the possibility of its independent existence from the body. At the same time, he is exceptionally critical of the Aristotelian view that only the acquired intellect attained as a result of intellection is immortal, and he devotes a lengthy discussion to refuting this view. For Crescas, only by positing the continued existence of the rational soul *per se* do we have a basis for the possibility of the experience of eternal felicity, an experience that cannot be accounted for by the existence of the theoretical intellect alone. Intellection may lead to pleasure, but it is not the faculty that is directly responsible for the experience of it. Pleasure lies in the satisfaction of the will in its attainment of the object of desire. Moreover, Crescas maintains that human perfection and ultimate felicity lie in the love of God rather than in pure intellection alone. This love results from both knowledge and action.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ For a discussion of Ibn Daud's view of the rational soul and his proofs of its incorporeality and immortality, see T.A.M Fontaine, *In Defense of Judaism: Abraham Ibn Daud* (Assen and Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1990), 49–82. Crescas mentions Ibn Daud in *Light of the Lord* 1, introduction.

⁵⁸ *Light of the Lord* 2.6.1. For a study contrasting Crescas's approach to pleasure and that of Maimonides, see Warren Zev Harvey, “Crescas versus Maimonides on Knowledge and Pleasure,” in *A Straight Path: Studies on Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger et al. (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1987), 113–23. The problem

With the stage being set for the continuous existence of the soul after its separation from the body, Crescas is in a position to try to put together the various traditional notions of reward and punishment. This he does in the third section of his treatise, in his discussion of various beliefs mandated by the divine law. He begins by reiterating and expanding upon the belief in the immortality of the rational soul.⁵⁹ Next, he turns to the various forms of reward and punishment, beginning with the physical forms that occur in the here and now followed by the spiritual forms experienced immediately after death. Based on rabbinic sayings, Crescas describes the reward of the soul as the felicity it attains after its departure from the body in its greater apprehension of God and its continuous and eternal cleaving to the *Shekhinah* (Indwelling), the highest level of spiritual being. This is what is meant by the rabbinic notion of enjoying the splendor of the Indwelling. The level of felicity achieved varies from soul to soul in proportion to the love of God it attained while attached to the body. The punishment of the wicked lies in the great sorrow that the soul suffers, surrounded, as it were, by darkness, which the sages figuratively describe as the suffering of burning in Gehinnom. The punishment of each soul also varies, with some suffering this punishment for a limited period, having been cleansed in this manner from their sins,⁶⁰ while other souls may deteriorate completely.

Having described what appears to be the ultimate reward and punishment on the death of the individual, which involves the soul alone, Crescas is faced with the difficult challenge of finding a place for the resurrection of the dead in this narrative. In attempting to remain faithful to the Jewish tradition as well as to reconcile conflicting rabbinic views on the subject, he modifies what appears to be his initial stance as to what the World to Come is and what should

remains regarding those who die young and who have not had a chance to pursue this goal. In other words, while the human soul may be eternal in principle, Crescas agrees that it still requires some activation of its rational power in order to merit eternal felicity. In his view, the rabbinic sages, in their saying, “When do the young merit the life of the World to Come? When they know o say ‘amen’,” are thereby hinting to the minimum cognizance required to attain this state. Crescas locates this statement in *Midrash Tanhuma*, but it has come down to us in *Yalqut Shim'oni Isaiah*, 247. Subsequently, Crescas treats circumcision too as a sufficient condition for the attainment of immortality; see *Light of the Lord* 3.2.3.8

⁵⁹ *Light of the Lord* 3.1.2.

⁶⁰ *Light of the Lord* 3.1.3.1.

be considered the ultimate and eternal reward. Crescas contrasts the views of Maimonides and Nahmanides, who, like Crescas, wrestled mightily with Maimonides' approach in his discussion of this subject. Against the interpretation that I offered above, Crescas, following Nahmanides, interprets Maimonides' belief in resurrection to be a literal one. Nor does he attribute to him the view that the acquired intellect alone is immortal – the Aristotelian view he negated in the previous section of the treatise. Rather, in Crescas's opinion, Maimonides too believed that the rational soul attains immortality, and experiences felicity in the afterlife with its departure from the body. The problem then becomes what the purpose of resurrection is if this is the case. Crescas, again following Nahmanides, ascribes to Maimonides the unstated view that resurrection enables the souls of the righteous to return to the physical world and advance in their apprehension. They thereby achieve a greater level of felicity when they return to the World to Come after departing from their bodies for a second time.⁶¹ Crescas points out that as opposed to Maimonides, Nahmanides sees the World to Come as referring to a future state not yet in existence – namely, the period after the resurrection.⁶² The resurrected will not die again, but will live forever in their bodies, though they will have no need of food and drink.⁶³ In a crucial sense, this view, as Nahmanides explicitly notes, is close to that of Saadiah.⁶⁴ It is these two conceptions of the World to Come that Crescas must mitigate.

Resurrection, in Crescas's view, is the ultimate miracle that will come about at Elijah's hands in the midst of the messianic period, not at the beginning of it. By means of this miracle, the human species will reach its final end, since it will silence all doubts regarding belief in God.⁶⁵ This miracle, however, will not involve all those who have died.

⁶¹ See *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul*, 309–10. This view also presupposes that for Maimonides, there can be no advancement of knowledge with the separation of the soul from the body. This was in fact Gersonides's position with regard to the eternal human intellect, with which Crescas was familiar.

⁶² In Nahmanides's view, the "place" of the soul immediately after death is what the sages refer to as the Garden of Eden, not the World to Come, and he criticizes Maimonides on this point; see *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul*, 306.

⁶³ *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.1.

⁶⁴ *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul*, 311. Nahmanides does not cite Saadiah's treatment of this subject in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, but rather his *Commentary on Daniel*.

⁶⁵ *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.2.

Based on rabbinic tradition, Crescas confines resurrection to the Jewish people, and among them, only to the completely righteous and the completely wicked. The resurrected will experience eternal bliss or suffering in accordance with their deserts, as taught in Daniel 12:2. In this manner, divine justice will be manifest to all the living. Crescas sees no problem in the all-powerful God restoring the soul to the body formed from the same composition of elements to which it was attached before.⁶⁶ As opposed to Nahmanides, he prefers the interpretation that the World to Come refers both to the state of the soul after its departure from the body and to the state of those who are resurrected. In this manner, he resolves what he sees as conflicting statements in rabbinic tradition regarding this notion.⁶⁷ While those resurrected will live forever in this state – no longer eating, drinking, or having intercourse, but still worshipping God and keeping the Torah – those living at the time of the resurrection will live regular physical lives and die. Due to the impact of resurrection on their beliefs and practices, however, they will all assuredly earn “a portion in the World to Come.”⁶⁸

The problems that emerge from Crescas’s approach are evident. In his initial treatment of ultimate felicity, the disembodied soul is said to exist forever in this state. This felicity is treated as being far superior to any felicity experienced while still living in the body. Yet in Crescas’s treatment of resurrection, it is precisely the most righteous – namely, those who attain the highest level of felicity – who will take part in this miracle and continue to live forever in a bodily state.⁶⁹ As for the most wicked individuals, in Crescas’s initial treatment of their punishment after death, their souls will apparently completely deteriorate due to the suffering they experience. In his discussion of resurrection, on the other hand, Crescas sees them being resurrected and experiencing eternal suffering in their bodily state.

⁶⁶ *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.4.

⁶⁷ *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.4. Crescas tries to show, however, that Nahmanides’s interpretation that the World to Come refers only to the period following resurrection is also possible.

⁶⁸ *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.4.

⁶⁹ Crescas does not address the philosophical problem of how it is that a body composed of the basic elements does not undergo corruption, but presumably he sees this as part of the miracle.

He thereby presents a problematic picture of final reward and punishment, in his attempt to be loyal to rabbinic tradition. He suggests a partial response to this problem when he points out the great merit of being part of this awesome miracle and its significance for others, and not only the resurrected. Yet this hardly solves the fundamental problem that according to Crescas's own description, the felicity of the disembodied soul is far greater than any felicity experienced by the embodied soul and that in this state, the soul is closer to the spirituality (and incorporeality) of the divine world.

Conclusion

The attempts to create a consistent narrative of reward and punishment in medieval Jewish philosophy revolve around two poles – biblical verses and rabbinic statements on one side and philosophical notions on the other. Saadiah Gaon, in a pioneering endeavor, developed an essentially consistent picture of reward and punishment. His is a picture that incorporates a number of philosophical conceptions, but for the most part, it is based on making sense of the various biblical and rabbinic teachings regarding this subject. Saadiah attempts to avoid figurative interpretations as much as possible, which is true of his philosophy in general, and mostly resorts to them in cases in which there is an inconsistency between biblical verses or between verses and rabbinic tradition. In Saadiah's narrative, the soul is a separate entity, which can exist, but cannot function without a body. The World to Come is a world yet to be created, following the messianic period, in which human beings will live forever with their souls attached to their bodies. Saadiah sees no difficulty for God, who created the world *ex nihilo*, to reunite the soul with the body in the future while it continues to exist in an inanimate state in the interim. While his view of the soul is primarily based on the philosophical literature with which he was acquainted, his narrative of future reward and punishment is almost entirely based on traditional sources. His philosophical view is also similar to the traditional view in that it sees the individual after their resurrection and subsequent transfer to the World to Come as maintaining the personality developed during their first life. In short, for Saadiah, human life, whether in this world or the next, lies in the union of body and soul.

Given the centrality of the idea of the purification of the soul and its ascent to its true home immediately after its separation from the body in Neoplatonic philosophy, it is clear that Jewish Neoplatonic thinkers could not accept Saadiah's picture, certainly not *in toto*. While this fundamental Neoplatonic notion preserves the idea of the existence of the soul after death, it stands in sharp conflict with traditional Jewish beliefs. Once one has immediately earned one's ultimate reward, which involves the soul alone, released from all bodily constraints, any subsequent form of reward would appear to be superfluous, if not worse. Ibn Zaddik attempts to create a coherent narrative that maintains the Neoplatonic idea of the immediate fate of the wise and righteous soul after death on one hand and the traditional belief in the resurrection of the dead in the messianic period on the other, but he essentially fails in this endeavor.

In the interpretation of Maimonides to which I subscribe, I see him as being loyal to philosophical notions of the ultimate human state and as esoterically alluding to figurative interpretations of the forms of reward and punishment in the Jewish tradition that are incompatible with these notions – particularly the resurrection of the dead. Following Aristotle and his followers, Maimonides also cannot accept the existence of the soul after death and its experience of pain and sorrow. Only the perfect intellect merits a form of immortality and ultimate felicity. His is a straightforward and consistent picture that sees the expression of God's governance solely in terms of the natural order. It is an exceptionally elitist picture, which holds no real hope for the vast majority of human beings, at least in terms of future reward. Maimonides understands that much of this picture cannot be presented exoterically due to the harmful effects it might have on the commitment of the vast majority of Jews to Jewish belief and, by extension, practice. Yet even for many of the intellectual elite, this picture of ultimate reward is hardly appealing. It posits as the ultimate state one in which there is no individuality; the "I" disappears to be replaced by the impersonal knowledge characterizing the theoretical intellect.⁷⁰ Basic Jewish beliefs regarding reward and punishment that Maimonides can interpret as

⁷⁰ The impersonality of the eternal human intellect is even more true in Maimonides' thought if he accepted Ibn Bajja's view that the individual intellect does not survive, but becomes one with the transcendent intellect. See his remark on the subject in *Guide of the Perplexed* 1.74 (seventh method).

being consistent with the order of nature, such as the messianic period and the Garden of Eden, are accepted, while the supernatural elements that characterize them are eliminated, and at the same time their significance for the individual is lessened. In short, Maimonides remains true to his intellect's judgment in its understanding of the human being's perfection and ultimate fate, and he interprets the sayings of the rabbinic sages accordingly.

Maimonides, who favors the Aristotelian view that only the pure actualized intellect, and not the rational soul, survives, certainly cannot accept Ibn Zaddik's picture,⁷¹ let alone Saadiah's. Yet he shares with Ibn Zaddik, and against Saadiah, the view that the World to Come is not a world that is to be created, but rather that it is one that exists in the here and now. It is the world of incorporeal existents, which the perfect human intellect joins at the moment of death and the final separation from the body. Future Jewish thinkers who grappled with this subject were hard pressed to ignore Maimonides' conception of the World to Come, despite the difficulties it poses to the role of resurrection or the messianic period when thinking about the final reward.

Crescas, following Nahmanides, attempted to surmount the difficulties of creating a narrative that was faithful to Jewish tradition, yet still in harmony with rational thought. He offers a philosophical critique of the Aristotelian view that pure intellect alone survives and attempts to provide a firm philosophical basis for the notion that the human soul is immortal. This enables him, as in the cases of Saadiah and Ibn Zadik, to paint a picture of ultimate and permanent felicity in which the personality of the individual, at least to some extent, is also maintained in the afterlife.⁷² He also interprets Maimonides along

⁷¹ Maimonides may not have been aware of Ibn Zaddik's view, but he was certainly aware of a similar view held by Avicenna. See Pines's remarks on the issue of individual immortality in Maimonides' thought in the introduction to his translation of the *Guide*, "The Philosophic Sources of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:ciii-civ.

⁷² In *Light of the Lord* 3.2.3.7, Crescas is critical of the belief in the transmigration of the soul on philosophical grounds, though it had become an accepted kabbalistic belief by his time. He argues that this belief entails that a baby is born with a potential intellect while it simultaneously possesses an actual intellect from its previous lifetime. It may be that the individuality that the soul attains when attached to a particular body, and the view of resurrection as its reattachment to that body, also played a role in his thinking.

similar lines. Yet due to the conflict between his philosophical thought and his loyalty to rabbinic tradition, Crescas, like Ibn Z̄adik before him, presents an inconsistent position on the question of whether ultimate eternal felicity is experienced by the disembodied soul or the embodied one. While his philosophical thought clearly favored the former, his loyalty to tradition led him to prefer the latter. In his final picture, it is precisely those who reach the highest level of love of God in their lifetime, and the highest level of felicity with the departure of their souls from their bodies, who will permanently return to their bodies at the time of resurrection. In the context of his philosophical views, they would thereby appear to be transferred to a permanently inferior state on becoming reattached to their bodies, though they will no longer experience basic physical needs.

As we have seen, the story of medieval Jewish philosophical attempts to create a coherent narrative of ultimate reward and punishment is a story of how philosophers read Scripture and interpreted rabbinic teachings in light of philosophical conceptions – what they were prepared to accept literally, and what they believed should be interpreted figuratively. At the same time, it is a story of how a literal reading of Scripture and rabbinic sayings led them to at times modify or even abandon some of their philosophical views. Finally, it is also a story of how we think of the “I,” whether in this world or the next. Do we think of ourselves as essentially corporeal beings, as Saadiah did, and thus we cannot imagine true reward and punishment not involving our rational souls being attached to bodies, capable of at least some forms of physical activity and still possessing attachments to other corporeal beings? Or do we think of our true selves, our very essence as human beings, solely in terms of the universal and impersonal knowledge we have attained of eternal truths, as did Maimonides following the Aristotelian tradition? Or do we think of our true selves only in terms of our rational soul – though not only its intellectual apprehension of eternal truths, but also its emotions and desires – with the soul of the individual now capable of enjoying a far better, more purified state of being when it is no longer weighed down by the body, as Ibn Z̄adik and Crescas did? Yet it is precisely this view that also led to the dissonance in their thought when attempting to create a narrative of final reward and punishment based on a literal interpretation of biblical and rabbinic views on the subject. With the strong soul/body distinction that Greek philosophy left in Jewish thought in general from the Middle Ages till

Howard Kreisel

the present, accompanied by its marked tendency to deprecate the body and all things material, this dissonance characterizes many subsequent thinkers as well. This, however, is a subject for a future study.

Trust, Hope, and Fortitude as Theological Virtues in Joseph Albo's *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*

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Abstract

Joseph Albo's *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* was one of the most popular Jewish works of the later Middle Ages. This article shows how in this work, Albo uniquely adopts, develops, and theologizes the ethical categories of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, such as happiness, friendship, and the virtues, in order to strengthen the commitment of his Jewish followers who were being induced to convert to Christianity. His objective was to convince the Jews that they must remain loyal to their faith, notwithstanding the worldly benefits that they might accrue by becoming Christians. Albo proceeds by arguing that the relationship between God and Israel represents the highest form of loving relationship based on utility, pleasure, and goodness, but that it is ultimately one that is reasonless from God's perspective. Hence, it is an enduring relationship that cannot be undone, as avowed in the biblical covenant between God and Israel, promising eternal happiness that transcends the limited worldly happiness of human flourishing. While the moral virtues are necessary for human flourishing and are perfected and applied to particulars by the Torah in a manner that cannot be achieved by the human intellect alone, the sustainability of the covenant requires a supplementary set of theological virtues. For Albo, the theological virtues of trust, hope, and fortitude are necessary for the maintenance of the covenant and the Torah, especially during times of adversity. All three traits bolster the Jewish people's ability to withstand societal and religious pressures to abandon Judaism in times of duress.

Introduction

Joseph Albo's *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* (*Book of Roots* or *Book of Principles*) was one of the most popular Jewish works of the later Middle Ages.¹ It laid

¹ Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* (*Book of Principles*), trans. Isaac Husik (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1929–1930).

out the structure of Jewish beliefs in a rational and accessible manner that allowed Jews to defend their religious commitments when under pressure to convert to Christianity during the fifteenth century. Much of the scholarship on Albo has dismissed this book as a work of popular theology that merely repeats and synthesizes the arguments of earlier Jewish philosophers in a more simplified form.² I want to argue instead that there is an innovative thread that runs through the work. This becomes evident in the way that Albo uniquely adopts and develops the ethical categories of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, such as happiness, friendship, and the virtues, with the larger purpose of defining the religious project of the Torah.³ Yet Albo is different from earlier Jewish interpreters of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, such as Maimonides, Gersonides and Ibn Kaspi, in that he reads the work through the prism of Crescas' more conservative theology whereby God is understood as knowing *all* particulars as particulars and is directly involved in the activities of human life.⁴

² The unoriginality of Albo's thought is the dominant view in the scholarship. See for example: Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iv (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1894), 239-240; Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 275; Isaac Husik, *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1966), 406-407; Eliezer Schweid, *The Classic Jewish Philosophers: From Saadia Through the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 424; Haim Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 487. Though, recent work has challenged this assumption. See for example: Dror Ehrlich, *The Thought of R. Joseph Albo: Esoteric Writing in the Late Middle Ages* (Givat Shmuel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009) and Shira Weiss, *Joseph Albo on Free Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was the central text on ethics for Jews and Christians in the late Middle Ages. Samuel ben Judah of Marseille's translated Averroes' *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* into Hebrew in the early 1320s and the *Nicomachean Ethics* was translated into Hebrew from the Latin translation of Robert Grosseteste by Meir Alguades in the early fifteenth century in Spain. For an overview of the reception of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the Middle Ages, see George Wieland, "The Reception and Interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics*," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, eds. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 662-668.

⁴ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 23 (IV 3): "God's knowledge, being infinite, embraces everything that happens in the world without necessitating change in God, and without destroying the category of the contingent... God's knowledge embraces everything that happens in the world, and that nothing happens by accident without being known in advance."

Historical context plays an important role in understanding Albo's broader intention. It was at this time that some Jewish theologians suspected that the Aristotelian worldview had the negative affect of weakening the popular commitment to religious and communal loyalty when Jews were under pressure to convert to Christianity.⁵ If religion, according to Aristotelian philosophers, is just a means to perfecting one's moral virtues and obtaining intellectual knowledge, and there is no promise of providential reward and punishment for one's religious actions, what advantage is there for the average person to continue practicing a persecuted religion? A Jewish convert to Christianity in the fifteenth century would have likely believed that he could live a life of safety, morality, and enlightenment better as a Christian in Spain than as a Jew. This is especially true if the outcome of Aristotelian philosophy is to see all religion as inherently utilitarian. One can find an example of such a critique in Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov's *Sefer ha-Emunot* (*Book of Beliefs*) where he explains the common reasoning advanced for Jewish conversion to Christianity as thinking that

it is a vain thing to hold that the soul will be rewarded for its good deeds and punished for its evildoing, or to have faith in Paradise and Hell and the great day of Judgment and the Resurrection of the dead, or to cherish any hope for the body once the soul has departed, for what is it then but a stinking carcass? Nor is the wise man better off than the fool, or the righteous different from the wicked, for what shall their intellect avail them if it remains with the corpse that is

⁵ Benzion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain from the Late 14th Century to the Early 16th Century According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 111-120. Some scholars have questioned the extent to which philosophy and philosophers had an impact on the decision of Jews to convert to Christianity, since there were many philosophers who were part of the polemic with Christianity in the fifteenth century and thus against conversion. See: Daniel J. Lasker, "Averroistic Trends in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Late Middle Ages," *Speculum* 55 (1980), 294-304, and *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2007); and Shalom Sadik, "When Maimonideans and Kabbalists Convert to Christianity," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24 (2017), 145-167. My argument here, however, is not trying to prove or disprove historically the extent to which Aristotelian philosophy was the dominant cause leading to conversion, but merely to show to what extent this premise is central to Albo's theology and perception of the threat.

trodden underfoot? Equally it follows that of the righteous man, who strives after justice all his life but whose intellect is not actualized so that it might become, along with the other actualized intellects from among the various nations, one of the Intelligences, nothing remains [after death]; whereas the evildoer, if his wickedness, no matter how great its extent, does not keep him from intellection, so that he acquires true knowledge in spite of it, he, regardless of his bad qualities, cannot be prevented [from surviving].⁶

One possible reaction would be to reject philosophy and the thinking life, considering there to be a choice between philosophic atheism and blind religious obedience. But Albo takes a different approach that recognizes the potential dangers of philosophy as a vehicle leading to the abandonment of Judaism in favor of Christianity, while still speaking in the universal language of philosophy. Instead of rejecting the intellect and its relationship to religion, viewing it as a threat to the Jewish religion, Albo instead adopts the universal categories of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to show that these ideas are best used for the defense of the Torah and the Jewish people, and indeed are best realized within Jewish tradition.

In this light, I am going to discuss how Albo reinterprets two central ideas from the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the purpose of defending Judaism. First, Albo takes Aristotle's discussion of friendship and applies it to the loving bond between God and Israel, and in doing so defines the covenantal relationship portrayed in the Torah as the highest form of friendship. Second, Albo describes the Torah as the means for delineating how to practically apply the moral virtues outlined in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, such as courage and moderation, while also supplying a set of higher theological virtues--trust (*bitahon*), hope (*tikvah*) and fortitude (*savlanut*)-- for maintaining the covenantal friendship between the Jewish people and God. The moral virtues prepare one for worldly happiness, while the theological virtues prepare one for spiritual happiness.

⁶ Quotation from Isaac Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol ii (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1961), 235.

Friendship and the Covenant (*Brit*) between God and Israel

One of the pinnacles of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the rich discussion of friendship (*philia*) in Books 8-9. Aristotle explores the psychology of what motivates human relationships and creates categories for these different types of friendships under the tripartite division of the useful, the pleasurable, and the good.⁷ He also differentiates between relationships based in equality, where each party is equally contributing what is useful, pleasurable, and good, and those based in inequality, where one party is proportionally contributing more, due to an imbalance in status or power, such as between a monarch and the people he rules, or between a parent and child.⁸

Albo adopts these categories in *Ikkarim* III 35-37 from Aristotle to describe the relationship between God and Israel as described in the Torah. In addition, it should be noted that here Albo is also influenced by Crescas who describes God as the ultimate lover, and ranked love over intellect as the highest goal of the Torah.⁹ According to Albo, the love between God and Israel is an example of an unequal relationship, since God has infinitely more power than human beings. Yet he submits that God does not desire human beings to attempt to repay what He gives them. He compares this imbalance to the loving relationship between a parent and child, pointing out that the gift of existence that a parent gives a child is impossible to be repaid or completely equalized.¹⁰ As Albo articulates it, "God supplies the wants of mankind, and all that He expects from them is to do honor to His name."¹¹ This form of loving relationship is expressed in the Bible

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 165-170 (8.2-8.4).

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 174-175, 181-183 (8.7, 8.12).

⁹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 316-351 (III 35-37) and Ḥasdai Crescas, *Light of the Lord (Or Hashem)*, trans. Roslyn Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 117-119 (I 3.5) and 215-225 (II 6.1). See: Warren Zev Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Ḥasdai Crescas* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 98-118.

¹⁰ Aristotle uses the parental analogy to make the point that in the parent-child relationship, the love of the parent for the child will always be stronger than the love of the child to the mother, even if the child strives to repay the parent for everything given to them. He gives two reasons: (a) the child is a part of the parent, like a tooth or hair, and (b) the parent has longer to love the child- they love their children from the moment of birth, whereas children begin to love their parents years after birth. See: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 181 (8.12).

¹¹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 344 (III 37).

through the language of covenant (*brit*), which is the performative act developed to concretize the relationship. Albo describes this concretely, saying that the “word covenant (*brit*) is applied to affirmation or oath or something firm which is performed by two persons to bind them to each other in love (*ha-ahavah*).”¹² In explaining the inauguration of a covenant in the Bible, he shows why it is rooted in love. He first describes how the process begins by cutting an animal in two parts, with the covenantal parties then proceeding to pass between the two parts. Albo explains that the poetic significance behind this incongruous practice is to teach that a covenant is a permanent bond, and just as the two parts of the animal were one body when alive, whereby each part felt the pain of the other, so too are the two parties making the covenant like one body in a loving and inseparable bond.¹³

Moreover, Albo describes how this loving relationship with God signifies the perfection of three ends: utility, pleasure, and goodness. It demonstrates utility in reminding us that God graciously gives life to all living beings (*honen ve-noten ha-metzi’ut le-khol nimitzah*).¹⁴ Likewise, it exemplifies pleasure in reminding us that God created not only what is necessary for us to live, but also provides luxuries to human beings which are not necessary for their bare existence (*ha-me’angim she-einam hekhrekhi’im*).¹⁵ It also reflects goodness in pointing to the fact that God is the source of absolute good and is without evil (*ha-tov ha-gamur she-ein bo ra’kellal*).¹⁶ Albo also sees these attributes metaphorically expressed in the Shema: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). He interprets “with all your heart” to refer to love of the good, “with all your soul” to refer to love of the useful, and “with all your might” to refer to love of the pleasurable.¹⁷

Albo also maintains that God makes a choice to form a relationship with a specific group that is different than his relationship with the rest of humanity, symbolized by the covenant with Abraham and his descendants. As part of the covenant, God gave to Israel a divine law, the Torah, that guides its adherents to true

¹² Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 440 (IV 45).

¹³ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 441-442 (IV 45).

¹⁴ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 318 (III 35).

¹⁵ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 318-319 (III 35).

¹⁶ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 318 (III 35).

¹⁷ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 319-320 (III 35).

spiritual happiness and immortality (*ha-hatzlāḥah ha-amitit she-hi hatzlaḥat ha-nefesh ve-ha-hisharut ha-nitzḥi*).¹⁸ This bond is not just existent as part of the divine law itself, but is built into the very relationship between God and the specific nation of Israel.¹⁹ One example of this unique bond, for Albo, is the sabbath, which is described in the Bible as “a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever” (Exod. 31:17). He explains that this means that the Sabbath is a sign of the bond with God that is forever attached to the nation of Israel. Through this bond, they will attain eternal happiness (*ha-hatzlāḥah ha-nitzḥit*) and ultimately a union with God, even suggesting that those who observe the sabbath can produce changes in nature.²⁰

Albo describes this type of love as a passionate love that is reasonless (*bli shum ta'am*), with God's reasonless love for Israel embodied by the term *ḥeshek* in the Bible.²¹ By reasonless he means that it cannot be reduced to a natural cause that can be explained through the use of the human intellect. However, Albo notes that even though God's relationship to Israel is the highest expression of utility, pleasure, and the good, he contends that it is not God's reason for making the covenant.²² Strangely enough, Albo's proof-text for God's reasonless love derives from the story of the rape of Dinah by Shechem, son of Hamor, in Genesis 34. Albo uses a statement made by Hamor in which he justifies Shechem's behavior in a conversation with Jacob and his sons and offers to arrange a marriage after the rape. Hamor says: “The soul of my son Shechem longeth (*ḥashkah nafsho*) for your daughter” (Gen. 34:8). Albo adds a comment to Hamor's explanation: “even though he can find one more beautiful.”²³ Certainly one may question Albo's choice of examples regarding whether it is apt to draw a parallel between God and the father of a rapist defending his son's behavior. However, there may be more than meets the eye in the connection Albo makes. It should first be noted that the statement is not made by Shechem, but by his father, Hamor,

¹⁸ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. i, 79 (I 7) and vol. i, 173 (I 21).

¹⁹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. ii, 65-66 (II 11) and vol. iii, 273 (III 29).

²⁰ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. ii, 65-66 (II 11).

²¹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 346-348 (III 37). The nature of *ḥeshek* as reasonless love has been analyzed in Warren Zev Harvey, “Albo on the Reasonlessness of True Love” *Iyyun* 49 (2000), 83-86 and Weiss, *Joseph Albo on Free Choice*, 150-151 and 156-165.

²² Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 346-348 (III 37).

²³ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 346 (III 37).

negotiating on his behalf. Like any good father, Hamor will tend to see the best in his son and will also try to find some goodness underlying his bad behavior. Hamor's statement about his son's passionate and reasonless love, in Albo's reading, is what any good father would say about his son. And perhaps here lies the similarity between God and Hamor. Albo writes that God's love for Israel is not based on their perfection or imperfection. In fact, he argues that if God was choosing by a standard of perfection, the Jews would not be the ideal choice, since they are not the most numerous and they have not always acted righteously.²⁴ Like a parent's reasonless love for a child, Albo argues that God's love for Israel is independent of all natural and rational considerations. Even if God has a hidden reason, at least from our perspective, it is not based on a rational choice that we can understand.

One can detect the polemical context out of which Albo's exegetical writing derives. Learning from his teacher Crescas, Albo uses passages from the scripture itself as a subtle response to the Christian pressure to convert. The Christian supersessionist argument is that God's love has changed from the Jews to the Christians, whereby Christians are now the new Israel. This is based on the premise that Jewish behavior has justified God's changing his love to a new lover. Albo's response is that God's choice of Israel does not fit into the categories of friendship as delineated by Aristotle, since it is ultimately not based on a reason and therefore cannot be changed by a new reason. It is rooted in a transcendent cause and is thus timeless. Albo's contention is meant to encourage his Jewish readers who may be facing pressure to convert to Christianity to reconsider and strengthen their loyalty to the Torah and Jewish people.

Trust (*Bitahon*), Hope (*Tikvah*) and Fortitude (*Savlanut*)

In order to defend the transcendent loving covenant between God and Israel, Albo articulates three virtues that support it: trust, hope, and fortitude. These virtues are especially necessary during times of persecution and despair, when there is a strong temptation to abandon one's community, faith, and tradition to join those who are stronger and possess more power.

²⁴ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 347 (III 37).

In defending the Jewish covenant with God as a friendship that is eternal, unchanging, and reasonless, Albo develops these theological virtues to support this enterprise in *Ikkarim* IV 46-48. Let me note that the term “theological virtues” is not a term that Albo explicitly uses, but a category of virtues developed by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa* (introduced in 1-2 and developed in detail in 2-2).²⁵ Aquinas takes what Aristotle refers to as happiness, *eudaimonia*, and categorizes it as “incomplete happiness,” since it is a state we achieve by means of our natural human aptitudes. This is distinguished from complete happiness, *beatitudo*, which is the supernatural union with God. The means to achieve *beatitudo* lies beyond what we can achieve on our own.²⁶ One finds a similar distinction in the work of Albo’s teacher, Ḥasdai Crescas, who in *Light of the Lord* distinguishes between “bodily happiness” (*hatzlaḥot gufiyot*) / “temporary happiness” (*hatzlaḥot zemaniyot*) and “psychic happiness” (*hatzlaḥah ha-nafshit*) / “eternal happiness” (*hatzlaḥah ha-nitzḥit*). It is similarly continued in Albo’s *Ikkarim* between “corporeal happiness” (*hatzlaḥot gashmiyot*) and “the true happiness, which is psychic happiness and immortality” (*ha-hatzlaḥah ha-amitit she-hi hatzlaḥat ha-nefesh ve-ha-hisharut ha-nitzḥi*) / “eternal happiness” (*hatzlaḥah ha-nitzḥit*).²⁷

Furthermore, Aquinas insists that “it is necessary for man to receive from God some additional principles, by which he may be directed to supernatural happiness,” which are the theological virtues in distinction from the moral virtues.²⁸ For Aquinas, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are the perfected traits that bring

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.62 (theological virtues), 2-2.1-16 (faith), 2-2.17-22 (hope), 2-2.23-26 (charity). Following Daniel Lasker, it appears likely that philosophers involved in polemics with Christians received their knowledge of Christianity from their direct contact with Christian polemicists. See: Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 161-164.

²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.62q1, 3.

²⁷ Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, 206, 209-210 (6.1.1) and Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. i, 79 (I 7), i, 173 (I 21), and iii, 217-218 (III 25). See: Warren Zev Harvey, “Hasdai Crescas’s Use of the Term ‘Happiness,’” in *The Pursuit of Happiness in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Thought: Studies Dedicated to Steven Harvey*, ed. Yehuda Halper (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 335-349.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.62q1. English translation from *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 476.

humans to *beatitudo*. I would argue that Albo develops a similar set of theological virtues — trust, hope, and fortitude — which bear some similarities to Aquinas' list, though written to show that eternal happiness through the biblical covenant between God and Israel transcends the intellect, but does not require Christian theology.

Like Aquinas, Albo does not deny the role of the moral virtues. In making the case for the superiority of divine law over conventional law in *Ikkarim* I 8, one of the reasons that Albo gives is that a law legislated purely based on human reason cannot specify the particular cases in which to apply the moral virtues. He writes that

Thus Aristotle in his *Ethics* says repeatedly in connection with the different virtues that a virtuous act consists in doing the proper thing at the proper time and in the proper place, but he does not explain what is the proper time and the proper place.²⁹

Albo expands upon this point later in *Ikkarim* III 7 when writing that

A person whose temperament is hot will admire courage and take pleasure in it; while a person of opposite temperament will admire and take pleasure in quiet. The only way to determine what is becoming and what is unbecoming in the manner above mentioned is by referring to the standard of a person of equable temperament, who does not exist. And even if such a person did exist, we should find enormous difficulty in determining what is a good quality in a particular case, a difficulty that is due to the acts themselves.³⁰

In fact, Albo argues that the reason Aristotle speaks about the moral virtues in a general way in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and does not list all the particular cases in which they can appear is a hidden admission of the limits of the intellect to legislate the practical application of the moral virtues. The variability of human temperaments and the variability of actions makes it very difficult for the intellect to prescribe the proper mean. In response, Albo gives examples of how the Torah's laws supplement the *Nicomachean Ethics* and teach the proper way to achieve the mean of courage and moderation, through

²⁹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. i, 84 (I 8).

³⁰ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 58 (III 7).

laws dealing with proper conduct in food, drink, sexual relations, and when to risk one's life.³¹ This is attained through following the Torah's divinely revealed legal actions which human reason, or a work of human reason such as a book written by Aristotle, cannot achieve. People can discover through their intellect the foundational moral principle to pursue good and avoid evil (which appears similar to Aquinas's *synderesis*), but not how to apply this principle to particular cases; hence, the need for divine guidance.³²

Ultimately, the ordinary moral virtues are not a central theme of *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* and they do not reappear in much detail after the brief discussion in the first book, since Albo's main goal in the book is not to defend religion against philosophers, but to use philosophy to defend a Jewish version of eternal happiness against its Christian articulation.³³ To achieve this goal, Albo endeavors to encourage Jews to develop each of these three traits of trust, hope, and fortitude.

Trust

The first theological virtue, trust (*bitaḥon*), is discussed in *Ikkarim* IV 46. Here Albo shows that the premise of this virtue can be understood according to the following logic. It is easy for one to believe in the promise of the divine covenant when things are going well in life, "so long as he enjoys peace and tranquility at home and prosperity in his business affairs."³⁴ But the only way to truly test your belief in the covenant between God and Israel is to test whether you will stick with it when adversity strikes. This is a test of one's faith. The individual who perfects the virtue of trust is better equipped to maintain his belief in the eternity of God's promises, even in troubled times, which is a recurring challenge for Jews.³⁵

The evidence for trust in the Bible, according to Albo, is Psalm 44. Albo reads this Psalm as testimony to the faithfulness of Israel by the sons of Korach both in times of prosperity and times of adversity.³⁶ Albo writes that

³¹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. i, 85-86 (I 8).

³² Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iii, 61-62 (III 7).

³³ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. i, 187-195 (I 24).

³⁴ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 449 (IV 46).

³⁵ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 449 (IV 46).

³⁶ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 450 (IV 46).

The entire Psalm is a laudation of the people of Israel, who trusted in God in the day of prosperity and happiness and acknowledged that all things come from Him; nor did their heart turn away from trust in Him (*bothim*) and loyalty (*maḥzikim*) to His covenant in time of trouble.³⁷

Much of the Psalm is an attempt to reconcile the changing fate of Israel over time. The question arises that if the Israelites had God's providential help in the past, such as the miracles used to liberate them from slavery in Egypt, why did God suddenly cease His providential aid to help Israel prosper during later periods in Jewish history?³⁸

In Albo's reading of the Psalm, there is a difference between trust in an unstable source and trust in a stable source. He argues that those who complain about their trust being betrayed are putting their trust in an unstable source, like wealth, while trust in God is the *only* eternal and stable source in the world.³⁹ If one trusts the loyalty of one's friend to the covenant, one would reveal one's secrets to him, as he reveals them to himself, since one's true friend is considered no different than oneself. Albo expresses this concept poetically through the numerical value (*gematria*) of the Hebrew words "love" (*ahavah*) and "one" (*eḥad*) which both equal thirteen.⁴⁰ Albo sees a biblical example of this in God making a covenant with Abraham, and then revealing all that would happen to his descendants in the future, whether these things be good or bad.⁴¹ This is the ultimate in trust—knowing that even when the bad things occur, the covenant will remain unbroken.

Even if one sees unjust suffering for the righteous who trust in the covenant of God in this world and appear abandoned by God, trust maintains the belief that they will be rewarded with eternal happiness after death. Albo writes earlier in *Ikkarim* II 15 that

Divine righteousness decrees that those who believe should obtain that degree of eternal life which is promised in the Torah, because they trust (*bothim*) in God and believe in His Torah, though they are not able to acquire an intellectual

³⁷ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 450 (IV 46).

³⁸ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 451-452 (IV 46).

³⁹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 453-454 (IV 46).

⁴⁰ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 443 (IV 45).

⁴¹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 445-446 (IV 45).

comprehension. [...] It cannot refer to life in the body, which the righteous believers enjoy no more than the wicked unbelievers.⁴²

Trust means knowing that the promises of the covenant will be fulfilled, even if they are not immediately apparent and even if not fully rewarded in this life. This is because the ultimate reward of trust in the covenant is the acquisition of eternal happiness, which is greater than worldly happiness.

Hope

The second theological virtue, hope (*tikvah*), is discussed in the following two chapters in *Ikkarim* IV 47-48, where hope is described as following from trust.⁴³ Hope is the expectation that future positive events will happen as promised because of trust in the covenant. Like trust, it can be difficult to maintain hope that that good will come when facing a situation of adversity, as Jews were facing in Albo's time.

Albo uniquely divides hope into three classes: hope based on mercy (*tikvat ha-ḥesed*), hope based on glory (*tikvat ha-kavod*), and hope based on a promise (*tikvat ha-havtaḥah*). Hope based on mercy is the expectation that God will help you because of His intrinsic mercy and not as a matter of obligation. Hope based on glory is the expectation that God will help you because He has been in the habit of helping you before and helping you now will add to His greater glory; and finally hope based on a promise is an expectation that God will fulfill a commitment that was made in the past.⁴⁴

Albo argues that the most certain form of hope is that which is based on a promise since if one has a commitment that someone will fulfill their word, it is more reliable than depending on someone's mercy or honor, which can be swayed by other factors.⁴⁵ Furthermore, since the promise we are discussing is based on God's word, it is as if the commitment is built into the laws of nature. Albo writes that "the person to whom they were promised may be as sure of them as if they

⁴² Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. ii, 98 (II 15).

⁴³ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 457-467 (IV 47-48). See: Alan Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 43-59.

⁴⁴ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 457 (IV 47).

⁴⁵ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 459-460 (IV 47).

were things which had to be by natural necessity.”⁴⁶ Here Albo draws upon an often-cited Aristotelian distinction between whether a future prediction is necessary or contingent. Some future events are considered contingent, in the sense that their occurrence is only possible depending on variable factors that affect whether it will or will not happen, such as whether it will rain tomorrow or not. Both are possible outcomes based on the shifting weather patterns. Other future events are considered necessary if they are rooted in the unchanging laws of nature, such as the sun rising tomorrow.⁴⁷ Since God and Israel are part of an eternal covenant, if God promises a future happening, it is considered necessary, like the sun rising each day. Thus, in hoping for future positive events, like being redeemed from one’s persecutors and that they will eventually face justice for their crimes, the persecuted believer recognizes that their suffering is not eternal and God’s promised redemption of Israel will happen at some point in the future.

A few chapters earlier in IV 42, Albo describes one of the clearest pieces of evidence of hope for Jews living in a time of adversity, which is the survival of the Jewish people across time when other nations have disappeared. Albo writes that:

There are nations, like the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Amalekites and others whose name has disappeared from the world, although their descendants are still existing, for there is no Philistine or Amalekite or Ammonite or Moabite nation... There is no nation which continues to exist both in name and in race except that of Israel, of whom this thing was foretold: “Shall your seed and your name remain” (Isa. 66:22) ... The other nations came into being and then disappeared and Israel too will necessarily disappear, since it came into being. To anticipate this notion, he says that it is not necessarily true that whatever is subject to genesis is also subject to

⁴⁶ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 460 (IV 47).

⁴⁷ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 460-461 (IV 47). The language of “necessary future” and “contingent future” appears similar to language used in Christian debates at the time over God’s knowledge of future events rooted in how to interpret Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*, Ch 9. For an alternative usage of these terms in medieval Jewish thought, see Ibn Kaspi’s usage as analyzed in my *Power and Progress: Joseph Ibn Kaspi and the Meaning of History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 20-21.

destruction, for the heavens and the earth are new, that is, have come into being, according, to the opinion of those who adhere to the Torah and believe in the creation of the world in time, and yet they exist before the Lord continually, ie. they are eternal, ... Hence the seed of Israel as well as their name will also remain forever and will not disappear.⁴⁸

For Albo, the survival of the Jewish nation in both its name and its people across time disproves the Aristotelian principle that all matter is subject to generation and corruption, such that just like everything else in nature that has a finite lifespan, the Jewish people will also eventually meet their demise. The divine covenant ensures that their survival is guaranteed across time, notwithstanding the Christian belief that Judaism has been superseded by Christianity and their existence is a relic of a previous covenant. The survival of the Jewish people teaches hope in times of despair so that Jews know that that just as they have overcome other adversities in their history, they will survive this challenge in Spain and live to face new challenges again in the future, since God's covenant transcends all of the contingencies of history.

Albo also singles out circumcision as the sign of the covenant that teaches Jews not to give up hope. He states that although Jews are perceived by other nations to be sick and near death, he reassures them that they will recover from the current "illness" since they know that the sign of covenant indicates that the bond between God and Israel is eternal. In fact, he maintains that they will eventually return to their original strength that they possessed earlier in their history, like in the period of prophecy. It is thus noteworthy that Albo's conception of hope is one that entails the expectation of a revival and a return to the glory of the past.⁴⁹

Fortitude

The third theological virtue is fortitude (*savlanut*), which is discussed in scattered places throughout the work, but follows thematically from other virtues. Although he stresses that it is necessary to have trust in the covenant during times of adversity and to have hope for a better future, survival also requires the fortitude to endure pain and

⁴⁸ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 425 (IV 42).

⁴⁹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part ii, 448-449 (IV 45).

suffering for the sake of God.⁵⁰ One salient case discussed in *Ikkarim* IV 27 examines the extent to which one is held responsible for actions committed involuntarily.⁵¹ In general, one is held responsible for actions committed knowingly and willingly, but one is not responsible for actions committed unknowingly or unwillingly. But Albo notes that there are certain actions that are difficult to classify as voluntary or compulsory, such as an action which is not compelled, but if one does not do it, there is a serious possibility of harm done to you. The question is grounded in how much pain and suffering one can tolerate rather than do the action.⁵² Nonetheless, Albo argues that there are actions that are *always* considered voluntary and one cannot use the excuse of them being done under compulsion, since one should endure any pain in the world rather than do them (*raui lisbol elav kol tzaar*).⁵³ He submits that one should suffer rather than (a) strike one's parent, (b) rebel against the king, or (c) rebel against God.⁵⁴ In other words, one can blame a thief for forcing you to give up your wallet, but only you are responsible if that thief forces you to harm your parents or curse God. For Albo, the necessity of having the fortitude to tolerate suffering is what the Rabbis meant in using the term, the "suffering of love" (*yisurim shel ahavah*) in worshipping God. Albo writes that "If the motive of their service is love, they will accept the suffering gracefully for the love of God."⁵⁵

For Albo, the exemplars of fortitude who have endured suffering are fully present in the Bible in the figures of Abraham and Job, though they are depicted as opposites. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his grown son Isaac was a painful decision but one that Abraham was rewarded for enduring.⁵⁶ In describing the pain that

⁵⁰ For a similar portrait in Aquinas, see LU Qiaoying, "Aquinas's Transformation of the Virtue of Courage," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 8, no. 3 (2013), 471-484. Qiaoying notes that Aquinas "defines endurance as the chief act of courage, and thus broadens the scope of courage to include the weak, including Christians" (p. 484).

⁵¹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 257-259 (IV 27). For an analysis of this chapter, see: Warren Zev Harvey, "Albo on Repentance and Coercion," *Jewish Law Annual* 21 (2015), 47-57.

⁵² Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 259 (IV 27).

⁵³ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 259 (IV 27).

⁵⁴ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 260 (IV 27).

⁵⁵ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 95 (IV 11).

⁵⁶ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 127-128 (IV 13). See: Weiss, *Joseph Albo on Free Choice*, 75-84.

Trust, Hope and Fortitude in Albo's *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*

Abraham had to endure, Albo writes that “suffering is inflicted in order that the person may actually endure trouble and hardship for the love of God.”⁵⁷ Other biblical characters lacked this endurance, such as Job, whose commitment was sustained in times of prosperity but waned during times of affliction. Job initially lacked the fortitude to persevere in the difficult circumstances of life that he faced. It is from Elihu that Job learns the necessity of having the fortitude to bear pain and suffering for the sake of God in order to correct one’s ways.⁵⁸ Of course, Albo’s focus on tolerating pain and suffering may be a response to the Jew considering converting to Christianity for greater social acceptance, financial gain, or avoidance of physical persecution in his own time. His response is that suffering potential pain is not an excuse for abandoning one’s commitment to God, and fortitude is always required as part of the commitment to the covenant.

Endeavor (*Hishtadlut*) and Diligence (*Haritzut*)

The emphasis on trust, hope, and fortitude may leave the impression that Albo is advocating a certain passivity in the face of adversity, with the implication that ultimately Jews in the Middle Ages were required to simply wait for redemption and assume that their own initiative is worthless. It is important to note that as central as the theological virtues are to Albo’s work, he does discuss in earlier chapters the importance of human endeavor and its relationship to divine determinism. In *Ikkarim* IV 6, he begins with the statement that “diligence (*haritzut*) and endeavor (*hishtadlut*) are useful and necessary in all human acts” and ends the chapter with the statement that “we should exert our efforts in all things as though they were dependent on our free choice, and God will do as He thinks fit.”⁵⁹ Albo reaffirms the Gersonidean principle that the heavenly bodies determine one’s future, but human beings through their intellect have the freedom to overcome the astrological decrees. In fact, according to Gersonides, even though an individual may be fated by the heavenly bodies for certain outcomes in life, it is possible to fight against these predeterminations with greater strength than other animals due to possessing the practical intellect. He contends that

⁵⁷ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 128 (IV 13).

⁵⁸ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 97 (IV 11).

⁵⁹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, vol. iv part i, 45, 49 (IV 6).

human beings have the ability to construct arts for their protection and cultivate the proper virtues of self-preservation such as (endeavour [*hishtadlut*], diligence [*haritzut*], and cunning [*hitakmut*] in crafting stratagems [*taḥbulot*]) to acquire the necessary ends of the body.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Albo appears much more skeptical than Gersonides and many of his predecessors about the power of human reason and initiative to solve all worldly problems, especially considering the dire position of Jews in the Middle Ages. It is perhaps no surprise then that the theological virtues of trust, hope, and fortitude play a much more central and even decisive role in Albo's thought in response to historical circumstances of grave and continuous persecution.

Conclusion

As we have argued, Albo's project to adapt and theologize the *Nicomachean Ethics* was undertaken to strengthen the commitments of his Jewish followers who were being induced to convert to Christianity. His objective was to convince the Jews that they must remain loyal to their faith, notwithstanding the worldly benefits that may accrue in becoming Christian. He proceeds by demonstrating that the relationship between God and Israel represents the highest form of loving relationship based on utility, pleasure, and goodness, but is ultimately one that is reasonless from God's perspective. Hence, it is an enduring relationship that cannot be undone, as avowed in the biblical promise of the covenant. For Albo, building on the project of his teacher Crescas and drawing on Aquinas' interpretation and modifications to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the central document of this divine-human covenant, the Torah, promises eternal happiness that transcends the limited worldly happiness of human flourishing, *eudaimonia*. While the moral virtues are necessary for human flourishing and are perfected and applied to particulars by the Torah in a manner that cannot be achieved by the human intellect alone, the sustainability of the covenant requires a supplementary set of theological virtues. For Albo, the theological virtues of trust, hope, and fortitude are necessary for the maintenance of the covenant and the Torah during times of adversity. Trust is the belief that God's commitment and promises are eternal, including the achievement of

⁶⁰ I discuss this in the first chapter of *The Virtue Ethics of Levi Gersonides*, 19–61.

Trust, Hope and Fortitude in Albo's Sefer ha-Ikkarim

eternal happiness. Hope is the expectation that future positive events will happen as promised because of trust in the covenant. Fortitude is the ability to endure pain and suffering for the sake of God. All three traits bolster one's ability to withstand societal and religious pressures to give up on Judaism in times of duress. One might say that Albo develops a series of virtues that are both communal and conservative, whose intent is to defend the community and its traditions against an attack on its very existence. It may even be speculated that this stalwart defense of the tradition may account for the popularity of Albo's *Ikkarim* in future centuries, since it provided a resolute response to the persecution that Jews continued to face after Albo's death and in the centuries that followed.

False Dreams in the Thought of Menahem Shalem

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Abstract

Menahem Shalem (Prague/Central Europe, ca. 1350 – ca. 1420) formulated theoretical positions about dreams and imaginations on the basis of Maimonides and Narboni, which can be read against the background of the Hussite revolution as a critique of religious phantasmagorias and fanaticism. Shalem identified a mechanism of symbolic institution that takes place in dreams: the “prior opinions” (or prejudices) of human beings leave traces in their imaginative faculties; these traces impact the dreams they have, and the dreams lend a semblance of objective reality or truth to their prior opinions. As a consequence, their prior opinions are engraved in the mind and become firm convictions that cannot be refuted by rational arguments.

Introduction

The late fourteenth century was a time of visions and prophecies in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire.¹ On the eve of the Hussite revolution, visionary texts that predicted the coming of the Antichrist and the Last Judgement circulated in the Kingdom of Bohemia in Latin, German, and Czech.² A significant proportion of society was strongly convinced of the authenticity and trustworthiness of dreams, visions, and ecstatic experiences. A celebrated example is the correspondence between Jan Hus and Peter Mladoniowitz (Petr z Mladoňovic) about a dream that the former experienced during his imprisonment in Constance in 1415, a few months before he was executed.³ During the days of the Hussite revolution, Bohemia

¹ See Frances C. Kneupper, *The Empire at the End of Time: Identity and Reform in Late Medieval German Prophecy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

² See Pavlína Cermanová, *Čechy na konce věků: Apokalyptické myšlení a vize husitské doby* (Bohemia at the end of times: Apocalyptic thought and visions of the Hussite period) (Prague: Argo, 2013), esp. 116–25 and 142–84.

³ Cf. František Šmahel, *Husitská revoluce*, (The Hussite revolution) (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1993), vol. 2, 11–12.

attracted groups of visionary fanatics from far-away Belgium, who were referred to as Picards. Radical Hussite groups expected the end of the world to occur in February 1420.⁴

Visions, dreams, and other kinds of religious phantasies were not merely private affairs, but acquired social and political significance in late medieval Bohemia.⁵ Visionary literature contributed to the emerging ideologies of religious dissent, which eventually crystalized into several forms of Hussitism. Religious phantasies became especially important factors in social and political life during the turbulent years of the Hussite wars, but their role was not limited to that period only: visionary texts were widely read both before and after the Hussite wars.

Menahem Shalem (ca. 1350 – ca. 1420), a significant Jewish philosopher in early fifteenth-century Prague, had a profound interest in dreams, hallucinations, and the ways humans can be deceived by them.⁶ The Maimonidean theory of prophecy enabled this Jewish contemporary of Jan Hus to make sense of the reality that he encountered. Shalem identified the dangers inherent in religious phantasies and warned his contemporaries, including his beloved friend and intellectual peer, Avigdor Kara, about the perilous effects of unleashed religious imaginations. In this context, philosophy acquired a social function that Shalem believed to be crucial: mobilizing the resources of reason, philosophy resisted religious phantasies and guarded philosophers from their destructive impact.

Menahem ben Jacob Shalem: The First Ashkenazi Philosopher

Menahem ben Jacob Shalem was the first Jewish intellectual in medieval Ashkenaz who can be called a “philosopher” with no exaggeration. His works were probably composed in Prague, where he lived for most of his life. As Ephraim Kupfer has argued, he was also

⁴ Cermanová, *Čechy na konce věků*, 169–84.

⁵ See Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–6.

⁶ I have attempted to reconstruct the broad historical and intellectual contexts of Shalem’s work in two studies: Tamás Visi, “The Emergence of Philosophy in Ashkenazic Contexts – The Case of Czech Lands in the Early Fifteenth Century,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts/Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 8 (2009): 213–43, and Visi, “On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz: Medieval Jewish Philosophers in Normandy and in the Czech Lands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century” (Habilitation thesis, Palacky University, Olomouc, 2011).

called “Menahem Agler”; the name “Agler” probably alludes to the city of Aquileia in Northern Italy.⁷ In 1413, Shalem was a member of Prague’s rabbinic court of justice (*beit din*) together with Yomtov Lippmann Mühlhausen and Avigdor Kara. The latter was one of his close friends, and they referred to each other as “my brother” in their writings. This phrase indicates a close relationship, but it is not to be taken literally: in fact, the two had different fathers and there is no reason to believe that they were related in any way. Nevertheless, misled by this phrase, some modern historians refer to Shalem as “Menahem Kara,” despite the fact that the latter name is not attested in any primary sources.

Shalem wrote long glosses on Narboni’s commentary on the *Guide* and on Hanokh al-Konstantini’s *Marot Elohim*, which is a commentary on the Account of the Chariot and related prophetic visions. The glosses often contain cross-references to passages in the *Guide* or to Narboni’s commentary and other relevant sources. Shalem also wrote an extensive commentary on the twenty-five premises summarized at the beginning of the second part of the *Guide*, summarized Gersonides’s proofs for the immortality of the soul, and composed a philosophical compendium on attaining the Active Intellect and earning individual providence in a work that also outlines a program of intellectual-spiritual perfection. Thus, in Shalem, we encounter a full-fledged post-Maimonidean philosopher whose mastery of the literary genres, conceptual and argumentative techniques, and ideas of the Maimonidean tradition reached heights that were hitherto unprecedented in Ashkenaz.

Recent research by Milan Žonca has shed new light on Menahem Shalem’s family background and biography. The name “Shalem” may indeed indicate a sojourn in Jerusalem, as Moshe Idel suggested; however, Žonca points out that Menahem inherited this sobriquet from his father, Jacob ben Samuel Shalem, who might be identical with a Jacob ben Samuel known from colophons of manuscripts copied in Jerusalem in the 1380s. Some of these texts are philosophical, which indicates that the interest in philosophy probably began with the father. Žonca also considers the possibility that the same Jacob ben Samuel copied the so-called Norsa Codex, which is dated to 1349 making it the earliest dated copy of

⁷ Ephraim Kupfer, “Towards a Cultural Portrait of Ashkenazic Jewry and Its Sages in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 42 (1972): 113–47, esp. 114–17.

Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* in an Ashkenazi hand Accordingly, Menahem Shalem may have learned Maimonidean philosophy first and foremost from his own father, Jacob Shalem.

Another Ashkenazi scholar of the same name mentioned in a commentary on the *Guide* by Solomon ben Judah ha-Nasi written around 1368 could be identical with Jacob Shalem, the father of Menahem Shalem. Solomon ben Judah ha-Nasi was probably of Provençal origin; he dedicated his commentary to Jacob ben Samuel and mentioned that he had spent two years with him “in the land of Ashkenaz.” This commentary was later utilized by Mühlhausen, and this fact suggests that the text was disseminated in Prague and perhaps even composed there.⁸ On the other hand, Judah ha-Nasi's commentary on *Guide* 3.7 does not contain any discussion pertaining to the problem of the sounds of the celestial bodies, which was disputed by Mühlhausen and Shalem.⁹ Both Shalem and Mühlhausen cite Moses Narboni's commentary as the standard commentary on Maimonides's *Guide*. It seems that Judah ha-Nasi's commentary was eventually supplanted by that of Narboni in early fifteenth-century Prague.

In sum, if Žonca's suggestions are correct, then the following story can be reconstructed. Around 1348–1349, there was a scribe in Germany called Jacob ben Samuel who was interested in philosophy, and he acquired a copy of the *Guide* and made his own copy of it in 1349. During or after the persecutions of the Black Death, he moved perhaps first to Northern Italy, to the city of Aquileia (hence his son's byname “Agler”), but the family eventually ended up in Prague, following the migratory pattern of many other Ashkenazi Jews of this period. Around 1368, Jacob ben Samuel received a guest from Provence, Solomon ben Judah ha-Nasi, who was well-versed in the Maimonidean-Tibbonide philosophical tradition and wrote a commentary on the *Guide*. Later, Jacob may have traveled to the Holy Land, earning the sobriquet “Shalem” (“the Jerusalemite”). His son, Menahem ben Jacob Shalem, probably grew up in Prague, where he studied with Avigdor Kara in the 1360s or 1370s or perhaps as late as

⁸ Milan Žonca, “Menaḥem ben Jacob Shalem and the Study of Philosophy in Late Medieval Prague” in Ota Pavlíček (ed.), *Studying the Arts in Late Medieval Bohemia: Production, Reception and Transmission of Knowledge* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 27–48; here 31–36.

⁹ Cf. Jerusalem, National Library of Israel, MS Heb. 38*7407 (*olim* London, Beth Din & Beth Hamidrash Library, MS 52), fols. 174r–178r.

the 1380s. He probably learned Maimonidean-Tibbonide philosophy from his own father, and perhaps also from Solomon ben Judah ha-Nasi. Moreover, he must have learned Talmud in a yeshiva and he eventually developed into a renowned scholar, becoming a rabbi of Prague by 1413; he must also have seen the rise of Hussitism in the Kingdom of Bohemia during the first two decades of the fifteenth century.

Apocalyptic Thought versus Philosophy:
Shalem's Commentary on an Eschatological *Barayta*

Apocalyptic thought was at the center of Hussite ideologies and propaganda, but it was by no means limited to them: the Hussites' opponents also utilized the semantic codes of Christian eschatological traditions in order to send their message home. Interpretations of the relevant New Testament texts, first and foremost the book of Revelations, was an important vehicle of self-expression for theologians and preachers of the age. However, there were also post-biblical prophetic texts, such as Johannes de Rupescissa's *Vade mecum in tribulacione* ("A vade-mecum in tribulation"), a text composed in Latin before 1365 that was later translated into German and Czech, with rewritten versions of it circulating in the fifteenth century that updated the content in light of recent events.¹⁰ Texts written by or attributed to Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202), and others had a similar reception. This received literature was augmented with new texts and authorities of the Hussite movement and its predecessors, such as Jan Milíč of Kroměříž (ca. 1320–1374), Matthias of Janov (Matěj z Janova, ca. 1350–1394), Jan Hus (1369–1415), Jakoubek of Stříbro (1372–1429), and others.

We do not know whether any of Shalem's works are contemporary to any of the aforementioned texts, since we cannot

¹⁰ See Kneupper, *The Empire at the End of Time*, 127–36; Pavlína Cermanová, "Jiná apokalypsa: Prorocké texty v husiství" (Another apocalypse: Prophetic texts in Hussitism), in *Husitské re-formace: Proměna kulturního kódu v 15. Století*, ed. Pavlína Cermanová and Pavel Soukup (Prague: NLN, 2019), 144–72, here 148–60; Robert E. Lerner, "'Popular Justice': Rupescissa in Hussite Bohemia," in *Eschatologie und Hussitismus*, ed. Alexander Patschovsky and František Šmahel (Prague: Historisches Institut, 1996), 39–51; Martin Pjecha, "Hussite Eschatological Texts (1412–1421): Introduction and Translations," in *Early Modern Prophecies in Transnational, National and Regional Contexts*, ed. Lionel Laborie and Ariel Hessayon (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 1:23–83.

ascribe an exact date to any of his writings. Some of his works may have been written as early as the 1380s, while some of them may have been produced as late as the 1420s or even later. The eschatological fervor in Bohemia began to diminish after the second decade of the fifteenth century, and apocalyptic thought gradually became routinized and developed into a conventional symbolism during the course of that century. Nevertheless, some of the apocalyptic texts of the earlier period were copied, adapted, and read with great interest even during the second half of the century.¹¹ Therefore, the apocalyptic thought of pre-Hussite and Hussite Bohemia may be relevant for understanding Shalem's works, even if we cannot be certain whether he wrote them before, during, or after the Hussite period.

Shalem's untitled philosophical compendium includes a long explanation of an eschatological passage of the Mishnah, tractate *Soṭah* 9:15, which is a post-tannaitic addition. This text can be seen as a Jewish equivalent of the Hussite commentaries on the book of Revelations and similar texts. However, the actual content of Shalem's work is diametrically opposed to the conventions of eschatological literature. Although he certainly saw his own age as being sunk in deep crisis, he refrained from any speculation about the near or distant future. Instead, he interpreted the eschatological passage in the Mishnah as an allegory for human perfection, or its absence. In other words, Shalem's interpretation of this apocalyptic text is profoundly *non*-eschatological. The revelations involved were meant to instruct us in spiritual development and philosophical studies.

According to Shalem, attachment to the Active Intellect opens a new dimension of reality. Whoever manages to quit the dominion of the great celestial machine and enter the dominion of the Active Intellect will find him- or herself in a new world in which emanations are distributed in a just way according to one's merits. Shalem identifies this redeemed world, where justice rules, as the Messiah, while he identifies the prophet Elijah, who is depicted as the forerunner of the Messiah in traditional Jewish literature, as several phases in one's spiritual-intellectual development, which precedes the "Messiah"; that is, the attainment of the Active Intellect. Many talmudic stories relate how several great rabbis met the prophet Elijah; in Shalem's interpretation, the "Elijah" appearing in the

¹¹ Cf. Cermanová, "Jiná apokalypsa," 154.

talmudic stories can stand for prophetic emanation, individual providence, and also the immortality of the soul, depending on the context.¹² Shalem interprets a number of talmudic texts about the Messiah and Elijah accordingly in order to posit that these texts speak about the ways to quit this world and find the next one.¹³

Did Shalem intend this exegetical direction as a deliberate response to the eschatological fervor of his age? He does not comment on the political events of his days in any of his extant writings. Polemical remarks against Christianity are occasionally inserted into his works, and he penned a short text to refute the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. We do *not* find any specific reaction to Hussitism in these texts: on the theoretical level, Shalem was apparently unconcerned by Hussitism as it hardly presented a genuinely new theological challenge to Judaism in addition to the “standard” challenge that he *did* address. However, we can find evidence in his writings that he was concerned about the religious imaginations and fervor of his fellow Jews. It stands to reason that some of the Bohemian and Moravian Jews were influenced by the eschatological fervor of the Hussites and/or their predecessors and began to indulge in eschatological speculation.

This last point has been debated by scholars for several decades. In a landmark essay, Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein collected textual evidence for the speculations of Jewish intellectuals concerning the end of the days in early fifteenth-century Bohemia and Germany and suggested that they were influenced or inspired by Hussite apocalyptic thought.¹⁴ In another landmark essay, Israel Jacob Yuval pointed out that the primary sources that Kestenberg-Galdstein utilized as evidence are dated before 1419 and as such cannot reflect

¹² Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 585, fol. 41v: הנה כבר התבאר שעניין אליהו על הרוב: יורה על השפעה הנבואית, גם עניין אליהו בהרבה מקומו יורה על ההשגחה הפרטית באדם [...] ואולם עניין אליהו במקום הזה יורה על השאריות הנפש אחר המות

¹³ Thus, for example, the talmudic sentences about the sufferings that precede the coming of the Messiah are interpreted as referring to the difficulties that precede the attainment of the Active Intellect; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 585, fol. 35v. On similar interpretations, see Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan, 1997), 119.

¹⁴ Ruth [Kestenberg-]Gladstein, “Eschatological Trends in Bohemian Jewry during the Hussite Period,” in *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves*, ed. Ann Williams (Harlow: Longman, 1980), 241–56.

any Jewish reaction to the Hussite wars, which began later.¹⁵ Yuval's argument is certainly conclusive; however, there are two further considerations that have to be taken into account. First, as has been mentioned, the eschatological fervor in Bohemia did not begin in 1419; the first significant apocalyptic thinker was the aforementioned Jan Milíč of Kroměříž, who had attracted much attention and a large following as early as the 1360s, and there is plenty of evidence for the circulation of apocalyptic texts and ideas in both Bohemia and Germany before 1419.¹⁶ Thus, although Yuval is right to point out that Kestenbergl-Glasner's evidence predates the Hussite wars, the thesis that earlier Hussite or pre-Hussite propaganda influenced Jews is by no means refuted by this argument. Second, Yuval's objection is not conclusive with regard to the writings of Menahem Shalem: we cannot be certain that they were all written *before* the Hussite wars, although this is certainly a possibility.

The most interesting piece of evidence that was discussed in this debate comes from the writings of Yomtov Lippmann Mühlhausen, who was Shalem's rabbinic colleague in Prague. The *Sefer ha-nitsahon*, Mühlhausen's most famous writing, contains two different predictions for the end of the world: in section 332, he speculated that the end would come in 1402, while in section 334, he modified the prediction to 1410. In a later work, a tract on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet composed between 1413 and 1416, he put the end of the world to the year 1430. Copyists of his works occasionally "updated" these dates in accordance with their own expectations.¹⁷ In other words, there was a prominent member of the Prague circle who was engaged in eschatological speculation.

Therefore, Shalem's choice to write a non-eschatological interpretation of an apocalyptic passage of the Mishnah may very well have been a deliberate attempt to oppose the eschatological speculations of his colleague, Yomtov Lipmann Mühlhausen, and

¹⁵ Israel J. Yuval, "Juden, Hussiten und Deutsche: Nach einer hebräischen Chronik," in *Juden in der christlichen Umwelt während des späten Mittelalters*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp and Franz-Joseph Ziwes, *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, Beiheft 13 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1992), 59–92, see esp. 63 n. 16.

¹⁶ See especially Kneupper, *The Empire at the End of Time*, and Cermanová, *Čechy na konce věků*.

¹⁷ The evidence is cited in detail by Yuval, "Juden, Hussiten und Deutsche," 63 n. 16. Cf. also Yuval, "Kabbalisten, Ketzler und Polemiker," 159–60.

perhaps other Jews who followed in his footsteps.¹⁸ Shalem also mentions a kabbalist whom he personally knew and another man, a righteous Jew, who told him about revelations that the prophet Elijah had told him in a vision, but which were “contradicting the truth.”¹⁹ Shalem’s criticism of Kabbalah and his emphasis that dreams and hallucinations could easily mislead people were certainly meant to counter such phenomena within the Jewish communities.

The commentary begins with an interesting remark on the manuscript transmission of this passage of the Mishnah. The last section of the text, a saying attributed to Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair, was not attested in the manuscripts available to Shalem, but was found in a manuscript and copied for him by his “brother” Avigdor Kara. According to modern philologists, this saying of R. Pinhas ben Yair is only included in the Babylonian version of the Mishnah, which was apparently poorly represented among the manuscripts available in late medieval Central Europe.²⁰ Shalem identified this sentence as a later addition to the Mishnah and proposed a textual emendation: instead of זריזות (“promptitude,” though Shalem understands it as the Aristotelian virtue of “courage,” the midpoint between cowardice and recklessness), we should read זהירות (“attentiveness,” though Shalem takes it as a term for “moderation”), because the former is an

¹⁸ A possible example of the latter was the anonymous author from Cheb (Eger), who wrote a kind of epilogue to Mühlhausen’s book on the alphabet in the early 1430s. This short text includes speculation about the year of salvation; see Yuval, “Kabbalisten, Ketzler und Polemiker,” 158–60. Another possible example was Eizik Tirna of Brno, who referred to Jan Hus as “Dan Husham”; see Abraham David, “R. Itzhak Isaac Tirna and His Polemical Tract *Answer to the Christians – Preliminary Clarifications*” [Hebrew], in *Ta Shma. Studies in Judaica in Memory of Israel M. Ta-Shma*, ed. Avraham (Rami) Reiner et al. (Alon Shevut: Tevunot Press, 2011), 1:257–80. While this phrase may be just a copyist’s mistake for “Jan Hus,” the biblical name Husham does occur in rabbinic eschatological texts: the list of the Edomite kings in the Bible, where Husham occurs (Gen 36:34–35), was read as a prophecy about the future Roman emperors in *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 83:3.

¹⁹ Oxford, Bodleian, MS Opp. 585, fol. 36r: וכבר פגשתי איש תם וישר ירא אלהי והגיד לי איך אליהו ז"ל היה אצלו והגיד לו מה שהיה סותר האמת

²⁰ On the various versions of the end of tractate *Sotah* in the manuscripts, see Ya’aqov Nahum Epstein, *Mavo le-nusah ha-Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Self-published, 1948), 976–77. Note that the famous Munich manuscript of the Talmud (mid-fourteenth century) does not attest the sentence attributed to Pinhas ben Yair either (ibid., 976). Parallels are found in b. *‘Abod. Zar.* 20b and y. *Šabb.* 1:6 3c, y. *Šeqal.* 3:4 47c; cf. also Heinrich W. Guggenheier, ed. and trans., *The Jerusalem Talmud: Second Order: Mo’ed, Tractates Šabbat and ‘Eruvin* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 57–58.

exclusively political virtue (להנהגה המדינית לבד), while the latter is an intellectual virtue, and as such fits the context better in his opinion.

Despite the fact that Shalem's interpretation of the rabbinic text goes against the eschatological trend in early fifteenth-century Bohemia, there is an important common trait between his work and that of the (pre-)Hussite interpretations of the book of Revelations. The commentators did not take the words of the sacred texts in their literal meaning or in their usual referential functions, and thus, semantic laxity was unavoidable. For example, Christian exegetes disagreed about such a fundamental question as whether "Antichrist" referred to a single person or whether the word was to be taken as a metaphor or emblem of all those forces that opposed Christ. Some believed that the actual Roman pope was the Antichrist, while others believed that the corrupted clerics and worldly leaders collectively were the Antichrist, but in either case, a significant amount of creativity was required in order to apply the word "Antichrist" to the historical reality in which the commentators were embedded.²¹ Similarly, the nonliteral interpretation of the end of tractate *Soṭah* that Shalem advanced demanded semantic laxity as well as abstraction from the usual senses of the key terms that occurred in the text. Shalem warned his contemporaries about deceitful dreams and hallucinations, but he decoded and interpreted the mishnaic text as if it were a dream.

Shalem's Theory: Hypnosis and Symbolic Institution

Shalem describes the human mind's encounter with the Active Intellect in four steps. We will discuss each of them in more detail below; a brief list follows:

- (1) Separating the mind from the external world. This may take place during sleep, hallucinations, or very strong mental concentration.
- (2) The senses and the faculty of imagination, once they are separated from their external objects, are reoriented toward different types of objects. These may include written texts, dreams, desires, and intellections.

²¹ Cf. Cermanová, *Čechy na konce věků*, 21–77.

- (3) The Active Intellect may become attached to the human mind and intensify the mental processes.
- (4) The process may have two different results. If the intellect is a strong component of the mind, then the Active Intellect will make it even stronger, and it will supervise the work of the senses and the faculty of imagination. Under such conditions, the mind will see veridical dreams or prophetic revelations, or it may receive correct intuitions about the future and providential help from astral spirits or the Active Intellect. However, if the intellect is weak, then the Active Intellect will intensify the senses and imagination without the supervision of reason, and consequently, the mind will see false dreams and insane hallucinations that reinforce its prejudices (see Maimonides's "third kind" of people in *Guide* 2.37).

Shalem viewed the kabbalistic ideas of his Jewish contemporaries as instances of this last kind of encounter between the human mind and the Active Intellect: when the human recipient of the emanation has a weak or unprepared intellect, but a strong faculty of imagination, the result will be an excess of vivid phantasies without intellectual content and control, which will lead to erroneous opinions and insane actions. Shalem refers to a saying attributed to Rabbi Akiva (*b. Sanh.* 65):

[Talmud,] chapter "Four kinds of executions" in [tractate] *Sanhedrin*: "As has been taught: *Or that consulteth the dead* [Deut 18:11]: this means one who starves himself and spends the night in a cemetery, so that an unclean spirit [of a demon] may rest upon him [to enable him to foretell the future]. And when R. Akiba reached this verse, he wept: If one who starves himself that an unclean spirit may rest upon him [has his wish granted], he who fasts that the pure spirit [the Divine Presence] may rest upon him – how much more should his desire be fulfilled! But alas! our sins have driven it away from us, as it is written, *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God* [Isa 59:2]."

That is to say, due to the sins that they did not learn sciences [*hokhmot*] and the rational [faculty of the soul] diminished and the emanation reached only the imaginative [faculty of the soul]. And this is the "third kind of people" whom the Master

[= Maimonides] mentioned in chapter 37, part 2 [of the *Guide of the Perplexed*].²²

Rabbi Akiva's complaint indicates that no matter how much one desires to attain the Active Intellect, it may happen that an "unclean spirit" is received instead of the redemptory emanation.

Shalem identified the trap more precisely on the basis of a passage in *Guide* 2.37. In this chapter, which belongs to a larger section on prophecy, Maimonides mentions that an overflow from the Active Intellect may reach the imaginative faculty without first perfecting the intellect.²³ Such people will see extraordinarily strong visions, and they may also have the capacity to communicate them to other people. However, these visions will be false images, contrary to reason, and may lead to delusion both on an individual and a social level if such a visionary indeed manages to influence the masses. Here, Maimonides obviously had in mind false prophets, founders of other religions, and fanatical political-religious leaders, as well as poets.

For Shalem, the possibility that the imaginative faculty could receive an emanation from the Active Intellect and become stronger than the intellect was the major challenge of inventing an escape route from this world. When the self was emptied, the consequence was not necessarily the desired attachment to the Active Intellect. One could lose good common sense, but instead of gaining the superior intellect, fall victim to the delusions of false visions that originate from one's own imperfections (that is, the intellect's imperfect control of the imaginative faculty) being magnified and intensified by the influence of the Active Intellect, which has now become perilous.

Shalem moves the discussion to a general level when he comments on the sentence from the apocalyptic text at the end of

²² Oxford, Bodleian, MS Opp. 585, 23r זה "דורש אל המתים, ופרק ד' מיתות בסנהדרין תניא: וקייבא מגיע למקרא המרעיב את עצמו ולן בבית הקברות כדי שתשרה עליו רוח הטומאה. וכשהיה ר' עקיבא מגיע למקרא זה היה בוכה ואומ': ומה המרעיב את עצמו שתשרה עליו רוח הטומאה, המרעיב את עצמו כדי שתשרה עליו רוח טהרה על אחת כמ' וכמ'. אבל מה אעשה שעונותינו גדלו לנו שנ': כי עונותיכם היו מבדילים ביניכם ובין אלהיכם". ר"ל בעונות שלא למדו החכמ' ונתקצר הדברי ולא יהיה השפע רק על המדמה לבד, והם הכת השלישית שיאמ' הרב פל"ו ח"ב

²³ See Maimonides's theory of prophecy as well as its broad intellectual context, on Howard Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought 8 (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001).

tractate *Soṭah*, “the kingdom turns into heresy, and there is no rebuke” (המלכות תהא מינות ואין תוכחת):²⁴

“And the kingdom will be heresy” – by “kingdom,” he means the extraordinary measure of emanation that arrives from the Great King who guards the species [i.e., the Active Intellect] to whom the intellectual emanation is attached, who is greater than all the flesh and blood kings, even greater than David and Solomon.²⁵

“...will be heresy” – because due to the diminution of the logical [faculty], the emanation (which is meant by “kingdom”) will all be “heresy,” since only imaginations will come to [mind] from it, imaginations that do not correspond to any reality at all, but are fanciful creations of lies, which their imagination created, and there is no greater heresy than this.

“And there is no rebuke” – that is to say, no disputation will help against these things, since they came to their [minds] from the wondrous imaginations in a dream or from a frenzy while they are awake, as if Elijah of blessed memory told them the opinions that they had possessed before. And their traces remain engraved in their imagination with all the things that are in their faculty of imagination, and as the multitude of imaginations cease and disappear, only the “places” of those opinions remain [in the senses during sleep], and it seems to them [in their dreams or hallucinations] that they are newly created and they are coming from outside.²⁶

²⁴ On the Jewish concept of heresy in this age, see Yuval, “Kabbalisten, Ketzter und Polemiker,” 162–63.

²⁵ Cf. Maimonides, *Guide* 3.52, translated in Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 2:629.

²⁶ Oxford, Bodleian, MS Opp. 585, fol. 35v: והמלכות תהא מינות ר"ל במלכות שפע שעור הנוסף המגיע מהשפעת המלך הגדול המחופף על המין הנדבק בו השפע השכלי שהוא גדול מכל מלך בשר ודם, ואלו היו דוד ושלמה. תהא מינות כי לקצור [כת] הדברי יהיה השפע המכונן במלכות כלו מינות כי לא יגיע ממנו רק ענייני דמיוניים לא יאותו לשום נמצא כלל, אך בדויי השקר אשר יבדהו דמיונם ואין מינות גדול מזה. ואין תוכחת ר"ל אין שום ויכוח יועיל נגד אלה למה שהגיע להם מן הדמיונות הנפלאות בחלום או מן הטרופי' בעת היקיצה כאלו אליהו ז"ל הגיד להם הדעות שהיו להם קודם. ונשארו רשומיהם חקוקים בדמיונם עם כל מה שבכחם המדמה וכאשר בטלו דמיונות רבות והשביתום נשארו מקומות הדעות ההם לבדם ויראו להם כאלו הם דברים מתחדשים ועניין בא מחוץ

In the continuation of the text, Shalem cites Maimonides's *Guide* 2.36 to the effect that the false prophets see dreams that reflect the opinions they hear while they are awake. Maimonides probably had Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, in mind, although he never mentions him explicitly in the *Guide* (in this context, it is justifiable to apply Leo Strauss's notion of "persecution and the art of writing"). The problem for Maimonides was how Mohammed could receive revelations that were – at least partly – accurate reflections of the truth if he was a false prophet. His answer was that Mohammed must have heard some true opinions (such as the oneness of God) during the daytime which had left a mark in his imagination and then, at night or during a frenzied waking state, his faculty of imagination had presented these opinions as if they had been revealed to him by the Archangel Gibril.

Shalem follows Maimonides's theory, but he was considering a different problem, and therefore, the theory acquired a new meaning for him. For Maimonides, the question was how a false prophet can speak truth, while for Shalem, the question was how opinions and/or prejudices can be so entrenched in the human mind that no argument or persuasion can remove them. For Maimonides, the big emanatory machine of the Active Intellect could produce some residues of truth even in the mind of a false prophet, who was not adequately prepared to receive the emanation (in *Guide* 2.36, he hints at the fact that Mohammed had wives, while sexual life hinders prophecy). For Shalem, the big emanatory machine of the Active Intellect *produced lies* in the mind of the unprepared recipients of the emanation, and these lies were formidable enemies of the truth, since they were enthusiastically believed and fanatically defended and spread. How could this happen?! How could the kingdom become heresy?!

Shalem's answer is that dreams and hallucinations carry out a blind repetition of acquired opinions. These opinions will be removed from the context of the normal world and relocated in a new symbolic system that is instituted in dreams and which is *different from the symbolic order of reason*. The normal resources of human cognition – namely, sensual perception and rational thought – are both switched off during this process, and for this reason, they cannot exercise any control over it. Instead of cognition, we observe a double process of "engraving": the imaginations of the daily routine engrave traces into the faculty of imagination, and then, at night during sleep, or during the time of "frenzy" in the case of hallucinations, the senses, which

are isolated from the external world and free to receive impressions from different sources, will be determined by the traces in the faculty of imagination. In this way, a second “engraving” takes place: this time, the faculty of imagination engraves the traces left in it into the senses that are isolated from the external world. As a consequence, the senses will show the “traces” left in the faculty of imagination as a kind of objective truth, “coming from outside,” to the dreamer. This theory is probably based on Averroes’s interpretation of Aristotle’s ideas, or on Narboni’s summary of it in his commentary on *Guide* 2.36, which Shalem certainly read.²⁷

Furthermore, according to Shalem, a symbolic system emerges in dreaming and therefore, we can describe dreams as cases of symbolic institution. As has been mentioned, Shalem considered the predetermined content of the dream to be encoded into visual symbols during the process of dreaming. The visual symbols may include, for example, the prophet Elijah, as happened to a man whom Shalem knew personally (see above).²⁸ Dream interpretation was a widely practiced art in the Late Middle Ages: there was a general belief that the visual and aural elements of dreams could be decoded and thus that dreams could be “read” as a kind of text.²⁹ Thus, a symbolic system, a visual language, is activated in the process of dreaming.

Through this symbolic encoding, the content of the dreamer’s consciousness will recur in a more intensive manner and without the slightest possibility of criticism or control by reason or experience.³⁰ Dreams are symbolic systems that create authorities without control. In this way, dreaming is a “king” or a religious authority like the

²⁷ See Averroes, *Averrois Cordubensis compendia librorum Aristotelis qui Parva naturalia vocantur*, ed. Henry Blumberg (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1954), 44–46; cf. Alexander Altmann, “Gersonides’ Commentary on Averroes’ Epitome of *Parva Naturalia*, II.3: Annotated Critical Edition,” *PAAJR* 46–47 (1978/79): 1–31, here 11–12. On the reception of Gersonides’s commentary in Ashkenaz, see Tamás Visi, “Gersonides’ Reception in the Ashkenazi Tradition,” in *Gersonides’ Afterlife: Studies on the Reception of Levi ben Gerson’s Philosophical, Halakhic and Scientific Oeuvre in the 14th through 20th Centuries*, ed. Ofer Elijor, Gad Freudenthal, and David Wirmer (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 264–76.

²⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 585, fol. 36r.

²⁹ A good introduction to high and late medieval dream interpretation and dream theories is Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, esp. 7–16 on the various types of dream books.

³⁰ Averroes emphasizes that choice and cogitation are excluded from the process of dreaming, see Averroes, *Averrois Cordubensis compendia*, 44–45.

prophet Elijah. The terrifying conclusion, for Shalem, was that these authorities worked to spread falsehood. Rational arguments or persuasion had no chance to refute the errors once they were engraved into the mind through dreams or hallucinations. The symbolic institution proves to be stronger than reason, and its consequences are perilous.

Marc Richir described symbolic institution as a mortifying power in human life: symbolic systems can isolate us from reality, stigmatize us or part of our experiences, and block our concerns, desires, and aspirations and relocate them in a symbolic world.³¹ Shalem apparently faced the same mortifying power of symbolic institution when he encountered the problem of deceptive dreams. This is evident from the following passage, where he finds a connection between the “places” that the preconceived opinions engrave for themselves in the faculty of imagination and the sophistic “places,” that is to say, *topoi*, figures of inferences, known from Aristotle’s *Sophistic Refutations*. Nicole Oresme (ca. 1320–1382) related a long debate between Arithmetic and Geometry that he had supposedly heard in a dream; perhaps Shalem had similar experiences in mind.³² However, it is more likely that Shalem means to say that the argument stating that “my opinion was reinforced by a dream, therefore it is true” is a fallacy, a sophistic *topos*:

And this is one of the misleading “places” (inferences) that bring about death, and how many have died because they held themselves to be wise! And this is why you find men who justify their opinion through dreams that they see, and they believe that what appears to them while they sleep differs from the opinion that they believed or heard while they were awake. And the commentator, Magister Vidal [i.e., Moses Narboni], said, “and this is a divine mystery, immensely wondrous” and by this, he alludes to the fact that even a prophet needs to be free of prejudice [*da’at qodem*, “earlier opinion”] lest the [thing] that appears to him while he sleeps will be merely an opinion which he already believed in when he was awake, and which may contradict the truth. That is why the Master [i.e., Maimonides] said, “one should not listen

³¹ Marc Richir, *Phénoménologie et institution symbolique* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 1988), 41–43, 114–17, 179, and esp. 133–35.

³² See Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 140–49.

to someone whose rational faculty has not been perfected, and who has not reached the completion of cognitive perfection.”³³

One cannot but recall the correspondence about Jan Hus's dream in the prison at this point. In his dream, Hus saw the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, where he used to preach, and saw the pictures of Christ on the walls being destroyed during the night; however, the next morning, painters came and repainted them more beautifully than before and the people rejoiced, including Hus himself. A friend of Hus, Peter Maldoniewitz, consulted the “doctor of Biberach,” who interpreted the dream on the basis of a “place” (*locus*) in the “vision of Daniel” (*visio Danielis*); he probably meant the *Somniale Danielis*, a widespread medieval book on dream interpretation.³⁴ The pictures of Christ on the walls of the Bethlehem Chapel meant the life of Christ which was to be imitated by Christians. The people who demolished the paintings were the enemies of Christ. The painters were preachers, who restored the Christian doctrines to their audiences and who would be saved by Christ, Hus being one of them. The interpretation refers to a goose (*auca*) lying on the altar, which is taken as a reference to Hus himself, as *husa* means “goose” in Czech.³⁵ Hus died at the stake a few months later.

We do not know whether Shalem ever had any occasion to comment on Hus's dream, but we do have sufficient information to reconstruct the implications of his approach. Shalem would probably have said that the doctor of Biberach may have correctly interpreted the meaning of the dream, but that Hus's dream was by no means a message from God. Hus had a preformed opinion, a prejudice: he believed himself to be a righteous preacher of divine teachings, and he believed that his opponents were the enemies of God. He was obviously greatly concerned with these thoughts, so it is hardly

³³ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 585, fol. 36r: וזה מקום מן המקומות המטעים: ומה מקום הממיתים, וכמה מתו מן המחזיקים עצמם כחכמי' ומפני זה תמצא אנשים אמתו דיעותיהם בחלומות שחלמו אותם, ויחשבו שזה הנראה בשינה הוא דבר מבלתי הדעת אשר האמינהו או שמעוהו בעת היקיצה, ואמ' המפרש מגי' וידל וזהו סוד אלהי נפלא מאד ובר רמו על שצריך שלא יהיה אף לנביא דעת קודם שלא יהיה הנראה בשינה הדעת שכבר האמינו בעת היקיצה סותר לאמת, ולכן אמר הר' ולזה צריך שלא ישגיח אדם למי שלא ישלם כחו בדברי ולא הגיע לתכלית השלמות העיונית

³⁴ See Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 10–11.

³⁵ Václav Novotný (ed.), *M. Jana Husi Korespondence a dokumenty* (Jan Hus: Correspondence and documents) (Prague: Komise pro vydávání pramenů náboženského hnutí Českého, 1920), 250–51.

surprising that they left a trace in his faculty of imagination. At night, when he slept, his senses were undetermined by the external world, so the strong trace of his preformed opinion began to determine his senses. The same opinion that he had in the daytime returned to him in the dream in an encoded form and created the mistaken impression that it reflected an objective reality or a message from God. The dream corroborated Hus's prejudice about himself and contributed to his death. This is the mortifying power of symbolic institution.

Conclusion

We cannot know exactly when Shalem's works were written besides the fact that none of them was composed earlier than 1380 or later than 1430, though it is most likely that he wrote them between 1390 and 1420. Thus, he was a contemporary of the incipient Hussite movement. We can justifiably read his work against this historical background, but we would not be justified in treating it as a direct response to Hussitism, as he never explicitly refers to the Bohemian reform movement. Nevertheless, the theoretical positions that he formulated on the basis of Maimonides and Narboni acquire a new and vivid sense once they are read against the background of the Hussite revolution. Shalem utilized the intellectual resources at his disposal to struggle against the religious phantasmagorias and fanaticism of his age.

Shalem identified a mechanism of symbolic institution that takes place in dreams: the "prior opinions" (or prejudices, *de'ot qodmot*) of human beings leave traces in their imaginative faculties; these traces impact the dreams they have, and the dreams lend a semblance of objective reality or truth to their prior opinions. As a consequence, their prior opinions are engraved in the mind and become firm convictions that cannot be refuted by rational arguments. Shalem emphasizes that the consequences can be deadly: "How many have died because they held themselves to be wise!"³⁶ This comment may also have summarized Shalem's opinion about the death of Jan Hus.

³⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 585, fol. 36r: וכמה מתו מן המהזיקים עצמם כחכמי'

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