

**Palacký University in Olomouc**

**Faculty of Arts**

Kurt and Ursula Schubert Centre of Jewish Studies

Magdaléna JÁNOŠÍKOVÁ

**Eliezer Eilburg: Criticism of Miracles**

Diploma thesis

Supervisor: Tamás Visi, MA, Ph.D.

Olomouc 2012

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

Prehlasujem, že som diplomovú prácu vypracovala samostatne a uviedla v nej predpísaným spôsobom všetky použité pramene a literatúru.

V Olomouci dňa 20. augusta 2012.

Magdaléna Jánošíková

I would like to thank my supervisor, Tamás Visi, MA, Ph.D. for being endless source of wisdom, support and healthy constructive criticism that I appreciate the most. I also thank to Mag. Louise Hecht, Ph.D. and PhDr. Lenka Uličná for being wonderful teachers of Hebrew language in Palacký University in Olomouc. Last but not least, I would like to express gratitude to my family, and especially Miroslav, for all the love and patience they provided to me.

# Contents

Introduction .....	5
1 Miracles as an Issue of Philosophy .....	10
1.1 Saadia Gaon .....	10
1.1.1 Saadia on Miracles .....	16
1.2 Maimonides .....	18
1.2.1 Creationism and miracles: Guide of the Perplexed .....	20
1.2.2 Prophecy and miracles: Mishne Torah and Guide of the Perplexed .....	21
1.2.3 Miracles: Treatise on Resurrection .....	25
1.2.4 Summary .....	27
1.3 Philosophical debate in transition: Ibn Sīna, Ibn Rushd and their Jewish followers .....	29
1.4 Gersonides .....	32
1.4.1 Prophecy .....	33
1.4.2 Miracles .....	35
1.4.3 Summary .....	38
2 Criticism of philosophical approach .....	40
2.1 Don Isaac Abravanel .....	42
2.2 Spinoza .....	47
2.2.1 Prophecy and prophets .....	49
2.2.2 Miracle .....	50
3 Eliezer Eilburg .....	53
3.1 Biography .....	53
3.2 Impact of Printing .....	55
3.2.1 Eilburg and Compilations of Manuscripts .....	59
3.2.2 Dating of Eser She'elot .....	61
3.2.3 Methodology .....	63
3.2.4 She'elah Rishonah: Criticism of Miracles .....	65
3.2.5 Eilburg: Summarizing Medieval Approach .....	66
4 Conclusion .....	76
Resumé .....	80
Appendix A: Translation: the First Question by Eliezer Eilburg .....	90
Appendix B: Transcription: the First Question by Eliezer Eilburg .....	118

## Introduction

Biblical miracles are a topic discussed even in contemporary society. Through ritualization and commemoration some of them, such as the miracles connected to the narrative of the Exodus which are commemorated during the Seder meal on the feast of Passover, became educative tools teaching religious concept of Judaism. Miracles in the Bible could be understood as manifestation of God's endless power that abrogates customary order. On the other hand, the sharp difference between miracles and customary regulations implicitly helps to constitute nature as having an order. The miracles we encounter in biblical accounts have specific providential and historical roles, which place the community of Jews in the centre of all events. Miracle is a unilateral type of communication of God with mankind. Despite the fact that miracles often receive a detailed treatment in biblical texts, there is no firmly established classification of supernatural events in the Bible. There are several words in Biblical Hebrew that denote miracles: *gedolot* (great deeds, magnificence of God), *pele* (wonders), *nifla'ot* (wondrous acts, miracles), *ot* (sign, signs of hidden or potentially happening in future), *nes* (sign of warning), and *mofet* (wonder, miracle).<sup>1</sup> The plurality in terminology concerning unusual miraculous events supports the thesis that the Bible does not intent to work with any rigid theory of miracles.

In the Talmud, Mishnah and midrashic literature we find diverse opinions concerning nature of miracles. Every commentator on miracles takes it for granted that they can happen. However, description of their nature differs to great extent. Some of the opinions became popular pre-texts for supporting a naturalistic interpretation of miracles in medieval Jewish thought. A passage in Tractate Avot, which is a later addition to the Mishna, says: "*Ten things were created on the eve of the Shabbat at twilight, and these are they: the mouth of the earth [Nm 16:32], the mouth of the well [Nm 21:17], [3] the mouth of the donkey [Nm 22:28-30], the rainbow [Gn 9:13], the manna [16:4-21], the rod [Ex 4:2], the Shamir, the letters, the writing, and the tablets.*"<sup>2</sup> The passage was repeatedly used by medieval Jewish

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Brown, F., Driver, S. R., Briggs, Ch. A.: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub, 1996), s.v. "gedolot", "pele", "niflaot", "ot", "nes", "mofet."

<sup>2</sup> mAvot 5:6.

thinkers to support the argument that miracles are not done through direct volition of God. One of the most famous passages of the Talmud rejects the epistemological testimony of miracles. The halakhic discussion speaks about R. Joshua, who protests against R. Eliezer.<sup>3</sup> The latter tries to support his opinion with the divine intervention into the normal course of things which are made on his behalf, and finally a heavenly voice declares that he is right, but at this moment R. Joshua cries out responding to the heavenly voice: *“The Torah is not in heaven!”*<sup>4</sup> [...] *We pay no attention to a divine voice because long ago at Mt. Sinai You wrote in Your Torah at Mt. Sinai, ‘After the majority must one incline.’*<sup>5</sup> This suggests that there was a tendency to limit miracles into the past history so that the rabbinic system of organization could thrive without being disturbed by older forms of religious behaviour. It also reveals that rabbis themselves were often understood as people that can bring out a miracle through various activities – predominately studying, making good deeds or praying. The account on Honi the Circle-Drawer is one of the brightest examples of this practice.<sup>6</sup> Maimonides in the introduction of the Commentary on Mishnah speaks about the relation between prophets and rabbis. It is mitzvah to follow prophet’s demands, even if they collide with the Torah. There is an expectation concerning worshiping idols. According to Maimonides, contradictory nature of prophet’s actual demands does not break the Biblical laws, but it suspends them; therefore both, prophets and rabbis, may both enjoy their legitimate authority at the same time.

The biblical and rabbinic text presented miracles as God’s action, although various intermediaries may appear in executing the divine will. Usually they are angels, prophets, and even sages. God is aware of every particular event and he has no problem to change the course of such events. God’s knowledge of particulars and implementation of His will was not seen as problematic. Under the influence the Arabic *falsafa*, philosophical branch influenced by Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism, questions concerning these issues were raised.

---

<sup>3</sup> bBava Metzia 59b

<sup>4</sup> Dt 30:12

<sup>5</sup> Ex 23:2

<sup>6</sup> mTa’anit 3:8

Shortly before his death, Judah Halevi (1075–1141) wrote his famous book *Kuzari*. This work was written in a form of a dialog between pagan king and followers of four systems of thought: a Christian, a Muslim, a Jew, and a philosopher. Judah Halevi as a proponent of the faith in Jewish revelation summarizes stances of philosophers in following way:

*“A desire intimates a want in the person who feels it, and not till it is satisfied does he become (so to speak) complete. If it remains unfulfilled, he lacks completion. In a similar way He is, in the opinion of philosophers, above the knowledge of individuals, because the latter change with the times, whilst there is no change in God's knowledge. He, therefore, does not know thee, much less thy thoughts and actions, nor does He listen to thy prayers, or see thy movements. If philosophers say that He created thee, they only use a metaphor, because He is the Cause of causes in the creation of all creatures, but not because this was His intention from the beginning. He never created man. For the world is without beginning, and there never arose a man otherwise than through one who came into existence before him, in whom were united forms, gifts, and characteristics inherited from father, mother, and other relations, besides the influences of climate, countries, foods and water, spheres, stars and constellations. Everything is reduced to a Prime Cause; not to a Will proceeding from this, but an Emanation from which emanated a second, a third, and fourth cause.”<sup>7</sup>*

Halevi sums up all the problems appearing when a philosopher of Jewish faith wants to embrace the worldview of *falāsifa* (philosophers);<sup>8</sup> immutability of God and impossibility of knowledge of particulates can put restrictions on omnipotence, omniscience and lead to impersonal creation rooting out the concept of the God of history. Consequently, a new type of discourse on the biblical and rabbinic idea of miracles was opened and it always remained in proximity of questions of creation, God's volition and knowledge, Providence bringing rewards and punishments. It was also connected to theories and proofs of prophecies raised in context of

---

<sup>7</sup> Halevi, Judah: *The Kuzari – Kitab al Khazari*: an argument for the faith of Israel. (trans. Hirschfeld, H.) New York: Schocken Books, 1964; p. 36-37 (part I).

<sup>8</sup> For definition see Leaman, Oliver: *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999; p. 13-20.

epistemological debate. This philosophical debate virtually closed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with Baruch Spinoza. His rejection of miracles on philosophical ground placed them into category of popular superstition denoting unknown, rationally ungraspable due to the limits of human knowledge. Miracles continued to be discussed in religious literature, but Jewish philosophers from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on were no longer interested in questions such as how precisely Joshua's miracle of stopping the sun took place.

This thesis will present the text that criticizes miracles on the bases of late Jewish Aristotelianism of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Dragging from medieval sources, the author, Eliezer Eilburg, comes with controversial conclusions a century before Spinoza. Eilburg's contribution must be understood from various points including historical and philosophical context. The 16<sup>th</sup> century is the transitive period with a short-lived epoch of revival of the philosophical studies in Ashkenaz in its second half.<sup>9</sup> It is also period of discussions over the authority of the Jewish community.<sup>10</sup> Eilburg also represents a person who crosses geographical and cultural entities. His studies in Italy allowed him to prepare his own personal library of copied manuscripts that travelled with him back to Poland. In this manner Eilburg follows the major trend: Poland was exposed to cultural impact of Italian communities. There is also another aspect specific to his Ashkenazi background. He recognizes kabbalah as teaching coherent with philosophy.<sup>11</sup> In his ego-document retelling his life, he speaks about his father and even mother as about kabbalists<sup>12</sup> and the found collection of manuscripts shows his genuine interest in kabbalah often combined with astrology.

---

<sup>9</sup> Reiner, Elchanan: *The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society to the New Science in the Sixteenth Century.*, in *Science in Context*. Vol. 10, No. 4. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997; Ruderman, David, B.: *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; chapter 2: The Legitimation of Scientific Activity among Central and Eastern European Jews; Davis, Joseph: *Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller: portrait of a seventeenth-century rabbi*. Oxford, Portland, Or.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004. Melamed, Abraham: A legitimating myth: Ashkenazic thinkers on the purported Jewish origins of philosophy and science, in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, Vol. 8, [s.l.]: Göttingen, 2009; p. 299-315.

<sup>10</sup> Sládek, Pavel: Širší kontext pražské židovské renesance. [Broader context of the Jewish Renaissance in Prague], in *Dialog myšlenkových proudů středověkého judaismu* [Dialog of Thoughts in Medieval Judaism]. Praha: Academia, 2011; p. 332-342; Reiner, Elchanan: The rise of an urban community: some insights on the transition from the medieval Ashkenazi to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish community in Poland, in *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*. Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2003; p. 363-372.

<sup>11</sup> Ruderman, David, B.: *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> MS JTS 2324; fol. 89r



However, all these perspectives are very broad and intersect in a complex manner. Sufficient treatment of aforementioned aspects would constitute more than a single thesis. Therefore, our main aim is to analyse part of his treatise and identify his philosophical arguments and provide general context within the framework of the Jewish thought.

The thesis is accompanied with translation of the “First Question” of Eilburg’s work *Eser She’elot* (the Ten Questions).<sup>13</sup> The text is dedicated to the analysis of miracles, prophecy and preeminence of laws, which are topics discussed as one issue connected to the proof of the divinity of the Torah and God’s individual will acting in unfolding history. We provide the main philosophical stances on the topic focused on several crucial thinkers. The most important role in Eilburg’s thought plays Maimonides and Gersonides. Eilburg applies different method of reading, when he works with their treatises; therefore, there is a need to discuss their views on miracles. Another crucial thinker, whose treatment of miracles set a breakthrough in the discussion, is Baruch Spinoza and his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* published in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Our aim is to show in what way Eilburg gets closer to the modern type of philosophy through comparison of Eilburg’s *She’elot* with Spinoza’s *Tractate*. We have also included few remarks on Abravanel’s criticism of philosophy, which argued for revelatory nature of laws and miracles as proofs of God’s will. He also rejected whole Aristotelian physics as spread among Jewish rationalists. His 15<sup>th</sup> century attack constructs ‘main stream’ in the thought. Aristotelian thought had been already under pressure in a century before<sup>14</sup> and Eilburg in the 16<sup>th</sup> century represents one of the last and very late Aristotelians.<sup>15</sup> However, the whole thesis starts with Saadia Gaon. Even though he was not philosopher influenced by the Islamic falsafa, but represents followers of *Kalām* (follower called as mutakallim), he has a place in the discussion over miracles as he was one of the first to comprehensively formulate issue of miracles, despite the fact there is no direct influence on Eilburg’s concept.

---

<sup>13</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 48v-58v

<sup>14</sup> See Frank, Daniel H.: Maimonides and Medieval Jewish Aristotelianism, p. 136-156; Kraemer, Joel L.: The Islamic Context of Medieval Jewish Philosophy, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 2003; p. 38-68.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, Joseph: Judaism and Science in the Age of Discovery, in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*. Maiden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012; p. 259-275.

# 1 Miracles as an Issue of Philosophy

Falsafa, as it was constituted by al-Fārābī, seems not to influence Jewish thinkers before the twelve century in a systematic manner. Only thinkers like Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021–1058), Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164), and Abraham Ibn Daud (1138–1204) who is understood to be the first Aristotelian, show intimate contact with the doctrines of the philosopher.<sup>16</sup> Before that time, it is even impossible to speak about a systematic Jewish philosophic school. Utilizing the knowledge about the major Islamic philosophical trends serves as a vital study tool. Despite the lack of Aristotle's defenders among the Jewish intellectuals, it does not mean they had no influence on earlier authorities involved in philosophical discussions..

If we undertake the mission to browse the literature dedicated to Jewish philosophy in a form of a companion or a historical summary we would find two figures denoting the imaginary starting point of the discipline.<sup>17</sup> The first would be Isaac Israeli (c. 832–c. 932), North African philosopher and physician, who followed in leaps of Neoplatonism. The second would be Saadia Gaon (882–942). In Saadia's case we meet with philosophical treatment of the miracles, which appear in his polemic and philosophical treatise.

## 1.1 Saadia Gaon

Arabian historian Al-Mas'udi identifies these Mutakallimun with theologians in Bagdad. The same term is applied by Ibn Hazm and Moses ibn Ezra for one of the aforementioned rabbis *Saadia ben Josef al-Fayyūmī* (Gaon).<sup>18</sup> This personality well-versed in the rabbinic culture and installed in their institutions broadened the subjects of studies and operations of the Gaonate far beyond their previous scope and one of the new features of such an approach was transformation of the authority, which

---

<sup>16</sup> Mičaninová, Mária: *Koruna kráľovstva rabi Šlomo ben Gabirola s komentárom*. [Keter Malchut of r. Shlomo ibn Gabirol] Praha: Bergman, 2010 [Czech].

<sup>17</sup> I am excluding Philo of Alexandria, who definitely was a great philosopher. However, the lack of philosophical tradition, absence of Hebrew translation and any direct impact on medieval Jewry put him in an insignificant role in this study.

<sup>18</sup> Stroumsa, Sarah: Saadya and Jewish Kalam, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003; p. 78-81.

suddenly defends their doctrines in a polemical way and gives recognition to their opponents as a byproduct.<sup>19</sup> This stance is already present in one of the first Jewish systematic treatise, which attempts to reconcile religious pillars with rational speculation, called *the Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (Arabic - original: *Al-Amānāt Wa-l-I'tiqādāt*; in Hebrew translation known as *Sefer Emunot ve-Deot*) written in 931. In his treatise, Saadia draws attention to the state of confusion among contemporary Jews that persuade him to write a book shedding light on the topic of the connection between reason and religion, or, better to say, a set of doctrines that Saadia as a religious authority was in charge of.

One of the main purposes was to show that his interpretation of the first chapters of the biblical book of Genesis, i.e. the creation of the world — which he understood as creation *ex nihilo* — is the only true beginning of the world and that this Jewish doctrine cannot be refuted by the pagans. Miracles play a role in his argumentation:

*“[The purpose of the treatise] is to respond to any one who argues against us in regard to matters pertaining to our religion. For our Master, blessed and exalted be He, has inculcated within us everything that is necessary in regard to religious matters through the medium of His prophets. He did this after he verified their prophecy through signs and marvels.”*<sup>20</sup>

It can be seen that the idea of a miracle appears in close contact to activity of a prophet as a validation of the truthfulness of the divine communication between God and the prophet. These beliefs Saadia calls “*tradition*” and he establishes it as one of the possible sources of the truth. In the introduction he argues that there are four of these sources. (1) Throughout the treatise, sensory reception remains the dominant source of the truth. One of the reasons is that its outcomes are shared with wide audience, not excluding women or children<sup>21</sup> and thus, it is the most public and most

---

<sup>19</sup> Brody, Robert: *The Geonim of Babylonian and Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Saadia Gaon: *Book of Beliefs and Opinion*, Introduction [Book of Beliefs] (Rosenblatt, Samuel, 1948), in ed. Manekin, Charles: *Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008; p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Saadia in the introduction openly declares: “*Furthermore women and young people and those who have no aptitude for speculation can thus also have a perfect and accessible faith, for everybody is equal when it comes to sense-knowledge.*” Ibid; p. 20.

“controlled” source of truth.<sup>22</sup> (2) Secondly, there are self-evident truths recognized by the power of intellect. (3) Last but not least, there are truths that are combinations of different information based on sensory perception and reason. In other words, these truths are deduced or inferred. (4) Saadia adds to this concept the religious tradition that must be authoritative, that is to say, derived from prophets.

Saadia acts as a limited rationalist throughout the whole treatise. Process of rational cognition, if one undergoes it with patience and is well aware of the methodology, should always bring us to correct reasoning. The outcomes of the process are equal to that of tradition. However, due to time-consuming manner of the activity and inability of all people to participate on it, there is a prophecy that informs us about all the necessary information for living happy life in harmony with the creation and with regard to the world to come.<sup>23</sup> Revelation, therefore, is rational and it could provide us also proof that our reasoning is correct. It also points at the direction our knowledge should be reaching. Only when all the sources agree on a certain issue, only then man could be sure that he came to the right conclusion.

To sum up, revelation provides benefits for individuals as well as masses. It provides corroborative assurance for those who delve into problematic issues. On the other hand, reasoning corroborates revelation that is especially practical in dispersing doubts though refutation. Revelation also shapes and arranges priorities in research. And finally, it helps individuals to live a beneficial life through following commandments revealed.

However, the world is not entirely knowable to human beings and none has complete knowledge. Human being, as a created material being, is finite just as every other creature. Another obstacle is the position of God in the world. Saadia’s assumption is that every cause is prior to the effect not only symbolically, but also in time – if there is an effect that cannot be caused by object itself, then the cause must be external.

When Saadia applies this theorem on the issue of creation, he claims that the cause of the turning the possibly existing world into actuality is external, therefore

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid; p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid; p. 13-16.

God is external to the world.<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to see that despite Saadia's disagreement with the eternal world (as held by Aristotle); he prefers relying on Aristotelian principles of natural philosophy<sup>25</sup> to the Mu'tazilites' atomism and denial of causality.<sup>26</sup> Once Saadia's concept of creation is accepted, we can deduce several conclusions. The most important one is that the uncreated creator reveals some of his positive aspects in his creation. Sensory receptors provide positive knowledge of God who is reflected in the world, but distant from it, and thus excluding pantheism.

Most of the content of revelation for Saadia is an assemblage of commandments, which he divides into (a) rational commandments and (b) arbitrary commandments.<sup>27</sup> Rational commandments are those, which are knowable for human beings through the activity of their senses, intellect and inference. The arbitrary or divine ones have no rational foundation – not in a sense that they are opposed to man's rationality, but their sense is not apprehensible by normal cognitive processes. Function of these laws is engendering certain kind of a lifestyle, which in this case is closely linked with ideas of God's providence, punishments and rewards.

The relation between speculation and the tradition could be abstracted from Saadia's claim: "... *we conduct our speculation and inquiry, in order to actualize what our Master has informed us about through revelation.*"<sup>28</sup> We have already pointed out that according to Saadia, revelation can be used as a corroborative tool to justify one's reasoning. However, Saadia is aware that it is not always possible to find a satisfying justification for some of the commandments. If they cannot be corroborated by reason that does not depend on time, then Saadia bases their veracity on the moment revelation appeared to senses of witnesses and this information is transmitted and accepted as tradition. Saadia turns the people of Israel into witness of

---

<sup>24</sup>Schweid, Elizer: *The Classic Jewish Philosophers: From Saadia Through the Renaissance*. Vol. III. Leiden [u.a.]: Brill, 2007; p. 16-20. Sirat, Colette: *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985; p. 23-35.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle understands cause and effect as coexisting in time and God and world in coexisting in eternal reality. Marmodoro, Anna: The Union of the Cause and Effect in Aristotle: *Physica* III 3, in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 2007; p. 205-232.

<sup>26</sup> Wolfson, Harry Austryn: *The Kalam Arguments for Creation in Saadia, Averroes, Maimonides and St. Thomas*. New York, 1943; p. 19-33.

<sup>27</sup> Saadia Gaon: Book of Beliefs and Opinion, Introduction [Book of Beliefs] (Rosenblatt, Samuel, 1948), in ed. Manekin, Charles: *Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008; p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid; p. 19.

the miraculous revelation, and their consensus is that the auditory and visual effects connected to the miracles were indeed true – therefore, miracles are reasons to believe that revelation is true (see fn. 9). Even tradition is put into the position of a subject for proper examination. The witnesses of the miracles examined the prophet and subsequent generations were responsible for examination of these witnesses.<sup>29</sup> This treatment of trustworthy tradition will reappear later with Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* again.<sup>30</sup> Saadia says:

*“It is also inconceivable that the ancestors of the children of Israel would conspire to lie in this matter. That condition suffices for every authentic tradition. Moreover, if they had told their children: “We lived in the wilderness for forty years eating manna,” and there had been no basis for that in fact, their children would have answered them: “Now you are lying. Is not this your field, Mr. So and So?” or: “Is not this your vineyard, Mr. So and So, from which you always derived your sustenance?” This is something that the children would not have accepted from them.”*<sup>31</sup>

The reconciliation of the tension between God and the world caused God's extra-natural nature as the topic in Saadia's earlier work *the Commentary on the Book of creation* (Arabic: *Tafsīr Kitāb al-Mabādī*, Hebrew: *Perush Sefer Yetzirah*), which involves the Arabic translation of the Book of Creation with Saadia's commentary. Although it is an older work, he already suggests the solution how to resolve the problem with the incoherency and anthropomorphism of biblical narratives. Saadia uses two interpretative methods. The major one, similarly utilized by Mu'tazilites, is

---

<sup>29</sup> Similar tendencies were present in Islamic intellectual society during the examination and arrangement of *ahadith* (sg. *hadith*) during the Abbasid period. Various miscellaneous Islamic traditions were categorized according to the quality of *sanad*, the chain of narration leading to the content of the informatory message called *mant* into categories *sahih*, *hasan*, *da'if* and various related categories primary related to the nature of *sanad*.

Saunders, J.J.: *A History of Medieval Islam*. London, New York: Routledge, 2002; p. 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> Kogan, Barry, S.: Understanding prophecy: Four Traditions, in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*. (ed. Nadler, Steven, Rudavsky, Tamar) Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 2009; p. 481-523. Eran, Amira: Intuition and inspiration: the causes of Jewish thinkers' objection to Avicenna's intellectual prophecy; in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*. Vol 14, No. 1. [s.l.]: Moher Siebeck, 2007; p. 31-79.

<sup>31</sup> Saadia Gaon: Book of Beliefs and Opinion, Introduction [Book of Beliefs] (Rosenblatt, Samuel, 1948), in ed. Manekin, Charles: *Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008; p. 19.

figurative interpretation (*tawīl*) wisely combined with reason, which works as the intuitive tool for distinguishing the interpretation to use. Only contradictory passages are allowed to be reinterpreted.<sup>32</sup> In case the prophecy is a subject of such activity, Saadia is reluctant to allow allegorization,<sup>33</sup> but underlines actual physical reality of divine visions and voices. There is no space in his arguments to dismiss them as illusion or having existence besides this material world.

In order to interact with people God must create sort of an intermediary agent, which is the way He manifests Himself in the created world. This created aspect of God is called *Created Glory* (Kavod nivra), which refers also to Shekhinah, or the Second Air (Avir sheni), that is to say, air in the air, very subtle and fine air that is responsible formulation of words.

*“It is by this fine air, which is the second, that was carried the word of prophecy, as it is said “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me” [Isaiah 61:1]. And it is by it that appear all the miracles visible to the prophets, as it is said “in a vision by the Spirit of the God” [Ezekiel 11:24] and it is evidently a created thing, for everything which is not God is a created, as it is said “there is none else beside Him” [Deuteronomy 4:35]. It is through this second air, very fine, but created, which is in the world as life is in man, that was produced the created word heard by Moses in the visible air, and the Decalogue that our fathers heard in the visible air, and it was called “the voice of the living God”.*<sup>34</sup>

Through the Created Glory, the *Created Word* (Dibbur nivra) appears. Anytime the Bible refers to speaking God, in Saadia’s opinion, it actually refers to the medium of the fine air through which words were created by God as a right arrangement of air vibrations reaching ears of the prophet and the people.<sup>35</sup> The Created Glory is responsible for the visual changes that appear during revelation. Despite Saadia does not operate with faculty of the imagination as later philosophers, he implicitly

---

<sup>32</sup> Saadia Gaon, Rosenblatt, Samuel: *Saadia Gaon: The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976; p. 265.

<sup>33</sup> Altmann, Alexander: Saadya’s Theory of Revelations: Its Origin and Background, in *Saadya studies*. (ed. Rosenthal, Erwin I. J.). New York: Arno Press, 1980; p. 4-25.

<sup>34</sup> Sirat, Colette: *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985; p. 29, (Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah VI, I).

<sup>35</sup> Saadia Gaon: *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* II, 12.

distinguishes between vision stimulating imagination and hearing a voice. It is responsible for changing the speech of God into language perceptible by mankind.<sup>36</sup> Altmann argues that although the Created Word resembles Mu'tazilites' conception used for fighting anthropomorphism, he does not see any Islamic source in the idea of the Created Glory. The Glory is closely connected to the merkava-mysticism, to which Sefer Yetzira alludes. He also recognizes that although in Saadia's commentary the two principles are intertwined, they are separate entities in his later work the Book of Doctrines and Beliefs. Altmann also traces the influence on the medieval Hasdei Ashkenaz, which operates with terms inner Glory (Kavod penimi), which is a form of a Logos (Dibbur) and visible Glory sitting on the throne of the Merkavah. The fact that Dibbur is called Kavod signifies that Hasdei Ashkenaz must have been influenced by tradition preceding the Book of Doctrines and Beliefs.<sup>37</sup> The reasonable conclusions are that God bears the responsibility for the supernatural deeds. Prophet is a simple man living rather common life.<sup>38</sup> He serves as a divine tool, who does not affect the ongoing process of revelation. He is not a miracle-worker in the proper sense.

From the crowd of prophets Moses emerges as the one whose prophecy is the most reliable. There are two aspects that make him the ultimate winner in Saadia's eyes. In the Book of Doctrines and Beliefs he is exalted because of the public nature of the prophecy. During the Revelation on Mount Sinai every Jew served as a witness, and therefore, for Saadia, it is unimaginable that the whole tradition could be faked. The accuracy of his prophecy is also guaranteed by differing mechanism through which God spoke to Moses. According to the Commentary, God spoke to him directly though the Created Word diminishing the possible doubts that the visionary aspect of the Created Glory could mislead Moses. He heard the prophecy in the most direct possible way.

### 1.1.1 Saadia on Miracles

---

<sup>36</sup> Altmann, Alexander: Saadia's Theory of Revelations: Its Origin and Background, in *Saadia studies*. (ed. Rosenthal, Erwin I. J.) New York: Arno Press, 1980; p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid; p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Saadia Gaon, Rosenblatt, Samuel: *Saadia Gaon: The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976; III, 3.



Miracles are imagined as impermanent changes in the natural order<sup>39</sup> of divine manner that prove the veracity of revelation, which is delivered by a prophet. As a consequence, Saadia claims that the miracle of manna was the most marvelous due to the continuous period of time that the world underwent change in the natural pattern.<sup>40</sup> Saadia acknowledges possibility that a rod could be changed into a snake [Exodus 7:10] due to omnipotence of God based on the idea that He has an ability to create *ex nihilo*. He elaborates his vision of miracles as proof of prophecy (and creation as well) by turning them into sensual experience that we are able to perceive through senses, which are, if we exclude tradition, most accessible mean of cognition.

Miracles as visions that could be seen and voices that could be heard must be understood in context of Saadia's Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah. His definition of miracles involved both philosophical and mystical aspect. In the commentary, Saadia describes the revelation as very materialistic activity devoid of ideas that revelation could have occurred in imagination. In comparison to later philosophers with Maimonides as their leader, Saadia is less committed to replace corporeal realities with spiritual ones. Rabbinic legacy presenting miracles in very naturalistic way could be felt in various places of Saadia's works. When Saadia speak about manna as about "*food produced for them in the air by the Creator*,"<sup>41</sup> he speaks about creation as the creation of the world described in Sefer Yetzirah. Therefore miracles are accessible to the senses of prophets or common people as actual reality. Personality of the prophet does not play any role. He does not deviate in any manner and there is no special quality attached to his soul. These issues rise only in strengthening of the influence of *falsafa* among Jewish circles.

Obviously, in Saadia's works miracles are presented in the spirit of limited rationalism. In order to support religious pillars, the author presents them as reasonable. However, his treatment does not challenge them in any aspect. And questions like probability of miracles stay unopened. Saadia already reacts on the

---

<sup>39</sup> Saadia Gaon, Rosenblatt, Samuel: *Saadia Gaon: The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976; III. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Saadia Gaon: *Book of Beliefs and Opinion*, Introduction [Book of Beliefs] (Rosenblatt, Samuel, 1948), in ed. Manekin, Charles: *Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008; p. 19.

concept of immutability of God. On the basis of the theory, God cannot desire nor will, He cannot access particular knowledge as all activities presuppose incomplete and imperfect being. There are two implicit answers. The first one stems directly out of his limited rationalism and strong position of God's omnipotence. Creation out of nothing is act of unconditional free will. Miracles are exactly this facet of power. As God is not fully revealed to human mind, there is no invincible need to understand miracles in their entirety. Maimonides follows this type of argumentation in his *Guide of the Perplexed* [Guide II, 25]. The second reply operates with analysis of intermediaries. Even though God is perfect and unreachable, his will is projected through agents of imperfect, incomplete and corporeal nature. 'Created Glory' is one of such agents that is corporeal and sensually accessible to prophet's corporeal eyes and ears, but the ultimate cause of the event is God. Later Jewish thinkers, abiding by Fārābī and Avicennian metaphysics, employ incorporeal intermediaries connecting God to sublunar world. One of these thinkers and the most influential is Maimonides.

## 1.2 Maimonides

The impact of Maimonidean corpus of works in medieval as well as modern world of scholarship is amazingly vast. By picking up various topics and issues from his works different thinkers modeled heterogeneous systems that deviate from the original thought to greater or lesser extent. Of course, one would have to admit that decipherment of this "original" thought could be possible. When we try to define what the opinion on miracles Maimonides has, we will encounter the fact that neither the *Commentary on the Mishnah* nor the *Guide of the Perplexed* dedicate to this topic even a single compact chapter. The only work addressing the issue is the *Treatise on Resurrection*. We are left in a situation forcing us to gather information from different corners.

Ackerman provides us helpful hint when diving scholars' attitude towards our topic into two groups.<sup>42</sup> There are researchers portraying Maimonides as radical naturalist rejecting God's power to intervene into the natural order. Their argument is based on an esoteric opinion that Maimonides held as he claims it to be one of his

---

<sup>42</sup> Ackerman, Ari: Miracles in Nadler, Steven, Rudavsky, T. M. (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009; p. 375.

methodological tools.<sup>43</sup> This approximation to Aristotle puts aside miracles as belief maintained for curbing masses. The revelation and the laws it establishes are only noble lies.<sup>44</sup> In one of Kreisel's articles, he concludes that Maimonides held miracles as events resulting from impersonal government of God.<sup>45</sup> For building up the image of his prophecy he argues that prophecy, as directly included among the "*Secrets of the Law*,"<sup>46</sup> should be treated with special attention paid to the technique of deliberate contradiction used for concealing the true meaning.<sup>47</sup> Reines goes much further. He directly distinguishes between "apparent concept of miracles" and the "true view", which he reconstructs through various allusions. One of his conclusions is that Maimonides completely adopted Islamic Neoplatonicized physics, i.e. God created only the First intelligence directly, which emanated other Intelligences and spheres that constitute the natural order that God does not abrogate. Reines afterwards continues that Moses was supreme in knowledge only, which he used for religious and moral purposes.<sup>48</sup>

Beside this Fārābīan fashion, there is another image of Maimonides – as defender of Judaism; and therefore the defender of miracles as well. In this case, the proof-texts supporting existence of miracles appear to be in contact with Maimonides' argumentation for creationism, e.g., Tzvi Langermann presents the issue of miracles in an "evolutional" way, examining the change in Maimonides' postulates in chronological order. He tries to map the changes in the opinion rather than providing coherent explanations of the whole Maimonidean oeuvre. According to his view, the development of the traditional stance in the latter period of Maimonides' life is reaction on his doubts about the omnipotence of science. This

---

<sup>43</sup> Guide, Introduction to part I.

<sup>44</sup> Strauss, Leo: *The City and Man*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964.

<sup>45</sup> Kreisel, Howard: Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy. In *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 75, No. 2. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984; p. 99-133.

<sup>46</sup> Guide I, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Guide, Introduction to part I.; Kreisel, Howard: *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001; p. 210.

<sup>48</sup> Reines, Alvin: Maimonides' Concept of Miracles. In *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 45. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974; p. 243-285.

progress is, however, rendered in terms of passage from the immature phase to the mature one.<sup>49</sup>

In this thesis, it is not our aim to reconcile various readings of Maimonides, neither it is the formation of our own theory. We will provide succinct overview of the topics connected with miracles focused on Mishne Torah and the Guide of the Perplexed. Naturally, these two most circulating Maimonidean books had the greatest impact on the following debate concerning miracles. We will include also the Treatise on Resurrection, which obtains observation on miracles qua miracles. They are worth of mentioning despite they never entered dramatic philosophical debate as is the case of the two aforementioned works.

### **1.2.1 Creationism and miracles: Guide of the Perplexed**

Maimonides argues for impossibility to prove any cosmogony to be right in its totality. The major clash appears to be between Aristotle's eternity of the world and its creation defended by Jewish tradition. He recognizes that from the actual state of the universe, any relevant information concerning creation of the world cannot be inferred.

In chapter 17 of the second part, he claims that the tradition holds that nature is not governed by the same laws at the time of creation as normally. Maimonides confirms that at the present state of the world eternal motion exists and potential precedes actuality. On the other hand, he claims that there are beliefs in that the matter and attributes were brought into existence from nothing. But this part of Jewish worldview cannot be proved in the same manner as the eternity of the world and there is no solid basis for their refutation. Aware of these issues, Maimonides rejects argument that creation could be derived from the properties of the world.

*“If we were to accept the Eternity of the Universe as taught by Aristotle, that everything in the Universe is the result of fixed laws, that Nature does not change, and that there is nothing supernatural, we should necessarily be in opposition to the foundation of our religion, we should disbelieve all miracles and signs, and certainly*

---

<sup>49</sup> Tzvi Langermann, Israel: Maimonides and miracles: The growth of a (dis)belief, in *Jewish History* Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2004; p. 147-172.

*reject all hopes and fears derived from Scripture, unless the miracles are also explained figuratively.”*<sup>50</sup>

Maimonides held Greco-Arabic sciences and philosophy in high esteem and he did not hesitate to use their paradigms to formulate explanations set in this cultural and scientific tone. He praises the sages discussing natural occurrence in *Bereshit Rabbah* and *Midrash Kohelet*.<sup>51</sup> Miracles should have been implanted into nature during the process of creation, during the time of obtaining present physical properties. Such miracles would appear in a certain time and space as results of natural laws. His inclination to this naturalizing tendency has its barriers. Maimonides acknowledges possibility that the world could have had other properties at the time of creation.<sup>52</sup> And there can be issues that God’s particular will may affect, e.g. distribution of stars.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Maimonides could admit that a particular divine will is affecting the miracles without contradicting his more general worldview.

Natural theory of miracles has own consequences. When miracles were implemented into nature and occurred in accordance with the natural order, than the miracle as such became a historical event that took place in defined time and space. A miracle is also knowable only to certain degree. Its properties can reach our senses but further knowledge is not accessible. Maimonides follows the logic of Saadia; knowledge of essence of miracles belongs to God. It is doubtful whether a prophet has access to this information, or he is just instrumented about place and time of a miracle.

### **1.2.2 Prophecy and miracles: Mishne Torah and Guide of the Perplexed**

Mishne Torah belongs to set of Maimonides’ rabbinic writings with all the particularities implied; that is to say, style of writing is entirely rabbinic. Although, any search for philosophical argument in a language of philosophy would be redundant, it accords with the concept of prophecy proposed in the Guide, his later work. The Guide, on the other hand, as a philosophical work opened new opportunities for expressing issues. The language plays important role. Arabic

---

<sup>50</sup> Guide II, 25.

<sup>51</sup> Guide II, 29. He does not cite the text exactly; he alludes to the text of *Bereshit Rabbah* 5:5.

<sup>52</sup> Guide II, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Guide II, 18.

language provided rich apparatus for entering new types of discussions, and even wider audience. Despite all these points, Maimonides did not essentially modify his theory of prophecy and he self-confidently refers to it in his later writings.

Mishne Torah speaks about “signs and wonders” only in connection to prophetic visions,<sup>54</sup> Messianistic age,<sup>55</sup> and the most famously in association with Moses’ revelation in *Sefer Madah*, Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah 7.1-8.3 as a subtopic of broader excursus on prophecy. Both treatises present prophecy as an act willed by God and liberation of prophet’s soul from sensual perception.

Maimonides is keen on reminding to his reader that some prophecies occur in a vision or dream-like state.<sup>56</sup> Namely, this method of interpretation is utilized to avoid literary understanding of God’s corporeality, inappropriate, or impossible behavior of prophets. Such events are restricted to prophet’s imagination. Seemingly, the historicity of such an event is heavily suppressed. This opinion may collide with the rabbinic perception of God as God of history, who gives meaning to living in space and time. But Maimonides does not oppose the idea that these moments result into a pace in the historical process, which conforms with the Divine. Prophesizing have real impact on society. His intention is to clarify vertical arrangement between the layer of spheres and human world. The world as such is created for the sake of humanity; however, spheres above have external relation to the sublunar world. The most vivid example is Maimonides’ approach to the story of Joshua halting the Sun (Joz 10: 12-14). In literal sense, this would mean cosmic disaster for the sake of a very mundane moment. Maimonides proposes to see it as rhetorical figure, a hyperbole with less poetic naturalistic expiation behind it. This classification enables us to deal with event once again on the ground of the world ruled by natural laws and accessible by senses and contemplation. Therefore, Maimonides concludes that any prophetic vision, which encounters with the change of heavens, is to be interpreted in an allegorical manner. The limits are obtained also in the continuation of the

---

<sup>54</sup> Mishne Torah [MT], *Sefer Madah* [SM], Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah 2:4; Ibid 7:1-3.

<sup>55</sup> MT, SM, Shoftim, Melakhim u-Milkhamoteihem, 11:3.

<sup>56</sup> See fn41 and Guide II 42.

quotation: “*The Allegorists amongst the Mohammedans have done this (figurative explanation), and have thereby arrived at absurd conclusions.*”<sup>57</sup>

In Saadia’s thought, a prophet is a common man. This view would not find positive feedback in Maimonides’ concept. His estimation of Greco-Islamic culture of intellectual self-cultivation reflects in the values he ascribes to a figure of the prophet. He replaced the traditional image with a new one corresponding with the Fārābī type. Both Mishne Torah and the Guide argue for a prophet who is mentally, physically, and morally perfect. A prophet is separated from the rest of the society by avoiding vices related to inappropriate life. Such life-time training should bring about a prophet whose “*knowledge would incline to general principles and to improve relations between members of society.*”<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the investment into self-perfection is not a guarantee that a man will turn into a prophet. The primary agent of prophecy is God; therefore, He is the one who allows prepared aspirants to obtain prophecy.<sup>59</sup>

The Guide adds to this the whole theory of human faculties, which are responsible for the nature of our perception. The faculty of prophecy is imagination, which is responsible for creating visions. Another faculty is the rational one that is the site of reasoning. Only excellent quality of both faculties can enable someone to become a prophet. The Guide, in the chapters dedicated to prophecy, introduces prophecy in this descriptive manner:

“*Prophecy is, in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man’s rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty.*”<sup>60</sup>

The influence of the Active intellect is influencing both faculties, even when their condition is not sound. However, if the conditions are not met, then the emanation of the Active Intellect does not result in prophecy, but in other states of mind which are of lesser quality. For Maimonides it means that the lack in the rational faculty combined with well-developed imaginative faculty produces false prophecies and

---

<sup>57</sup> Guide II, 25.

<sup>58</sup> Guide II, 36.

<sup>59</sup> MT, SM, Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah, 7:5.

<sup>60</sup> Guide II, 36.

hallucinations. These people may be statesmen, lawgivers, charmers, diviners, or people having true dreams. On the other hand, people with an excellent rational faculty become sages and philosophers when influenced by the Active Intellect according to Maimonides' theory.<sup>61</sup> The prophet is the ideal combination of a wise man and the lawgiver. The law he gives is the divine law, which provides welfare of the body and welfare of the soul.

It can be noticed that the whole emanation theory in connection to epistemology is borrowed from the prophetic concept of Islamic philosophers (al-Fārābī and Ibn Sina).<sup>62</sup> It enables to develop a coherent system for description of prophecy. It further expounds on the relation and semi-active position of a prophet, who have to fulfill prerequisites. Such implementations would be surprising in a work like Mishne Torah. There the communication of prophecy is described as a contact with angels of the lowest rank known as ishim.<sup>63</sup>

Moses as the superior prophet appears in both treatises. Guide II, 32<sup>64</sup> mentions two aspects that make him paramount of prophecy. First is the qualitative difference, and the second is the public nature of his "performance" – "*in the presence of friend and enemy, of his followers and his opponents*"<sup>65</sup> There is even interesting lexical differentiation between miracles of Maimonides Moses, and other prophets: "*his signs (ototav) are not of the same class as the wonders (niflaot) of other prophets.*"<sup>66</sup> However, from one sentence we prefer not to draw any conclusion.

Finally, we get to the passage, where miracles play a role. In Mishne Torah<sup>67</sup> Maimonides builds an argument that prophets should not be trusted on the basis on the miracles they perform and he supports this proposition by illustrating the case of Moses' prophecy. Wonders cannot have corroborative function, because these events could be produced by magic. Therefore, they are always subject to suspicion. There is also a pragmatic aspect of miracles; hence the splitting of the Red Sea in order to

---

<sup>61</sup> Guide II, 37.

<sup>62</sup> Davidson, Herbert A.: *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; p. 200-207.

<sup>63</sup> MT, SM, Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah 7:1; 2:4.

<sup>64</sup> He refers back to the opinions drawn in the Commentary to Mishnah (Sanh. 10:1) and Mishne Torah, Sefer ha-Madah, Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah 7:6.

<sup>65</sup> Guide II, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid; I have exchanged the word miracles for wonders to fit the context.

<sup>67</sup> MT, SM, Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah, 7:6-8:3.



drown enemies, similarly the case of Korah and corruption of the earth and other biblical stories involving unnatural events with providential nature. Only the revelation on Mount Sinai provided Israel a proof for Moses' trustworthiness as a prophet. In this case all the Israel were witnesses and their testimony based on their actual experiences is the only proof that can be given.

The idea of actual testimony as a proof resembles Maimonides' opinions on Messiah.<sup>68</sup> The doubts about any candidate of being the Messiah are dispersed only after the candidate succeeds in the battlefields, builds the Temple, and gathers all Israel in the Holy Land. He should be considered as a conditional Messiah, if he is a man from the House of David observing laws, rectifying the observance, and fighting wars for the sake of Israel. But he should not be believed until his plans are fully realized and Israel is given a proof. However, when a man of high qualities announces his intentions, he should be listened to. It is a commandment to do so. It implies that Israel was obliged to listen to Moses (and any other solid man), but not to believe in him as prophet. Their belief was not established by miracles, but by experience on Mount Sinai, where his mission became fulfilled. This is valid also for other prophets. Not everyone who performs a miracle is to be believed, but only those fit for prophecy and bringing benefit to Jews.

Maimonides sees Moses as the most perfect prophet; there was no one before and no one after like him. And this is also clear from the passage on the Messiah. Maimonides argues that there will be no apocalyptical end, probably even no change in the Torah, which is perfect. The Messiah doesn't even have to perform any miracles. His accomplishment in changing political and social situation of Jews should be the measures used for examining him. Then it would be right to conclude if there are no miracles to be performed, the future Messiah does not have to be a prophet at all, but only the best among the nation. As a consequence of Maimonides' naturalist inclination, the role of miracles in Jewish theology and religious imagery is reduced. Even though the image of miracle-less Messiah contradicts rabbinic depiction, it established dominant trend.

### **1.2.3 Miracles: Treatise on Resurrection**

---

<sup>68</sup> MT, Shoftim, Melakhim u-Milhamoteihem, chapters 11-12.

The only systematic treatment of miracles appears in Maimonides' *Treatise on Resurrection* (Hebrew: *Tehiyat ha-metim*) written in 1190/1191. The treatise itself was written as an answer to a debate between Gaon Shmu'el ben 'Eli and Maimonides supported by his student Josef ben Jehuda. Maimonides' purpose was to address a wider audience and this fact determines the language and terminology he uses. He composes a compact argument, and he rarely refers to previous works.

At the end of the treatise he presents miracles as a pillar of religion. In his early age, when he wrote *the Commentary on the Mishnah*, none of the thirteen principles of faith was dedicated to belief of miracles, although the last one contains the idea of bringing dead back to life. In the *Treatise on Resurrection*, Maimonides compares resurrection to miracles. Miracles cannot be proved; they can only be accepted on the basis of belief.<sup>69</sup> Their exceptional nature prevents them from becoming subjects to logical reasoning.

He divides miracles into two groups according to their relationship to nature. Turning a rod into a snake [Ex 7:10], the story of Korah [Nu 16:32], splitting of the Red Sea [Ex 14:21] belong to miracles that are naturally impossible (*ba-'inyanim ha-nimn'aim*). On the other hand, the other documented miracles are claimed to be naturally possible (*ba-'inyanim ha-efshariyim*). It is worthy to notice that the very same miracle of splitting the sea, which was previously understood as naturally programmed, is here understood as naturally impossible. Apparently, Maimonides takes logical possibility of miracles for granted in the *Treatise* and he does not repeat or refer to his discussion in the *Guide*. In the case of resurrection, which is scheduled to happen in closer undefined time in future, a philosopher must conclude that there is no possibility to make the event subject to logical reasoning at the present state and believers do not transgress any rationally proved law by believing in resurrection.

A miracle must fulfill at least one of the following conditions: (1) the event is preceded by an announcement delivered to the prophet; (2) the event is either rare and unusual, or it exceeds the measurements we are accustomed to, like the plague of

---

<sup>69</sup> אמנם תחית המתים הוא אחד מהמופתים ומבואר מאד שענינו מובן ואין שם אלא להאמין בו לבד כמו שבאתנו ההגדה האמתית והוא ענין יוצא חוץ לטבע המציאות ואין ראיה עליו מצד העיון.  
From the *Treatise on Resurrection*, [CD; Taklitor Torani. Ver. 16].

frogs, hail, or pestilence. Finally (3) the event is continuous.<sup>70</sup> But the miracle cannot last forever. Maimonides once again refers to the principle that the natural laws cannot be permanently violated.

Tzvi Langermann in his article on miracles cites from a fragment of the *Letter to R. Hisdai* to which he assigns Maimonides' authorship.<sup>71</sup> Examine part of the text:

*“As to what you said concerning miracles: I have already set down, in proofs that I demonstrated in our worthy tract The Guide of the Perplexed, needs to be clarified in connection with them. The upshot is that some of them are natural, others – such as the staff that charged into a serpent, the water [that changed into blood], and the like – are counter-natural. This is possible [or: has been made possible] in order that we may believe that the world is created, which is the basis of everything, as the verse says, Between Me and the Children of Israel it is an eternal sign that God made heaven and earth in six days [Ex 31:17]. I already wrote all of this in the Guide of the Perplexed, i.e., that according to the view [that considers] the world to be created, everything is possible. The generation of the universe (ma’aseh bereishit) is not of necessity (hiyyuv) as it is according to Aristotle.”*<sup>72</sup>

Tzvi Langermann claims that this treatment of miracles agrees with Maimonides' position in the Treatise on Resurrection. Maimonides' argument is not based on the division of the miracles into natural and contra-natural, i.e., naturally impossible. This distinction indeed has appeared in earlier phases of Maimonides' career. He establishes this position on the proximity of miracles, the topic of creation, and the conflict of doubt and even severe doubt (as in Guide II, 25).

#### 1.2.4 Summary

In Maimonides' rabbinic works, the prophecy is presented as a declaration of the faith: *“It is [one] of the foundations of [our] faith that God conveys prophecy to*

---

<sup>70</sup> Maimonides, Boušek, Daniel, Rukriglová, Dita: Pojednání o zmrtvýchvstání [Treatise on Resurrection] in *Maimonides: Výber z korespondence* [Maimonides: selected letters], (Boušek, Rukriglová). Praha: Academia, 2011; p. 283-284.

<sup>71</sup> For new information about Langermann's position towards the letter see: Tzvi Langerman, Israel: Igerto shel ha-Rambam le-rabbi Hisdai [Maimonides' Letter to R. Hisdai] in *Ta-shma: mekharim be-mada'i ha-yahadut le-zikro shel Israel M. Ta-shma*. [Ta-Shma: Essays in Jewish Studies in Honor of Israel M. Ta-Shma] Alon Shvut: Herzog College, 2012; p. 533-539.

<sup>72</sup> Transl. Tzvi Langermann, p. 165-166 in Maimonides and miracles: The growth of a (dis)belief in *Jewish History* Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2004; p. 147-172.

*man.*”<sup>73</sup> He advocates for the possibility of miracles. And when he seeks for their reasonability, he searches for their social and spiritual significance. He abolishes the miracle as a proof of God’s omnipotence. Maimonides limits these marvelous events to past and doesn’t require Messiah to perform any of them. Only resurrection enters his system of thoughts as miraculous activity connected to future.

In Maimonides’ system, there is a shift in the perception of the historical value of miracles brought by rejecting visions occurring extramentally. Prophecy as such is a product of imaginative faculty with immediate response of the rational one. This supernatural intervention represents supreme truth that orders all previous knowledge. Although, it does not occur extra-mentally, it contains the highest epistemic values. On the other hand, there are signs and wonders that prophets perform. These events are not products of their superior perfection. Prophecy is obtained through special training with the aim of human perfection. Therefore, miracles are always doubted. They can be products of ruse and magic. Such doubts and unsatisfying solutions not formulating general laws lead Maimonides to elimination of miracles as satisfying examination of the prophet.

We can doubt about any prophet, but in Maimonides view, only Moses brought the real divine law. The proof is derived from the public testimony of witnesses similarly as in Saadia’s case. Theoretically, there can occur a man performing vivid illusions or foretell, for example, an explosion of a volcano, and having virtuous qualities at the same time. And he will rise and bring new legislation that will take care about bodily and mental needs of state. And he will be called a prophet. From the theological point of view, his prophecy would be a fraud, but there would be no possibility to evaluate the situation. From a perspective of pragmatically thinking man, there would be no harm in accepting this new legislation as it brings benefits. If the prophet loses possibility to demonstrate himself, people lose certainty. According to Maimonides, people can gain it through observing his success. If the prophet is evaluated on the basis of his achievements, the divine connection as a particular event loses its importance.

---

<sup>73</sup> MT, SM, Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah, 7:1.

It is beneficial to bear in mind that Maimonides never addresses the issue of miracles directly in more than few sentences with the exception of Treatise on Resurrection that did not play role in later discussions. These conclusions appear explicitly stated only by later readers of Maimonides.

### **1.3 Philosophical debate in transition: Ibn Sīna, Ibn Rushd and their Jewish followers**

Centres of philosophy after Maimonides changed their physical location. New environment and new circumstances led to development of ways of argumentation and new readings of Maimonides. These tendencies erupted in the famous Maimonidean controversies, but we can understand them even in the mirror of discussions about the nature of miracles. There were several direct influences, which indulged new tendencies in the development of the topic.

Maimonides predominately worked with ideas of Islamic philosophers that sought balanced position of religion and reason. Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna, or Ibn Bajja, none of them founded their philosophical systems on direct conflict with the present state of reality. None of them implicitly or explicitly portrayed philosophy as incompatible with religion. Nonetheless, there were thinkers that systemically attacked them, although for various reasons. Al-Ghazzālī (1058–1111), an Ash'arian theologian, takes on more dogmatic position, but his battle for proving incoherence of philosophy (in his work the *Incoherence of Philosophers*) adopted language of Aristotelianism. His influence has two faces. First, Judah Halevi embraced his arguments and converted them into Jewish problem. His opinions were vibrant especially among the kabbalists. Secondly, after the transition of philosophy under Christianity and finalization of the translation from Arabic to Hebrew, his aforementioned book became the source of Ibn Sīna's theory of noble soul for those Jews who were not able to talk Arabic.

Another strike for Islamic Aristotelian philosophy was blown by Ibn Rushd (lat. Averroes; 1126–1198), who was an older contemporary of Maimonides. His attack was not directed at philosophy as such, but on Neoplatonism and the Neoplatonistic interpretation of Aristotle by Ibn Sīna. On the other hand, he acted as a defender of Aristotle and philosophy in his response to al-Ghazzālī in his work *the Incoherence of*

*Incoherence*. His great accomplishment, appreciated by Jews as well, was his activity of a commentator of Aristotle's works and Plato's Republic. In the *Letter to R. Shmu'el Ibn Tibbon*, Maimonides recommends appropriate literature for studying Aristotle with, namely the commentary by Alexander of Afrodisiada, Themistius, and finally explanation of Ibn Rushd.<sup>74</sup> Maimonides subordinates Ibn Sīnā under the authority of al-Fārābī in the letter. However, there was a part of Ibn Sīnā teaching that deeply rooted among the Jewish philosophers of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century and directly affected perception of miracles. The whole concept is named as the *anthropological theory of miracle* by Aviezer Ravitzky, who expounds on the topic in details.<sup>75</sup>

In Maimonides' description of prophecy, a prophet requires perfection of both faculties, rational and imaginative. However, the miracle of prophecy is believed to be in hands of God. Ibn Sīnā's theory of prophecy puts prophet into different position. Miracles became part of the soul of the prophet. An individual soul is superior to matter; it operates the body. However, if the influence of the Active Intellect reaches perfect imaginative faculty (ittisāl), it elevates over its particularity and it is within its power to influence other forms and matter. This influence includes miracle-working as well. Perfection of the rational faculty would cause acquiring knowledge of all intelligible things; therefore 'foretelling' is possible. The linkage of Active Intellect and an individual soul initiate special epistemic process of actualization of potential knowledge. There is a hidden imperative to undergo such a process, if man's capacities allow him. Only actual knowledge allows us to live in accordance with the laws of the world. There are still events called miracles, which are not connected to human activities. According to Ibn Sīnā, they are natural occurrences that have no rational explanation so far due to lack of information.

This theory incorporates the idea of naturalization of miracles. They are parts of the nature and there are laws that drive them. However, man plays active role of an agent in the system. He can subordinate, influence the laws of nature through their

---

<sup>74</sup> Boušek, Daniel, Rukřiglová, Dita: *Maimonides: Výber z korespondence* [Maimonides: Selected Letters], (Boušek, Rukřiglová). Praha: Academia, 2011; p. 367-369.

<sup>75</sup> Ravitsky, Aviezer: The Anthropological Theory of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy. In *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*. (ed. Twersky, Isadore). Vol. 2, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1984; p. 231-272.

power and nobility of the soul.<sup>76</sup> Ibn Rushd comments on Ibn Sīnā with reservations pointing out that Ibn Sīnā's stance (and that of al-Ghazzālī) requires existence of a power that is not defined in Aristotle's physics:

*“And if such facts are verified and it is possible that a body could be changed qualitatively through something which is neither a body or a bodily potency, then the reasons he mentions for this are possible: but not everything which in its nature is possible can be done by man, for what is possible to man is well known. Most things which are possible in themselves are impossible for man, and what is true of the prophet, that he can interrupt the ordinary course of nature, is impossible for man, but possible in itself; and because of this one need not assume that things logically impossible are possible for the prophets, and if you observe those miracles whose existence is confirmed, you will find that they are of this kind.*

*The clearest of miracles is the Venerable Book of Allah, the existence of which is not an interruption of the course of nature assumed by tradition, like the changing of a rod into a serpent, but its miraculous nature is established by way of perception and consideration for every man who has been or who will be till the day of resurrection.”<sup>77</sup>*

Averroes admits miracles as a possibility, but a logical impossibility for a man. His view implies a breach between man and prophet. Men are not able to violate the natural order. And in his eyes, the greatest of miracles did not violate order as well.

Ibn Sīnā's theory found its path into Jewish cycles already in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in works of Abraham Ibn Da'ud or Abraham Ibn Ezra in his Commentary on the Torah and minor works like *Hay ben Meqitz*.<sup>78</sup> However, as a fully developed tendency it rolled in in following two centuries when it mixed with Ibn Rushd's theory of the communication between the Active Intellect and human mind. He abolished the

---

<sup>76</sup> Adamson, Peter: Aristotelianism and the Soul in the Arabic Plotinus, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 62, No. 2. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001; p. 211-232.

<sup>77</sup> Al-Ghazzālī: *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Translated by Michael E. Marmura. Brigham: Utah University Press, 1997; p. 187. Iqbal, Muzaffar: *The Making of Islamic Science*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2009; p. 263-265.

<sup>78</sup> See Hughes, A.: The Three Worlds of ibn Ezra's *Hay ben Meqitz*, in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*. Vol. 11, No. 1. [s.l.]: Routledge, 2002; p. 1-24.

Active Intellect as a separate Intelligence and redefined it as a self-consciousness of all actual forms, i.e. whole material world.

Ravitzky identified two versions how Ibn Rushd's legacy preserved among Jewish circles. The first one views Ibn Rushd's theory as supporting Ibn Ezra's version of conjunction with the Knowledge of All. On the other hand, Ibn Rushd was acknowledged as a higher authority supporting the argument against the anthropological theory of miracles. The idea was formulated in the *Reply to Kaspi* penned by Kalonymous ben Kalonymous, one of the translators of Ibn Rushd's works into Hebrew. Kalonymous, however, integrated own text into quoted text of the Incoherence of Incoherence. Apparently, Jewish intellectuals of south Provence had no ability to distinguish between the proper texts of Ibn Rushd and Kalonymous as they had no knowledge of Arabic.<sup>79</sup> This mistreatment of Ibn Rushd does not parallel with the treatment by scholastics; hence it was only Jewish issue. Abraham Bibago (15<sup>th</sup> century), Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), or Shimeon Duran (c.1400–1444), all of them conservative philosophers, previous research has showed that they all exploited Kalonymous' text. Although, confusion of sources was growing, there were personalities that were not fooled by new Hebrew materials circulating in Europe.

## 1.4 Gersonides

Levi ben Gershon (1288–1344), in his works the *Wars of the Lord* (1329; further referred as 'Wars') and the *Commentary on the Torah* ('Commentary'), proposes different theory of miracles and prophecy. It constitutes itself as a rejection of former theory of miracles, which assigned function of an agent in miracle-working to prophet. Gersonides, unlike others, was aware of the fact that Averroes did not teach such a theory. He reminded closer to the original reading of Averroes and he tried to spread his knowledge as it meant obeying of the commandment of *Imitatio Dei*.<sup>80</sup> He

---

<sup>79</sup> Kalonymous quote from Ibn Rushd and its comparison of the original is published in aforementioned Twersky's article (1984).

<sup>80</sup> Kellner, Menachem: Gersonides on *Imitatio Dei* and the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series. Vol. 85, No. 3/4. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; p. 275-296.



himself had a circle of students that he taught through correspondence and occasional meetings.<sup>81</sup>

Gersonides was not just an admirer of Ibn Rushd. His works suggest profound respect for other authorities like Abraham Ibn Ezra in the field of astrology and halakhah and Maimonides who he praised and criticized at the same time. Gersonides' approach towards prophecy and miracles, which are the main interest of this thesis, shows expensive influence of the Guide of the Perplexed. However, one must not forget that Maimonides' view of miracles was never addressed

#### 1.4.1 Prophecy

Gersonides fully realizes the close connection between prophets and miracles. Despite former philosophers assigned an ability to cause a miracle to the prophet, only when the topic is re-examined on the basis of the Torah, the relation between the two elements appears as deserving more attention. The whole anthropological theory dragged attention from the Biblical narrative as such. Although Bible occurred as a proof-text from various semi-philosophical, semi-mystical treatises, only when Gersonides dragged attention back to Bible it allowed him to realize the importance of past prophets and miracles that the anthropological approach neglected.

Similarly to Maimonides, Gersonides discusses miracles in two of his works; first one, the Commentary, composed in a 'rabbinic' style and the second, the Wars of the Lord embracing philosophical style. Although both of these perspectives allowed him to examine the problem from different perspective, both of the treatises were obviously written with similar notions kept in mind. For later readers of Maimonides, there is inconsistency considering the functions of faculties and attaining of prophecy. Ibn Rushd brushed aside the communication of the Active Intellect with a particular soul as a mean of obtaining theoretical knowledge;<sup>82</sup> hence diminishment of the role of rational faculty in the prophecy. However, Maimonides stood up for the rational faculty as the first instance 'touched' by the prophecy that consequently descends to

---

<sup>81</sup> Glassner, Ruth: Levi den Gershom and the Study of Ibn Rushd in the Fourteenth Century, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series. Vol. 86, No. 1/2. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; p. 51-90.

<sup>82</sup> Najjar, Ibrahim: *Faith and reason in Islam: Averroes' exposition of religious arguments*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2001; p. 100-105.

the imaginative faculty.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, he defined imagination as the faculty of prophecy.

Later the rational faculty overshadowed the function of imagination. Ascension could provide access to ultimate knowledge. This Gersonides rejects. Ability of a human to learn is limited; absolute knowledge is irretrievable. He does not accept Ibn Rushd's restrictions on the nature of prophetic knowledge either. It is possibly to obtain theoretical knowledge through prophecy in Gersonides view. The rational faculty takes over the function of the organ of prophecy and it bears capacity for foretelling the future as well.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, imagination still has a position in the system; it particularizes obtained knowledge. Once the soul reaches universal level its knowledge turns to be universal as well. Particularization is, therefore, necessary in order to grasp knowledge on the sublunar level and communicate it. Imagination fulfills the function of the rhetorical tool. To understand the importance of such tool, we have to understand it in connection of the obligation *Imitatio Dei*.<sup>85</sup>

Imagination is not active only during prophesizing. There are other, more casual influences that affect the faculty, namely heavenly bodies. The influence of the Active intellect on rational intellect may cause bringing about prophecy, whereas the influence of heavenly bodies on imagination evokes dreams and divinations. This discussion parallels with Averroes' *Epitome of Parva Naturalia* as Feldman points out.<sup>86</sup> Gersonides understands non-prophetic visions as absorbing certain type of knowledge relevant to understanding universe.

All mentioned philosophers understand Moses as the most excellent among the prophets as they followed the Bible. Also Gersonides addressed this question directly. Once he removed imagination out of the centre of conjunction with the Active Intellect, he dissolved Maimonides explanation why Maimonides was so special. Just to remind, Maimonides held that Moses exceeded the knowledge directly with no

---

<sup>83</sup> Guide II, 36.

<sup>84</sup> In Maimonides case this ability was ascribed primarily to the imaginative faculty aided by intuition (Guide III, 38).

<sup>85</sup> Kellner, Menachem: Gersonides on *Imitatio Dei* and the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series. Vol. 85, No. 3/4. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; p. 275-296.

<sup>86</sup> Feldman, Seymour: *Gersonides: Judaism within the Limits of Reason*. Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010; p. 148-149.

imagination needed. In Gersonides' thought, the imaginative faculty does not play any role in quality of prophecy (its perfection is still required as a prerequisite). Every prophet obtains prophecy directly through rational intellect. Imagination could not stand as an aspect of differentiation. There is another faculty, activity affecting quality of prophecy. It is *hitbodedut* (isolation), the ability to concentrate.<sup>87</sup> In Gersonides' concept, another subjective quality appears, *hitbodedut*, that is needed not as a prerequisite, but during the act itself.

### 1.4.2 Miracles

Despite Gersonides acknowledged Ibn Ezra as being a great sage, he rejected the anthropological theory of miracles, which Ibn Ezra held. Neither Maimonides nor Gersonides saw prophets as defined through miracles, even though both of them meditated over the close relation between a prophet and miracle-working.

Conjunction with the Active Intellect does not mean obtaining omniscient power to bend laws in accordance with prophet's will. Gersonides disposed of a prophet who is an agent of miracles and replaced it by a prophet, the tool of miracles. On the philosophical and theological grounds the main objection is impossibility to obtain absolute knowledge. Prophet would never occur in a position that his knowledge would enable to bend law at his will. His opposition to miracle-workers is also based on observation of the Bible, where the prophets are announced that a miracle will take place. If he was an agent of miracle, divine announcement would be redundant. Finally, there is another reason for renunciation former theory of prophecy, which is logical paradox; the prophet with such powers would be able to change himself essential.<sup>88</sup> In one moment the prophet may decide to change his essence and stop being a prophet. And that is nonsense for Gersonides. He shifts agency of miracles from man to the Active Intellect. The prophet becomes rather interpreter of God's will.

He also draws conclusion that miracles are accidental in nature and cannot lead to an essential change of an object. Therefore, there cannot be any division between naturally possible and impossible miracles. None of the miracles was actual change of

---

<sup>87</sup> See Idel, Moshe: "Hitbodedut" as concentration in ecstatic Kabbalah, in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*. (ed. Green, Arthur) New York: Crossroad, 1986; p. 405-438.

Wars II, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Wars VI, 2:10.

essence. Gersonides is not opened to admit that natural order could be altered. As have been said, he considers all miracles as naturally possible. Those that Maimonides would understand as impossible, Gersonides sees as under special set of laws causing e.g. speeding up natural events: causing the ground to swallow up Korah or turning a rod into snake.<sup>89</sup>

Gersonides' put the problematic of miracles into a new perspective when he connected them to the topic of God's knowledge of contingent events and to the conflict between free will of a man and God's foreknowledge of future. Gersonides classifies miracles as logically possible events – neither necessary nor impossible. All miracles are contingent inasmuch they depend on actions determined by human free will. In Gersonides' opinion God cannot produce any new volition in human beings that would make human decisions necessary and not contingent events. In this sense human actions all could be different than they actually are: they are *not* necessary, which means that they can be out of free will. God's foreknowledge of free human actions consists of sets of ranges of possibilities or human choices but God does not know in a distinct way which options are actually taken by human beings.

However, Gersonides had to face a problem: Midrashic literature and Mishnah, Avoda 5:6 say that miracles were preordained at the time of creation. If miracles are dependent on human actions out of free will and therefore, they are contingent, how could they be preordained by God at the time of creation?

Gersonides' reply is that miracles are based on a specific order of general rules which were created by God at the beginning. These general laws are in need of particularization in pretty much the same way as the general knowledge a prophet can obtain when he is prophesising must be "particularized" in order to get a meaningful prophecy about events in the sublunar world. Thus an individual miracle is a contingent event not preordained at creation, but it is based on an order of miraculous events which has been established at the time of creation. Miracles follow general laws just as other natural phenomena, although in these laws human decisions as well as a providential care for intelligent and virtuous people play important role.

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid 2:12.

When Seymour Feldman tries to delimit novel accomplishments of Gersonides in relation to theory of miracles, he stresses that according to Gersonides miraculous events must not be only logical and accidental, but they are limited to sublunar sphere.<sup>90</sup> Gersonides reaches this conclusion after arguing that there are no changes in heavenly sphere.<sup>91</sup> However, this opinion has occurred already in the Guide of the Perplexed,<sup>92</sup> where Maimonides analysis miracles connected to change in the heavens as figurative tropes. Gersonides would find the idea that miracles are restricted to the sublunar sphere natural. Gersonides criticizes Maimonides for suppressing historical meaning of miracles, but they would both agree on stability and perfection of heavens. Gersonides sees the topic through astrological perspective that Maimonides could have never used due to his negative attitude towards astrology.

As an active observer of the sky, Gersonides realized that there are repeating occurrences that could be associated with universal laws. Motion of heavenly objects was seen as perfect. From the theological point of view, heavens as creation are perfect and there is no need to introduce changes. A change in the motion of the celestial bodies would result in the complete destruction of the world, which obviously did not take place; therefore halting of the Sun (Joshua 10) could not take place literally. The sentence about Joshua's "stopping the Sun" must be an individual subjective testimony referring to incredibly quick victory in Gersonides' view.

When Gersonides died he left an unfinished paper on the conjunction of 1345. As every astrologer, he had to work with older astrological tables counted in the past by other astrologers.<sup>93</sup> Reliability of these materials could have been questioned, only if they did not empirically fit needs of astrologers they would be abandoned. Gersonides sees similar parallels with the religious tradition.<sup>94</sup> He claims that there are astrological tables written millennia ago and they are reliable. There is no intention of our ancestors to spread lies among future generations. Also the stories

---

<sup>90</sup> Feldman, Seymour: *Gersonides: Judaism within the Limits of Reason*. Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010; p. 157-159.

<sup>91</sup> Wars VI, 2:12.

<sup>92</sup> Guide II, 46-47.

<sup>93</sup> Goldstein, Bernard, R.: Levi Ben Gerson's Astrology in Historical Perspective, in *Gersonide en son temps*. (ed. Dahan, G.). Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1991, p. 287-300.

<sup>94</sup> Wars VI, 2:9.

like halting of the Sun must be taken as real, but as it has been shown appropriate interpretation is needed.

### 1.4.3 Summary

Gersonides explains that miracles are performed by the Active Intellect and they are also dependent on other conditions connected to sublunar world such as human free will. They are contingent; therefore, their occurrence can be explained without assuming a new volition or any other sort of change in God. . Miracles are not necessary but contingent events and their exceptional occurrence is regulated by general rules – that is to say, they take place when there is a reason for them to take place. Miracles are done to save people who *deserve* to be saved in exceptional ways. Therefore, miracles have providential character and their meaning may be understood by human observers from a broader historical-providential perspective as history unfolds. It what? Unclear! turns some of the predictions to be dependent on future behaviour on involved individuals or groups. Gersonides' theory also implies that God knows only potential possibilities and not actual events.

Gersonides redefines the position of a prophet in the system. Even though he abolishes the prophet as an agent of miracles, he casts him to be necessary condition. It is the unique ability of the prophet to announce miracle. He is an announcer, interpreter and possible actualizer, and beneficiary of miracles. Gersonides suggests much broader definition of prophecy that is not dependent on performing miracles, realizing that there are prophets that never performed any miracles.

Although Gersonides' ideas are quite original in some respects, if viewed from a broader perspective his problems and solutions follow the same tracks as that of other medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Saadiah gaon or Maimonides. The main problem was, as we have seen, how to reconcile the philosophical idea of a perfect being which is “above” changes, mutations, desires, wishes, and knowledge of mortal affairs with the image of an intensively personal and activist deity known from the Bible. The response to problem was usually positing an intermediary between God and the world, which was *delegated* by God and therefore it could act on behalf of God on the one hand, but it did not have to be a *perfect* being and as such it could take over the problematic characteristics of the personal God of the Bible, on the

other hand. When Gersonides claims that miracles are enacted by the Active Intellect or when he supposes an order regulating the occurrence of actual miracles, he posits such intermediaries (the Active Intellect, or the impersonal order of miracles) which are ordained, created and *delegated* by God, but which, unlike God, may notice particular events or may be “particularized” through the events of the sublunar world.

Miracles are enacted not directly by God but by intermediaries delegated by God – this was the general answer medieval Jewish philosophy offered to the problems surrounding miracles. In the next chapter we will see what arguments were marshalled against this solution by the enemy and critics of philosophy.

## 2 Criticism of philosophical approach

Not everyone among medieval intellectuals was convinced that the philosophers' approach to the issue of miracles was fruitful and legitimate from a religious point of view. Conservative religious leaders among Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike were suspicious of the intellectual tradition called "philosophy" due to its pagan roots and its independence of religious authorities and concerns. They were all too ready to discover signs of disbelief in the works of philosophers. More importantly, some conservative critics of philosophy marshalled interesting arguments against philosophical doctrines, and tried to invent alternative theories. In the present chapter we will examine some of their contribution to the discourse on miracles.

One of the most inspiring critical approaches to philosophical theories about miracles was penned by al-Ghazzālī, whom we already mentioned. In his discussion on causality, he advocates strong position of God vis-à-vis the order of causes and effects stressing God's omnipotence and ability to suspend cause-effect relations and to make miracles.<sup>95</sup> Al-Ghazzālī attacks it through claiming that observation is a weak tool for determining causes. In his famous example about a piece of cotton being burnt by fire he argues that what we see is simultaneous existence of two forms; cotton stays cotton and flame stays flame. The action that causes the piece of cotton to burn is directly influenced by divine power (God) that manipulates the attributes of the objects in order to produce the desired effect.

From this perspective, miracles can be understood as direct manipulation that causes rare effect and it amazes observers. One of the possible cases leads to suppression of customary natural laws through speeding up an otherwise natural process. Al-Ghazzālī says:

*"Also in this way can be seen the possibility for recalling the dead to life, or changing a rod into a serpent. That is, Matter can receive every accident. Dust and*

---

<sup>95</sup> Giacaman, George; Bahlul, Raja: Ghazali on Miracles and Necessary Connection in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9, Cambridge University Press: 2001; p. 39-50. Alon, Ilai: Al-Ghazzālī on Causality in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 100, No. 4, 1980; p. 397-405.



*all other elements are transformed into plants. Having been eaten by animals, plants are transformed into blood. Blood becomes sperm. Sperm fertilizes the womb, and develops into a living being. This is the usual course of events extending over a long time. Why should the opponent refuse to believe that God may have the power to rotate Matter through all these phases in a shorter time than is usually taken? And if a shorter time is admissible, there is no bar against the shortest one. So this is how the action of the natural processes can be accelerated to produce what is called a prophet's miracle.”*<sup>96</sup>

Al-Ghazzālī stipulated miracles as still sharing the intellectual instinct to explain miracles in terms of natural processes but, at the same time, unlike the philosophers, Ghazzālī held God to be a direct cause of miracles. Jewish thinkers were aware of this criticism and some of the philosophers and some of their adversaries both absorbed Ghazzālī idea. In Gersonides opinion, Ghazzālī argument directly supported nature’s ability to uphold miracles. Contrary, more conservative thinkers used the argument to dismiss the philosophers’ attempt to naturalize the supernatural. The argument had a moderate impact on formulations of Judah Halevi (1085–1141) whose aim was to distinguish between certitude of religion and fallacy of reason, which led him to introduce God as God of history and miracles as having special divine significance.

An important critique of the philosophers was Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman, also known as Ramban and Nahmanides. He lived in thirteenth-century Catalonia. Nahmanides did not reject the natural order and he saw the philosophical explanation of the Scripture as a legitimate form of interpretation within certain limits. However, he did not claim that it is the only one, but rather the first of possible interpretation on the level of *peshat*.<sup>97</sup> Despite this fact, it is hard to evaluate what degree of autonomy he was ready to assign to nature.

Nahmanides broadened the definition of miracles so that they might look like ordinary natural events called hidden miracles (*nisim nistarim*). As any other type of miracle, it manifests divine power. However, only miracles that manifest divine

---

<sup>96</sup> Al-Ghazali; Kamali, Sabih Ahmad: *Al-Ghazali's Tahafut al-falasifah: Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Lahore: 1963; p. 191.

<sup>97</sup> Funkenstein, Amos: *Perception of Jewish History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; 98-120.

power fully have the power to convince all the people. Hidden miracles form a much more subtle reality and only cautious interpretation of events might reveal them. Nahmanides recognizes three changes in modality of nature that signifies miraculous activity: events not contradicting nature, deviating from the natural order, and subordinating natural order. Hidden miracles let the particular divine will flow unseen.<sup>98</sup> This triple distinction among miraculous event was adopted by others including Hisdai Crescas, who followed Nahmanides even in the theory of hidden and public miracles.

Hisdai Crescas' philosophical answer to Aristotelians had much more dramatic background. Gersonides wrote his work *the Wars of the Lord* in 1328. Crescas' thought was formed more than eighty years later from Nahmanides' concept in totally different political and social situation.<sup>99</sup> His work *the Light of the Lord* (1410) had polemical nature pointing at the corrupting nature of philosophy. But philosophy was not his only target. Another work *the Principles of Christianity* openly refuted Christian dogmas. However, he did not refrain from using the same criticism of the theory that miracles are enacted by prophets as Gersonides did.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, the conclusions of his reasoning substantially differed from that of Gersonides. Miracles have meaning only when they are particular, intended for individuals or groups. The Active Intellect, which Gersonides saw as the source of miracles, cannot exercise power to change particularities in Crescas' opinion.

## 2.1 Don Isaac Abravanel

Abravanel (1437–1508) uses al-Ghazzālī's argument to prove that there is no inviolable natural order in the created world and to institute God as the powerful

---

<sup>98</sup> Langermann, Y. Tzvi: Acceptance and Devaluation: Nahmanides' Attitude Towards Science, in *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*. Vol. 1, No.2. Brill, 1992; p. 223-245.

<sup>99</sup> The massacre of Jews in 1391 set turning point in development of Christian-Jewish relationships in Iberian Peninsula. One of the internal reaction was the increase in opposition to philosophy and blaming it for lenient relation towards religion among circles cultivating philosophy. For further overview of changes see: Assis, Yom Tov: Spanish Jewry – From Persecutions to Expulsion (1391–1492), in *Studia Hebraica*. Vol. 4. Bucuresti: Universitatea din Bucuresti, 2004; p. 307-319. Nirenberg, David: Une société face à l'altérité: Juifs et chrétiens dans la péninsule Ibérique 1391–1449, in *Annales – Histoire, Sciences Sociales*. Vol. 62, No. 4. 2007; p. 755-790.

<sup>100</sup> Kreisel, Howard Theodore: Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*. Vol. 75, No. 2; p. 122-133. Rudavsky, Tamar M.: Creation, Time and Infinity in Gersonides, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Vol. 26, No. 1. [s.l.]: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988; p. 25-44.

agent with direct access to the world. Abravanel was a prolific writer, who knew Latin and referred to ‘gentile’ (i.e. Christian) sources as well. His style is an extension of Iberian philosophy, which arrived into Italy after the Expulsion of 1492. Abravanel himself was driven out by this incident and settled in Italy.

In accordance with the theory that God can interfere directly to the course of nature, Abravanel formulated belief in creation as one of the crucial pillars in Judaism. Kellner explains that Abravanel’s concern about pillars of faith is due to a direct influence of the Iberian halakhic school. The majority of Iberian sages were involved in a discussion about the principle of Judaism trying to define it on a firm ground.<sup>101</sup> Despite Abravanel’s later hesitation in making any selection from among the commandment Abravanel states:

*“Were I to choose principles to posit for the divine Torah I would only lay down one, the creation of the world. It is the root and foundation around which the divine Torah, its cornerstones, and its beliefs revolve, and it includes the creation at the beginning, the narratives about the patriarchs, and the miracles and wonders which cannot be believed without belief in creation. The same applies to belief in God’s knowledge and providence, and in reward and punishment according to [one’s observance of] the commandments, none of which can be perfectly believed in without believing in the volitional creation of the whole world.”<sup>102</sup>*

Once again miracles became crucial as *a posteriori* proofs of God’s power. Abravanel does not avoid entering the discussion on miracles in much more polemic style in comparison to his predecessors. He refuted Maimonides, Gersonides as well as Aristotle in both, philosophical and theological manner. Abravanel’s treatment of the topic is included in various works, mainly in *the Deeds of Gods, the Commentary on the Guide of the Perplexed* and biblical commentaries. His unwillingness to accept any of Aristotle’s position led him to reject of Plato’s *Republic*, which he

---

<sup>101</sup> Kellner, Menachem: Jewish Dogmatics after the Spanish Expulsion: Rabbis Isaac Abravanel and Josef Ya’beš on Belief in Creation as an Article of Faith in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 72, No. 3. University of Pennsylvania Press: 1982; p. 178-187.

<sup>102</sup> Abravanel, Isaac: *Rosh Amanah*, chapter 23; transl. by Menachem Keller; published in aforementioned article (1982).

misattributed to Aristotle.<sup>103</sup> Often he identifies Maimonides' and Gersonides' opinions and refutes them.<sup>104</sup> In several cases, such as the topic of necessity of miracles, he misreads Gersonides.

The struggle takes place between Aristotelians and Isaac Abravanel. Abravanel's rejects the theory of emanation in its entirety in order to secure God's direct access to the world and turn him into an agent of miracles. As an exegete, he applies close reading of the Bible and dissolves all figurative interpretations that support the Neoplatonic system of emanation. He argues there is no Active Intellect in the Bible. The Bible speaks about God creating thousands of angels.<sup>105</sup> He finds Aristotelian theory of ten separate intellects unjustified.

To elucidate his philosophical stance we have to understand his approach towards sources of cognition. He distinguishes between the knowledge of God and angels who always know the cause of things and are able to understand the upcoming effects directly. This is the type of knowledge that a prophet may experience during prophecy when he acquires the knowledge of some future event. However, normal human cognition is diametrically opposed to divine and prophetic knowledge. Only after sensual perception of effects, the cause might be found and universal laws might be formulated.<sup>106</sup>

Abravanel holds that sensory perception is the basis of all intellectual cognition and every rational process is dependent on perceptual results. Embracing some of the classical skeptic arguments pointing out the imperfection of sensual perfection Abravanel devaluates intellectual cognition in its entirety, arguing that intellectual cognition is based on sensual perception, and sensual perception is highly exposed to errors, therefore intellectual apprehension is exposed to errors as well. Once this principle has been established Abravanel turns to such major concepts of medieval Jewish philosophy as astral determination or the theory of Active Intellect and he argues that these theories are doubtful and can be refuted. A basic premise of

---

<sup>103</sup> Melamed, Abraham: Isaac Abravanel and Aristotle's "Politics": a Drama of Errors. In *Jewish Political Studies Review* 5, 3-4. 1993; p. 55-75.

<sup>104</sup> Feldman, Seymour: *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel: defender of the faith*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003; p. 67-82.

<sup>105</sup> Abravanel, Isaac: Commentary on Kings I, chapter 3.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

medieval sciences, namely that the celestial spheres have a permanent nature, is questioned by Abarvanel: he claims that the motion of celestial bodies is changeable. This also implies that the created world is not imperishable contrary to what Maimonides, and virtually all his followers taught. Maimonides argued that natural order is unchangeable and therefore the created world must exist forever; Abarvanel replied that natural order is changeable and consequently the world may cease to exist. Whereas Maimonides envisioned a universe which God endowed with a stable and perennial order, which could not be annihilated, Abarvanel found that the universe was about to fall apart and only God's special and direct will could preserve it in existence.

Having dismissed the Active Intellect, Abravanel must formulate a new theory of prophecy. In case of Maimonides and Gersonides, the Active Intellect played crucial role in delivering prophecy to the prophet. Without the Active Intellect the whole theory about the psychic faculties' role in prophecy falls apart and Abravanel is free to establish his own vision of a prophet. These discussions accumulate in his commentary on the Guide of the Perplexed.<sup>107</sup> Abravanel denies the necessity of the triple Maimonidean perfection of rational, and imaginative faculty, and moral perfection. He acknowledges only the last one as required for being a prophet. He tries to establish definition and typology of prophets in a much broader ground than his predecessors. He rejects to classify prophets and define prophecy using Moses as the ideal prophet. Such approach does not respect abilities of other prophets and drags them out of the definition. Moses' primacy is guaranteed by biblical passages and Abravanel does not underestimate that. He rather claims that there are no differences in prophecy as such, only the degree of communication with God differs.

Even though Abravanel rejects the perfection of rational and imaginative faculties as preconditions for prophecy, he does not reject their existence and understands them as possibly active during prophecy. They simply are not required to have a certain degree of quality in order to become a prophet. This position enables

---

<sup>107</sup> The main opinions of Maimonides in the commentary to Guide II, 32.

Abravanel to set up a wide classification of prophets<sup>108</sup> which includes persons that Maimonides would classify as statesmen (rational faculty affected only), or politicians and poets (imagination affected only). But Abravanel claims that any foreknowledge or enigmatic visions seen or heard by prophets are valuable divine revelations, not mere imperfect mental visions. Abravanel sets firm foundations of perceptual prophecy that is to say, a prophecy that involves sensual experience, which role Maimonides limits by putting the experience within the framework of a vision. Abravanel argues for prophecy occurring extramentally.

Abravanel's definition of prophets definitely releases prophets from chains of miracle as the examination of their genuine intentions. His argument is built on the typology of prophecies. Not every prophet performed miracles; therefore, miracles cannot be understood as the universal proof of the prophet. Although he weakens the bound between miracles and prophets, miracles still are tightly linked to principal topics like creation, omnipotence and providence. They are defined as not having natural cause, but the cause is purposeful will that has ability to bend or annul customary order.<sup>109</sup> In contrast to opinions of thinkers with strong naturalistic tendencies, Abravanel sees miracles as logically possible, but naturally impossible. As direct actions of God (or mediated through angelic powers) they contain message that has historical significance; they are symbols to be deciphered. According to Abravanel as God's will enters the world it has different forms. The lowest degree of supernatural will represents events that seems to be naturally possible, but their customary measure is exceeded, e.g. hail sent on Egypt. Second, there are naturally impossible event that preserve the essence of some natural entities but change its attributes, e.g. Sarah giving birth after menopause. The last and the most extreme type of a miracle is complete violation of natural laws as in case of Joshua 10 or crossing of the Red Sea.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> (a) Intellectual prophecy, (b) imagination and rational faculties involved in a prophecy, (c) prophecy with only imagination affected, (d) perceptual prophecy, (e) intellectual and perceptual prophecy.

<sup>109</sup> Abravanel, Isaac: Deeds of Gods X, 10.

<sup>110</sup> Abravanel, Isaac: Deeds of Gods X, 10.

## Conclusion

Whereas philosophers argued that intermediary existents which are delegated by God perform miracles, the critics of philosophy from al-Ghazzali to Abarvanel argued that no such delegates were necessary. Miracles could be viewed as God's direct interventions into the habitual course of nature. The chief argument was directed against the philosophers' concept of nature, al-Ghazzali, Judah Halevi, Hisdai Crescas, and Abarvanel all argued their own way that nature is not an immutable order of the world and that a special and personal volition of God is necessary to assume if we want to understand why the created world exist in the way we know.

To the philosophers' objection, namely that particular volitions entail imperfection, and God cannot be imperfect in any respect, the conservative critique replied by devaluating intellectual cognition as well as the philosophers' cultivation of the intellect. What we encounter is a grandiose *ad hominem* argument: the philosophers are simply not the people who may tell what is perfect or imperfect for God. The critiques of the philosophers rejected intellect as the highest and most reliable source of knowledge, and they argued that certain statements must be accepted as true solely on the basis of tradition or mystical elimination even if they contradicted the results of intellectual cognition.

## 2.2 Spinoza

*"That revelation occurred through images alone... And although Maimonides and others maintain that this story happened in sleep (and likewise all the narratives which tell of the appearance of angels, like the one to Abraham at Minoah, when he was thinking of sacrificing his son, etc.) and refuse to accept that anyone could have seen an angel with his eyes open, they are surely talking nonsense. They were only concerned to derive Aristotelian trifles and some fragments of their own from Scripture, than which, to my mind, nothing could be more ridiculous."*<sup>111</sup>

This is a summary of opinions maintained by Jewish thinkers for centuries. Their attempt to reconcile philosophy with the scripture in the eyes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

---

<sup>111</sup> Spinoza, Baruch: *Theological-Political Treatise* (Treatise) chapter I, 14. (ed. by Israel, Jonathan). Cambridge UP, 2007; p. 18. Every quotation is based on Israel's edition.

philosopher Baruch Benedict Spinoza (1633–1677) is worthy of intellectual mockery. Both late Aristotelians and Spinoza appeared on the same side of the barricade – both against the theological monopoly on explaining the world.

In 1669/1670, Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Tractate) was clandestinely published in Amsterdam presenting a brand new hermeneutic toolkit applied to studies and interpretation of the scripture. His analysis is a combination of philological, historical, almost anthropological approach.<sup>112</sup> Such an approach to the Bible can be applied only when the entire range supernatural powers are excluded from discussing the source lending authority to the Bible. Once there is nothing beyond the Bible, the interpreters are free to disintegrate presupposed ideas and investigate the content without prejudice.

The whole treatise tries to draw line between philosophical and theological fields of discourse. Both perspectives have their own interpretative apparatus. According to Spinoza the Bible should not be interpreted as a philosophical work, hence he criticizes Maimonides for having done so. But Spinoza's criticism is directed not only towards the past. It contributes to an ongoing controversy concerning some contemporary Protestants' attempt to apply the biblical laws in real life, while another party proposed philosophical interpretation as valid method of clarification of meaning of the 'divine' laws.<sup>113</sup> Of course, the Tractate articulates also a criticism directly on previous philosophers as in the case of Maimonides in the quotation at the beginning of the chapter. Spinoza prefers literal exegesis of the Bible over the figurative interpretation utilized by the followers of Maimonides' method. By exploring the literal sense of the Bible, Spinoza continues a venerable medieval tradition associated with such commentators as Rashi, Rashbam, Abraham ibn Ezra, and David Kimhi. Analysing the literal sense presupposes deep knowledge of grammar, and usage of the terms in different context, focusing on social and political situation that builds up rich picture of the past culture that is not accessible through eyes of a contemporary man. If we want to know who the prophet is in biblical texts,

---

<sup>112</sup> Israel, Jonathan (2007); Introduction, p. 10-17.

<sup>113</sup> Preus, J. Samuel: A Hidden Opponent in Spinoza's "Tractatus". In *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3. Cambridge UP, 1995; p. 361-388.



we are required to know Hebrew, and understand the specific style of prophetic language as well as beliefs of chroniclers, Spinoza warns his readers.

### **2.2.1 Prophecy and prophets**

Despite all the revolutionary features of Spinoza's interpretation, it would be wrong to assume that all the aforementioned ideas were rejected. In analyses of prophecy and prophets<sup>114</sup> Spinoza continued the previous discussion on prophecy in Hebrew philosophical and theological literature and expound on the topic with regard to his other philosophical concepts. For Spinoza, there is only one type of human knowledge accessible by all mankind in accordance to their qualities, but there is no man that could reach out of his own nature to absorb other kind of otherwise occult impermeable knowledge. In this sense, such knowledge would be supernatural despite all attempts of medieval philosophers to put the process under natural patterns. There is a clash between popular definition of prophecy and prophets on the one hand and Spinoza's interpretation on the other.<sup>115</sup>

Spinoza's main problem with acknowledging the value of prophecy is that prophecy does not include rational knowledge, which is product of philosophy. For Spinoza, the prophecy is a theological issue and as there are no prophets living today, the Scripture is the only source of information that can provide us information about them. Spinoza approaches the Bible as historical chronicle trapped in the past, which is not obvious for present reader. Successful interpretation of the Bible required knowledge of the language, its idioms and expression in connection to cultural values of the society.

First what Spinoza does is that he pulls prophecy out of rationally obtained knowledge. There is no immanent demonstration that proves that prophecy is correct. In other words, through interaction of human reason and nature we cannot find any proof for the content of prophecy. If it is not rational, Spinoza holds that it is based on vivid activity of imagination. He does not understand these faculties as complementary. In chapter two he says:

---

<sup>114</sup> Treatise, chapter I-II.

<sup>115</sup> Treatise, chapter I, 1-2. See: Jacobson, Arthur, J.: Prophecy as expertise, in *Hebraic Political Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 4. Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2009; p. 329-336.

*“Those who are most powerful in imagination are less good at merely understanding things; those who have trained and powerful intellects have a more modest power of imagination and have it under better control, reining it in, so to speak, and not confusing it with understanding.”*<sup>116</sup>

Prophets do not have to be brilliant minds. Quite to the opposite, they represent simple men devoid of any philosophical or scientific sophistication. Spinoza explicitly rejects biblical exegesis that attempts to explain away biblical verses indicating that prophets were ignorant of certain scientific or mathematical facts.<sup>117</sup> Exactly this tendency prevented Spinoza’s predecessors to realize incoherencies in the biblical narrative.

Prophecy is not rational and has no rational proof in Spinoza’s opinion. Nevertheless, it is documented phenomenon. This suggests that it was supported by other than rational sources of authority. In regard to the character of certitude, Spinoza evaluates prophetic knowledge as inferior to rational.<sup>118</sup> Instead of explaining prophet’s certitude as a result of his inborn or developed ability,<sup>119</sup> he delves into other potential reasons of the prophet’s acquiring the feeling of certitude. There are three causes that are operative separately or in combination:<sup>120</sup> [1] A prophet received the prophecy during state of being awake. Spinoza does not recognize the theory that prophecy appears in dreams. He is willing to leave space for prophecy as a social event (see the third reason); however he firmly denies any epistemological values of dreams. [2] Prophets saw certain sign. This did not occur in every case. [3] They all believed that what they do is good and right.

### **2.2.2 Miracle**

Spinoza saw an ontological problem in assuming that the natural order of the world could be broken in any respect. Therefore, the discussion about the miracles in Tractatus Theologico-Politicus aims at showing that no biblical narrative of miracles is sufficient evidence that the order of nature was ever broken. Spinoza states four

---

<sup>116</sup> Treatise II, 1; p. 27.

<sup>117</sup> Treatise II, 13; p. 33-35.

<sup>118</sup> Treatise II, 3-6.

<sup>119</sup> Maimonides’ prophet has highly developed intuition. Guide II, 36.

<sup>120</sup> Treatise II, 5.

propositions that infer the definition of miracles, which does not reject them, but define as events with unknown causes. The fourth one discusses interpretation of miracles in the Bible, which has been already analyzed and is not relevant to our discussion at this point.

*“(1) that nothing happens contrary to nature, but nature maintains an eternal, fixed and immutable order, and at the same time demonstrate what should be understood by the term ‘miracle’”*

*“(2) that from miracles we cannot know about either the essence or the existence or the providence of God, but rather that all three are much better grasped from the fixed and unchangeable order of nature”*

*“(3) I will show from some examples in the Bible that by the decrees, volitions and providence of God, Scripture itself means nothing other than the order of nature which necessarily follows from his eternal law.”<sup>121</sup>*

What appears to common people as a miracle is actually naturally caused event that is beyond reasoning. Secondly, the idea of God is not self-sustained. His existence is deduced from the nature that possesses aforementioned qualities. The popular definition of a miracle is that it is an extra-natural event that subordinates nature in order to interfere into worldly order. Spinoza recognizes nature as the only ‘decree of God’, God is not outside of the system. If miracles are part of nature that opposes nature, then God opposes to Himself. Such contradictory nature of God is absurd. If miracles are extra-natural and oppose nature, then God lacks power to maintain his own creation.

When Spinoza dismisses miracles as popular superstitions, then he proceeds to interpretation of miracles in accordance with the thesis underlined above. Miracles of the Bible testify a lack of knowledge of the ancients. Spinoza scorns particular, providential nature of miracles as it is described by rabbinic authorities. However, Spinoza does not reject their historical occurrence. Although Spinoza sees miracles as possible, he claims that miracles happened according to the natural order and offers

---

<sup>121</sup> Treatise VI, 2.

naturalistic explanations to solve mystery of miracles.<sup>122</sup> Ignorance of natural causes of the effect could be temporal, caused by lack of theoretical knowledge at the certain time, or permanent, that 'a miracle' is beyond human cognition in general and no additional knowledge will change that condition.

Spinoza draws definitive line between philosophy and theology and the Bible was, apparently, denied to become philosophic authority. The paradox is, that despite long-term criticism of rabbis opposing tendency to rationalize miracles, when it was denied by philosophy itself, previous discussion on miracles lost their power from the Aristotelian point of view.

---

<sup>122</sup> Treatise VI, 12.

### 3 Eliezer Eilburg

#### 3.1 Biography

Eliezer Eilburg is slowly finding his place as a subject of contemporary research. His discoverer Joseph Davis dedicated to his finding a paper in 2001, where he introduced Eilburg's life and his work *Eser She'elot* (Ten Questions).<sup>123</sup> Subsequently, he prepared an annotated edition of this work.<sup>124</sup> Davis' thesis proposed in the first article, were discussed in paper of Tamás Visi in context of Moravian Jewish intellectual life.<sup>125</sup> Here, we propose another edition and analysis of the first question concerning miracles in more general framework of miracles as medieval and early modern issue. But before doing so, let us introduce his person through Davis article (2001) and his own autobiography called *Mahberet ha-Me'asef* (Notebook of the Collector).<sup>126</sup>

Eilburg's early life in Brunswick, a town where Eilburg was born, was interrupted by the expulsion of Jews in 1546, the very year of Luther's death.<sup>127</sup> Despite the fact, that the expulsion decree was revoked, political insecurity initiated by reformation made German countries a less attractive destination. The expulsion decree was renewed soon, e.g., in 1553 by Duke Erich the Younger and in 1557 by Heinrich the Younger. This shift of Jewish population for Bohemia and Moravia, Northern Italy and later on Poland was a well-established phenomenon. Eilburg and his wife moved to Poznan, a town described as a peaceful refuge with a long lasting Jewish settlement. Soon, forced to leave<sup>128</sup> he ended up in Ancona, where he delved into medicine, philosophy, and Kabbalah. He did not obtain any university degree; he

---

<sup>123</sup> Davis, Joseph: The Ten Questions of Eliezer Eilburg and the Problem of Jewish Unbelief in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, XCI, Nos. 3-4, January – April, 2001; p. 293 – 336.

<sup>124</sup> Davis, Joseph: The "Ten Questions" of Eliezer Eilburg in *Hebrew Union College Annual* 80, Cincinnati. (2009); p. 173-244. This study is still not accessible by this time; therefore we could not use it or compare it. When we write about Davis opinion we work only with his argument from the previous articles. His present opinions and progress in his research are not known to us.

<sup>125</sup> Visi, Tamás: Die Rebellion des Elieser Eilburg gegen die Rabbinische Tradition: eine Episode in der intellektuellen Geschichte des Mährischen Judentums, in *Judaica Bohemiae*, XLVI Supplementum (ed. H. Teufel, P. Kocman, A. Putík, I. Cermanová), 2011; p. 11-32.

<sup>126</sup> MS JTS 2324; fol. 89a-101a

<sup>127</sup> Ibid; fol. 89r

<sup>128</sup> JTS MS 2324, fol. 89r – 90v

rather enjoyed possibilities offered by Jewish intellectual framework of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy. Regrettably, we cannot reconstruct the exact dates of his stay, but some information can be obtained from notes in some of his manuscripts.<sup>129</sup> In 1553, the year when the Talmud was burnt in Rome, he was back to Poland. However, it is not clear whether on-going reformation pushed Eilburg out of Italy back to Poland. In 1552, Eilburg seems to be present in Ancona.<sup>130</sup> However, the following year he was imprisoned in Silesian town Olešnica (Oels).<sup>131</sup> Eilburg left Italy just before counter-reformation transformed the approach toward Jewry under Pope Julius III and Paul IV<sup>132</sup> following a whole European trend of rising central power, which in our case means augmenting range of interference into Jewish internal affairs.

Cultural exchange between Italy and Poland certainly wasn't an exclusively Jewish phenomenon. Nichola Copernicus (1473–1543) and Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584) are just two most remarkable examples of Polish personalities, who spent time in Italy and consequently returned to Poland. Matatya Delacrut,<sup>133</sup> who acquired his knowledge in mathematics and Jewish mysticism in Bologna, was back to Cracow by 1555. Here he obtained the respectful position of scribe of the growing Jewish community. Unlike Delacrut, Eilburg did not appear in any fixed position at Jewish communities. From various quotes from his collection of manuscripts, JTS MS 2323 and JTS MS 2324 including his biography, we can reconstruct that he was familiar with Silesian, Polish and Moravian environment, Jewish communities and their leaders. Eilburg's notes suggest that he was imprisoned in Olešnica (Oels) in 1553–1556 and later on in Nysa (Neisse) in 1567.

Around a year later he seems to be working as a private teacher in Swidnica (Schweidnitz). However, we must not forget that Swidnica had permanent ban on Jewish settlement from 1457 up to 1799; therefore, this contract pointing at Eilburg as a teacher does not mean that he actually lived in the city. Another matter is that the

---

<sup>129</sup> JTS MS 2324, fol. 5v – 10r: copied from a MS of Joseph Levi of Ferrer; 76v – 79r: copied from MS owned by r. Yehudah Ashkelon (Judah D'Ascoli).

<sup>130</sup> JTS MS 2692, fol. 24a

<sup>131</sup> JTS MS 2323, fol. 91a

<sup>132</sup> 1554 – Julius III endorsed burning of Talmud, 1555 – burning at stake Marranos in Ancona, the same year Paul IV issued Bull *Cum Nimis Absurdum*, 1556 – privileged previously given to Jews of Ancona revoked, 1557- ban on Hebrew print, etc.

<sup>133</sup> Steinschneider, M.: *Jewish Literature from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century*. London, 1857; p. 285.

reasons for Eilburg's imprisonment are obscure and no final conclusions should be suggested before a detailed examination of his manuscripts. The only fact we can directly infer from this information is his actual stay in Silesia.

On the basis of other passages in his writings<sup>134</sup> we can see that he was familiar with Moravia as well. A manuscript of the Jewish Theological Seminary [JTS] 2324 fol. 45r–77v contain one of Eilburg's works, *Eser She'elot*. The first few pages are written in a form of an open letter to rabbinic authorities of Moravia and subsequently, he opens philosophical discussion concerning various controversial themes including scriptural criticism, discussions about creation of the world, moral profile of patriarchs, or resurrection. He enumerates the names of rabbis in following way: R. Ya'akov of Kromnava, R. Liva of Austerlitz, and Hiric (Hirsch) of Stemberg.<sup>135</sup> According to the opinion of Tamás Visi supported by a rabbinic approbation (*haskamah*) from 1613 name '*Kromnava*' refers to Moravský Krumlov (Mährisch Kromau).<sup>136</sup>

In the main part of the text starting with fol. 48v, Eilburg addresses some respectable persons at certain points without naming them. However, it is a sound assumption that he refers primarily to these aforementioned rabbis and the lack of direct reference in the text is caused by Eilburg's attempt to create universal polemical work that approaches rabbinic authorities as such. Although Eilburg draws support from the medieval manuscripts, his form of criticism exceeds the existent framework of discussion and in many respect foreshadows Spinoza. But we will discuss Eilburg's contribution sufficiently in chapters dedicated to analysis of the text.

### 3.2 Impact of Printing

Although Eilburg's innovative criticism of Judaism pushes us to imagine him as a progressive and modern figure, we must not forget even the first early moderns are the last medieval. Invention of printing is generally understood as one of the prime movers of modernity. First Hebrew books were printed before 1480, but only in with

---

<sup>134</sup> MS JTS 2323, fol 45r; 99b

<sup>135</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 45r

<sup>136</sup> See Visi (2011); p. 18; fn. 24

establishment of printing houses, which put Hebrew book on their regular agenda, Hebrew books started to revolutionize literary canon.

Italy dominated in Hebrew book printing until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was replaced by Amsterdam. Soncino's and Bomberg's printing houses edited many manuscripts in the form of printed books and contributed to stabilization of "official" versions of text which used to circulate in different versions of the same throughout Europe. Nevertheless, Eilburg's presence in Italy does not guarantee us that Eilburg actually benefited from this little miracle directly.

There are few textual variations why Eilburg's citations differ from the official printed books. He uses two form of the word denoting magic trick לט and לאט. The second version of the word appears in Eilburg's quotation of the Mishne Torah.<sup>137</sup> The same spelling appears only in the printed edition of Venice, 1524. Another quotation is repeated one more time on fol. 55r and the same spelling is employed. All the other printed version that we could check have in this passage word לט. On the other hand, when Eilburg does not quote anyone, he prefers to use the other form of spelling with aleph.<sup>138</sup> This observation suggests that in the case of aforementioned quotation of he followed the spelling of the original book he was used as a source. It could be the printed edition of Mishneh Torah, Venice, 1524. When he quotes next law from Mishne Torah (YT 8:2),<sup>139</sup> he is not that precise. Square brackets represent the text of the printed edition, which is missing in the manuscript. Round brackets represent Eilburg's text. This instruction is valid for all the other Hebrew quotations.

ובמה האמינו בו במעמד הר סיני שענינו ראו ולא זר ואזנינו שמע[נ], ולא אחר האש והקולות  
להלפידים והוא נגש אל הערפל והקול מדבר אליו [ואינו שומעים] משה משה לך אמור  
לה(ם)[נ]<sup>140</sup>

<sup>137</sup> MT, SM, YT 8:6; fol. 51r, fol. 55v

<sup>138</sup> See fol. 51v and fol. 55v

<sup>139</sup> MT, SM, YT 8:2; fol. 52v

<sup>140</sup> Maimonides: *Mishne Torah*. Venice: Daniel Bomberg, 1523; fol. 16r; Eilburg's text: JTS MS 2323; fol. 52v



We admit that these changes could be introduced in order to make the text of the manuscript more fluent, but we do not see direct reason why. Therefore, we find more probable that he did not use Bomberg's printed version, but a manuscript.

Let us leave this question open and proceed to the case of Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah. Eilburg cites a passage from Maimonides' introduction to the commentary on fol. 52r. The Mishna was first printed in Spain before the expulsion in 1485. The first Italian edition already included Maimonides' commentary on it. It was printed by Soncino in Naples in 1492. Another Mishnah with Maimonides' commentary that Eilburg could have had possibility to view is Giustiniani's edition (Venice, 1546). The text quoted by Eilburg is similar to both Soncino's edition and the edition printed by Giustiniani. However, the text slightly differs from the version, which appears in Eilburg's manuscript. It is indeed interesting that Eilburg cites מופת או מופת meaning "*sign and wonder*" instead of „*sign*” as presented in printed Mishnah. Apparently he uses sources, which already reflect lexical issue and distinguish between these categories. Once again, round brackets represent Eilburg's text and square brackets the text in Soncino's edition. Here is the quotation:

וכבר שגו [בו כל] המון (העם) [האדם] גם מתי מספר מיודעיהם שהם מרמים בנפשם  
שהנבואה לא (תתיחס)[תתקיי] לכל המתיחס אליה עד (עשייתו) [עשותו] אות (או מופת)  
מופלא כגון אות מאותות מרע"ה<sup>141</sup>

His usage of the Guide of the Perplexed also shows that his source were not printed editions. One of the longest citations in Eilburg's work is from Guide III, 29. We compared the text to two printed editions; the first one Roma, before 1480, and second one Sabionetta, 1553. The second book was printed the very same year as we are able to find information about Eilburg back in Poland. Due to dating of Eilburg's Eser She'elot, to 1567/1568 it is sound assumptions that he could encounter the printed editions. The analysis of the passage shows different results.

---

<sup>141</sup> Maimonides: *Perush Mishnah* in *Mishnah*, vol. II, Venice: Marco Antonino Giustiniani, 1546; fol. 1v; Eilburg's text: JTS MS 2323; fol. 52r. for Soncino's Mishna see: Maimonides: *Perush Mishnah* in *Mishnah*. Naples: Joshua Solomon Soncino, 1492; fol. 1v.

שם יספור על אדם הראשון שהוא זכר בספרו ש[ב]הודו אילן [אחד] כשילקח(ה)ו סעיפיו וישליכו הסעיף בארץ יהיה רומש ומתנועע ברמ[ן]שת הנחשים, ו[ש]יש אילן (ש)שרשו בצורת אדם ישמע לו קול גדול [ו]יצא ממנו הד(י)בור [דבר או דברים ושעשב] (ושיש עשב) שתארו כך כשיקח אדם מעליו וישימים בבית הצואר [שליו] י(ת)עלם מבני אדם ולא יראה אנה יכנס [ו]מאנה [יצא] וכשיקטירו ממנו (חוברי השמים) תחת השמים ישמעו בני אדם באויר הסמ(ו)ך לנו צליל וקולות נוראות, (ב)כל עוד שהעשן [ההוא] עלה וכיוצא באלו ההבלים הרבה<sup>142</sup>

The most striking difference is Eilburg's insertion of words חוברי השמים, but there are many minor changes as well. In every quotation longer than four words there is such deviation. I assume that Eilburg was not working with the printed edition of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Similar analyzes should be done also concerning the *Wars of the Lord* written by Gersonides. These two authors create backbone of his analysis of miracles. Unfortunately, during my research I had no access to the first printed edition – Riva di Trento, 1560. Nevertheless, comparison between modern editions and the text quoted by Eilburg in his manuscript reveals potential amount of lesser or greater variations. Despite the fact that Eilburg's own copies of several works are preserved in the manuscripts, none of them includes any of the quoted works copied by Eilburg's hand; therefore we cannot compare Eilburg's quotations in *Eser She'elot* with other Eilburg's copied manuscripts.

Eilburg profoundly refers to authors that had not been printed by the time of Eilburg's composition of *Eser She'elot*. In one case (fol. 58r), Eilburg paraphrases Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, Book Lambda). Even though, he claims that these are the words of Aristotle, it is more probable that he utilized Ibn Rushd's *Epitome of Metaphysics*. It is not the only Ibn Rushd's work to which he refers. He uses and shows knowledge of *Epitome of Plato's Republic*, and Ibn Rushd's most popular work among the Jewish audience *Incoherence of Incoherence*. Furthermore, there are two other commentaries on the *Guide of Perplexed* penned by Profiat Duran and Narbonni. Also works of Nissim of Marseille, Abraham ibn Hisdai and Kalonymous

<sup>142</sup>Maimonides: *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Roma: Ovadijah, Menashe, u-Benjamin mi-Roma, 1475; fol. 121r; Maimonides: *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Sabbionetta, 1543; fol. 154v; Eilburg's text: JTS MS 2323; fol. 51r.

ben Kalonymous were not printed in Eilburg's lifetime. Eilburg must have had possibility to consult great number of manuscripts to compose his work. Eilburg's autographs show that he brought with him from Italy copies of different manuscripts. However, we have no information in what way Eilburg consulted manuscripts during the composition of Eser She'elot as we assume that it happened in Moravia or its proximity. Printing brought about mixing of the worlds: Sefardic works found their way into Ashkenazi communities and they were accustomed to their new environment. A famous instance of this phenomenon is the publication of Moses Isserles' "corrections" (hagahot) to Joseph Karo's *Sulhan Arukh*.<sup>143</sup>

A new canon of authoritative religious texts was continually formed by book printers, especially after the ban on printing the Talmud in Italy.<sup>144</sup> After this incident, new types of genres were introduced into print including esoteric teachings that had been kept as elite studies before.<sup>145</sup> But printing did not eliminate existence of vital manuscript culture. Manuscripts became bearers of texts that could not get into print for political, social, or even financial reasons. The existence of printing houses in the 16<sup>th</sup> century did not secure possibility to publish own criticism. Even in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some of the works of *Leon Modena* (1571–1648), who worked as an editor in Venice, circulated as manuscripts, whereas other were printed. It is not coincidence that works preserved in manuscripts were of polemic nature (Ben David, Magen ve-Zinah, or Magen Herev).<sup>146</sup> We should understand manuscripts and printed books as two media that offer different advantages for the author as well as for the reader of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later times.<sup>147</sup>

### 3.2.1 Eilburg and Compilations of Manuscripts

In Eilburg's case, however, we have serious doubts if there were any readers. There is no other copy preserved of Eser She'elot besides his autograph. He predominately acts as a copyist and compiler. All his autographs preserved seem to have nature of

---

<sup>143</sup> Karo's (1488–1575) *Shulhan Arukh* was first printed in Venice in 1565. Isserles's *Mappah* (hagahot attached to the body of *Shulhan Arukh*) were first printed in Cracow in 1571.

<sup>144</sup> On the 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1553 the ban was issued by the Pope and Talmud was burned.

<sup>145</sup> Ruderman, David: *Early Modern Jewry*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010; p. 99-102.

<sup>146</sup> Dweck, Yaakov: *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice*. Princeton: Princeton UP [epub], 2011; see chapter 1: Hebrew Manuscript in an Age of Print.

<sup>147</sup> Reiner, Elchanan: The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript versus Printed Book, in *Polin*. Vol. 10, Oxford: 1997; p. 85-98.

private library, into which personal writings (e.g. correspondence) and original writings were inserted. This collection is personalized by his introductions and occasional glosses. So far, four autographs were indentified: Ms Jewish Theological Seminary [JTS] 2323; Ms JTS 2324; MS JTS 2692 and MS Oxford-Bodleian Neubauer [Bodl.] 1969.

The least often mentioned manuscript, Bodl. 1969, contains an extract from Tikkune Zohar xxi, an extract on Hebrew grammar and prosody as well as unknown commentary. Neubauer does not specify on what the commentary is, however it suggests that it could have been written by Eilburg himself.<sup>148</sup> It is the only manuscript that bears mark of Italian censorship from the year 1597, when Mantuan mass expurgation of books took place. This means that the manuscript stayed in Italy after Eilburg had left it.

Under call number MS JTS 2692 we can find a medical collection called *Ma'arekhet refu'ot ha-shamayim* (System of Heavenly medicine) containing 33 leaves. It contains notes on a treatise of Ibn Sina and Hebrew translation of a Christian physician from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Arnaldus of Villanova.<sup>149</sup> The systematic shortening and commenting of these works was intended to create a portable guide for a physician; it was a popular and desired literary genre among students of medicine. Fol. 24a suggests that Eilburg was present in Ancona in 1552.<sup>150</sup>

Another Eilburg's autograph is MS JTS 2324. This compilation involved Kabbalistic, astrologic, and grammar works. Eilburg's interest in astrology is evidently present throughout his Eser She'elot. Some of the manuscripts are estimated to have been copied from Italian manuscripts: 5v–10r contains pieces of *Ma'amar 'al Odot Derashot Hazal* (Treatise on Rabbinic Sermons) by Abraham Maimonides, and they are estimated to be copied from a manuscript of Yosef Levi of

<sup>148</sup> Neubauer, Beit-Arié Malachi, May.: *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Suppl. Of Addenda and Corrigenda to Vol. 1., Oxford: Claredon Press, 1994.

<sup>149</sup> Eilburgs copied an astrological work *Panim be-Mishpat*, which was introduced to Hebrew audience in the 14<sup>th</sup> century through the translation of Shlomo Avigdor in France. After recollection of Arnald's works, a new Latin compendium has been published in a printed form in Lyon in 1504 and several reprints and editions followed.

Steinschneider, Moritz: *Die Hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*. Berlin, 1893; p. 788.

<sup>150</sup> JTS 2692; fol. 24a: ולזה אחד מן האהובים הנכבדים הבקיאים ברפואה אשר היה אצלי בעיר אנקונייה במדינת [= 1552] לומרדייא לפרט קטון יש"ב

Ferrera. Another example is *Mishnat Yosef 'Uzi'el* (76v–79r) copied from a manuscript owned by Yehuda Ashkelon, Eilburg's teacher known under name *Judah D'Ascoli*. Finally, there is another manuscript assumed to be copied in Italy - *Mayan ha-Chochmot* (Source of Wisdom, 66v–70v) with a colophon pointing to the year 1555.<sup>151</sup> The colophon itself says: “*This is Book of Raziel I found in the hands of Greek sages... I copied it in Anconia in Lombardia and now in I am in my galut as a captive... [25<sup>th</sup> Kislev, Monday, 1555].*” This colophon was written in Olešnica during his imprisonment. In Italy, Eilburg claims to have been in contact with a Greek Jewish scholar referring especially to his teacher R. David Vital. The manuscript includes aforementioned *Machberet ha-Me'asef* (*Notebook of the Collector*), author's biography.

MS JTS 2323 is a compilation of predominately philosophical writings copied by Eilburg. It shows that his intellectual scope was very medieval, but not that Ashkenazi. It contains works of Abraham ibn Ezra, 'Abd Allāh ibn Muhammad Batalyawṣī, (even though Eilburg grants himself authorship), and al-Fārābī's Book of principles (or Political Regime) that is the youngest manuscript of this work preserved. It was recommended by Maimonides to be read. This manuscript also includes Eser She'elot. The whole compilation bears two colophones: fol. 31r informs us that he wrote this material in 1568,<sup>152</sup> and fol. 104r in 1567.<sup>153</sup> And on fol. 149v there is a purchase contract from 1568.

### 3.2.2 Dating of Eser She'elot

Eser She'elot were embedded in the whole compilation surrounded by materials produced in years 1567 and 1568. Joseph Davis, however, claims that Eser She'elot were written in 1575.<sup>154</sup> This discrepancy is mentioned by Tamás Visi,<sup>155</sup> who prefers to understand the manuscript in context of the dates mentioned in pages of the manuscript. The fact is that whole Eser She'elot does not contain any explicate articulation of the date. Also, there are no signs that the any of the manuscripts are of

<sup>151</sup> Colophons in fol. 62r; fol. 70v

<sup>152</sup> JTS 2323, fol. 31r: [1568=] תעתיק בידי שנת והקרב"ה לעולה לפ"ק

<sup>153</sup> JTS 2323, fol. 104r: [1567=] סיימתי חבור הזה וגמרנו כלה בחדש שבט יום ד' שנת שכ"ז לפ"ק

<sup>154</sup> Davis (2001); p. 293.

<sup>155</sup> Visi (2011); p. 24-25.

foreign origin, and therefore it presents continuous work of the compiler and the author, who is not anyone else but Eilburg. The form, in which Eilburg wrote *Eser She'elot*, gives us hints that this autograph is not the final version of the author that would serve as the model in case of “publishing” of the manuscript, i.e. in case the manuscript enters circulation. This can be inferred from the division of thoughts and his usage of occasional square script he uses in order to divide the text into logical sections. However, this practice is not used throughout whole *Eser She'elot*. Finally, he visually separates only dominant questions. We admit that more evidence is needed to justify the stance; therefore, we will draw no conclusion from this observation.

Nonetheless, if we look at the folios with date, we see that manuscript from 1568 (fol. 31r) is followed by the manuscript from 1567 (fol. 104r), and finally information from year 1568 (fol. 149v) is added. Either materials were not bound chronologically or written in chronological order. If we want to base date of *Eser She'elot* on codicological examination, then the manuscript should be revisited once again to disperse any doubts.

In his criticism of miracles, we found no information that would help us to date the manuscript. It is not surprising that he uses medieval sources and operated with medieval authorities, which leave us almost no space for determining the time when *Eser She'elot* were composed. His occasional remarks on specific cultural events are too general to help us. If we acknowledge the introductory criticism of rabbinic authorities as indeed written in chronological order and attached to *Eser She'elot* as sort of a prologue, then Eilburg's enumeration of rabbis can be understood as another evidence to be considered. All aforementioned rabbis (R. Ya'akov of Kromnava, R. Liva of Austerlitz, and Hirsch of Stenberg) are attested in responsa of famous Polish R. Moshe Isserless.<sup>156</sup> He was appointed in 1553 and he held his office of the *Rav ha-Medinah* (chief rabbi) until his death in 1572. If we follow Davis' opinion, we must presume that Eilburg wrote the work after Isserles' death and we must presuppose that all three rabbis were still heads of their communities. Yet there are no other

---

<sup>156</sup> Davis (2001), fn. 19, p. 298; Visi (2011), p. 18-20.

sources of information about them and no other sources to specify dating of Eser She'elot.

### 3.2.3 Methodology

Eilburg uses various sources that he cites and uses as proof-texts. Surprisingly, the main material is not the Scripture, but works of Maimonides. His interpretation of Maimonides follows the tradition of esoteric reading of medieval “radical” Maimondeans.<sup>157</sup> He directly reveals his method in fol. 51v, where he cites one of the seven principles of contradictions telling us that even words not directly connected to the topic are relevant for the final outcome of reasoning.<sup>158</sup> He utilizes this approach in the first part of the argument contra miracles, as we shall see, to present what Eilburg believes is the real opinion of Maimonides. With this interpretative tool he not only praises Maimonides, but ridicules some of the latter's opinions in a euphemistic way without actually degrading Maimonides' intellectual integrity. At the same time, Eilburg profiles himself as an independent thinker not following previous discussions slavishly and he employs a distinguished set of proof-texts to formulate his thought.

He uses authorities well-versed in philosophy and adds selections of biblical verses to support his arguments. Although there are no signs of deeper halakhic education, he is aware of rabbinic discussion concerning relevant issues. However, he does not quote the sources directly (Talmud, midrashim, etc.) and his collection of preserved manuscripts contains no systematic halakhic treatise. Certainly, halakhah is not Eilburg primary and even secondary focus and we should consider the possibility that paraphrased halakhic materials could have been obtained from other sources, e.g. medieval biblical commentaries of Abraham Ibn Ezra, Gersonides, and oral culture.

Freedom of Eilburg's speech has its limits. Even if we have to admit that his objections towards (what is perceived as) tradition is controversial in itself, they are even more controversial in context of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Ashkenaz. The debate on the position of textual tradition already started to appear after development *pilpul* as a

---

<sup>157</sup> Ravitzky, Aviezer: The Secrets of the Guide to the Perplexed: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Century, in *Studies in Maimonides*, (ed. Isadore Twersky) Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990; p. 159-207.

<sup>158</sup> Guide, Instruction.

new study and interpretation technique, but finally erupted after publication of the Shulhan Arukh and its acceptance among Rabbis of Poland led by Moses Isserles.<sup>159</sup> The Shulhan Arukh had the potential to omit usage of Talmudic sources from formulation of judgements. Against this practice several rabbis arose in Poland and Bohemia underlining the need of Talmudic studies and the support for local minhagim, namely R. Shlomo Luria (Maharshal; 1510–1572), R. Yehuda Loew ben Betzalel (Maharal; 1520–1609) and his brother R. Hayim ben Betzalel (1530–1588).<sup>160</sup> These tensions led to devaluation of Maimonides' Mishne Torah, which was no longer needed by supporters of the Shulhan arukh on the one hand and seen as illegitimate form of interpretation of the Mishnah on the other.

A simultaneous process was rejection of Maimonides as a philosopher. As Elchanan Reiner argues, Maimonides' *Gude of the Perplexed* was not read as a philosophical text in most of early modern Ashkenaz.<sup>161</sup> Philosophical reading might have occurred after new printed literature reached transalpine region and discussion on Maimonidean legacy peaked in the disputation of 1559 in Prague, where group of pro-Maimonidean thinkers were accused of disbelief. This does not mean that all halakhists rejected studying of philosophy.<sup>162</sup> Isserles himself defended its study<sup>163</sup> and many others were educated in secular sciences. However, none of them would see halakhah as inferior to philosophy.

Under these circumstances, we can see Eilburg as a thinker that occurred on the margins of cultural interest and operated half-hidden under authorities like Ibn Rushd, Maimonides, and Gersonides, or using the stipulated opponent (ba'al ha-riv) to fully articulate Eilburg's ideas. On fol. 53r he quotes Ibn Rushd to suggest that miracles

---

<sup>159</sup> Shulhan Arukh with Isserles glosses was first printed in 1571 – a year before death of the author of the glosses.

<sup>160</sup> Wiener Dow, Leon: Opposition to the 'Shulhan Aruch': Articulating a Common Law Conception of Halacha, in *Hebraic Political Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 4. Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2008; p. 352-376.

<sup>161</sup> Reiner, Elchanan: The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society to the New Science in the Sixteenth Century, in *Science in Context*. Vol. 10, No. 4. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997; p. 589-603.

<sup>162</sup> Philosophy was understood as Greek science or Greek wisdom to underline its foreign source or it was a part of so-called 'new science' that according to Reiner's hypothesis was deliberately disregarded as later cultural programme of Ashkenaz. Philosophy as part of new science supposes new context in which it appeared. See Reiner (1997).

<sup>163</sup> Shut ha-Remah; no. 7.



have no rational bases.<sup>164</sup> Although he claims that in other various ways, Ibn Rushd's text is the most direct articulation of the idea.

More often Eilburg uses the third unspecified person - an 'antagonist' as translated by Davis or simply 'opponent' as used in the translation added to this thesis. This opponent is representative of rationalists and feels free to point out errors in the usual reasoning of the apologists of conservative religious ideas and articles of faith.

### 3.2.4 She'elah Rishonah: Criticism of Miracles

The first question together with a brief introduction constitutes ten folios.<sup>165</sup> In the introduction<sup>166</sup> Eilburg already discloses what the primary aim of his refutation is. It is an article of faith, by which he understands widely accepted belief supported by the consensus of people as well as religious authorities. In case of Judaism, this means belief in God as a giver of the Torah and this act of giving implies a particular volition on the part of God having source in God's love and mercy, and it also implies a belief in Moses as His messenger.

At the same time, Eilburg diminishes the border between Jewish understanding of foundation and those of other religions claiming:

*"And nobody has ever seen, or ever heard of any religion and nomos, which would come into being without this, that is to say, [without] performing strange actions, or foretelling the future in advance."*<sup>167</sup>

*"...every single nation, every single society tells [such things] of their religion in a narrative, each in accord with its kind, about some of these unparalleled deeds and strange miracles that were seen and narrated man by man from their first [witnesses] until today and forever."*<sup>168</sup>

Eilburg argues that such an article of faith is either subject of pure belief or it is based on proof and evidence. The evidence can be based either on the intellect or on

---

<sup>164</sup> Please, note that I failed to identify the quotation.

<sup>165</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 48v-58v

<sup>166</sup> Ibid; fol. 48v-50v

<sup>167</sup> Ibid; fol. 49v

<sup>168</sup> Ibid; fol. 50r

the Torah. Although we are not given concrete definition of simple belief, we can deduce that such belief cannot operate with any reasoning that is relevant to the evaluation of the truth value of the events.

In a similar manner he describes the nature of evidence we can find in the Torah. He emphasizes the distinction between the first (supposed) witnesses of the miracles which created faith in the members of the community, on the one hand, and the later generations which accept the veracity of these miracles solely on the basis of the testimony of the earlier generation, on the other hand:

*“We rely on them [i.e. on the first witnesses of the miracles] and their testimony that is transmitted man by man. We believe [it] without Sun appearing to our eyes and without demonstration found in our intellect.”*<sup>169</sup>

Eilburg’s discussion is framed within a putative debate between two camps; those, who support the Torah as a source of universal truth and those, who search the truth through reasoning and argumentation. He draws a line between Torah and philosophy. Scripture stops to be source of information, which is to be interpreted in the light of philosophical theories that are validated through reasoning. Even though this approach resembles Spinoza’s separation of philosophy from theology, there is an important difference between Spinoza and Eilburg: Spinoza mocks Maimonides’ attempt to adapt Aristotelian philosophy to the specific needs of Jewish biblical exegesis<sup>170</sup>, whereas Eilburg is still a member of the Aristotelian camp and he embraces such typical ideas of post-Maimonidean philosophers as the theory of astrological influences. Despite some resemblances, Spinoza and Eilburg differ in respect of methods and initial assumptions as we shall discuss soon.

### **3.2.5 Eilburg: Summarizing Medieval Approach**

Eilburg summarizes previously discussed issues concerning miracles in connection to their relevance as source of belief. He divides the sources into three groups: [1] miraculous actions;<sup>171</sup> [2] miraculous foreknowledge of future;<sup>172</sup> and [3] miraculous

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid; fol. 50v

<sup>170</sup> Treatise I, 14; p. 18

<sup>171</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 50v-53v

<sup>172</sup> Ibid; fol. 53v-55r

nature of the teachings and laws established by a prophet as opposed to the non-miraculous nature of the doctrines and laws established by sages who are not prophets.<sup>173</sup>

### *Miracles as a source of belief*

The apologist of Jewish religion held that belief in Moses is built on miracles experienced by forefathers. Eilburg opposes the article of faith in relation to the Bible in two ways: [1] there is no extra-biblical evidence proving miraculous activities,<sup>174</sup> and [2] the lack of success of miracles as demonstration of power accompanying Israelites.

We have mentioned above that Eilburg recognizes traditions parallel to the Jewish one and he is aware of the fact that in the past other nations also wrote chronicles as part of a state's or religious community's agenda. Eilburg would expect to find records of the miracles of Exodus in the chronicles of Egyptians and other people involved. However, these chronicles are silent about marvellous deeds of Israelites.

Another objection stems from the lack of success of the early Israelite community to convert other people to its faith.<sup>175</sup> Eilburg introduces a new perspective into the discourse when he asks why nations other than the Jews were not convinced by the miracles of Moses when they must have witnessed them. The failure of convincing other people diminishes the trustworthiness of the biblical stories. Eilburg could have such an approach to the biblical stories, because he had more information about and interest in Gentile historical literature than medieval Jewish philosophers. And this is probably due to his encounter with humanism in Italy in the 1550s.

Even if miracles had happened, Eilburg recognizes this wonderful and marvellous activity as an act of magic. Even though he used Maimonides in order to support his argument, Maimonides denied possibility that miracles could be a product of magical operation. Narboni, the fourteenth century thinker influenced by

---

<sup>173</sup> Ibid; fol. 55r-58v

<sup>174</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 53r

<sup>175</sup> Ibid; fol. 53r -53v

Averroism, explained Maimonides philosophical stance as in correspondence with the idea of the existence of magic and sorcery. Narboni read Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed as a book that contains esoteric stance of Maimonides. Eilburg accepted this form of reading of Maimonides, which was popular among Italian Averroists. Therefore, Eilburg concludes, that even the greatest authority among Jewish theologians — Maimonides — admitted that biblical miracles could be produced by magic. Consequently, they cannot be a source of belief.

The Averroist tradition, already discussed in chapter *Philosophical debate in transition*, approached all magical activity as natural, although there are specific in respect to their rare occurrence and occult nature. Eilburg adopts this tradition and he explains miracles, as a part of magical practice, in very natural terms. Therefore, biblical miracles are natural. As natural events, they cannot be proof for any supernatural interference in nature, that is to say, they *cannot* constitute a basis for belief in supernatural providence for Jews.

Eilburg sees magical activity responsible for the theophany on Mt. Sinai. Already Saadia claims that giving of laws at Mt. Sinai was witnessed and processed through the senses, which is the verified source of truth.<sup>176</sup> Maimonides in Mishne Torah<sup>177</sup> rejects miracles as basis of faith due to his devaluation of sensual testimony and preference in intellectual apprehension. Eilburg agree with this view. As the miraculous actions can be of magical nature, they cannot have real epistemic value. For Eilburg, the spectacular theophany *accompanying* the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai is just an effect of talismans that have power to influence people's mind.

This theme also surfaces when Eilburg discusses the biblical narrative about the witch of Endor. The acts of necromancy attributed to the witch by the Bible can be interpreted in two ways according to Eilburg: either it occurred in a prophetic vision, or extramentally.<sup>178</sup> Now it is clear that Eilburg prefers the first choice – but interprets it in accordance with the Averroist approach to miracles as occult natural processes, or, to put it more simply, as a form of magic: therefore Eilburg claims that

---

<sup>176</sup> Emunot ve-deot, Introduction; Perush Sef Yetz, p. 72.

<sup>177</sup> MT, SM, YT 8:2; Eilburg directly refers to it.

<sup>178</sup> The major advocate of prophetic vision was Maimonides in various chapters of the Guide of the Perplexed (II, 42; 25; 35-36).

magical enchantment causes this change of mind of the observers of the “miracle.”<sup>179</sup> He has also replies to a putative religious critique (a ‘Torah-ist’) who advocates the extramental nature of such events. If it indeed Samuel appeared to Saul outside his vision, outside his ‘soul,’<sup>180</sup> then the power of talisman is even higher, being able to drag Samuel’s soul from Eden to the sublunar sphere and temporally incarnate him.

On the basis of these discussions Eilburg concludes that even the greatest miracles recorded in the Bible could be performed through magical means. And following the Averroist tradition Eilburg assumes that magic is entirely natural: it is based on unusual and occult natural processes the existence of which Ibn Rushd admits in the famous passage about miracles in *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, which we have quoted and discussed in the chapter about medieval theories of miracles. Basing his discussion on this medieval intellectual heritage Eilburg concludes that if biblical miracles are magical then they are natural, and if they are natural, they cannot be proofs for the existence of a supernatural providence for the people of Israel. Therefore, Eilburg concludes that the miracles related in the Bible are no sufficient proofs for the truth of the Jewish belief in the supernatural origin of the Torah.

#### *Belief based on foreknowledge of future possible events*

The Bible teaches us about unique position of prophets not only because of wonders appearing in their vicinity, but also through their foretelling of events of future. However, incoherency of the biblical stories caused difficulties in formulation of general rules of these actions. Exceptional case is Jeremiah, chapter eighteen, where the idea of God’s mercy and omnipotence appears in direct conflict with any possibility of certitude about correct foretelling. Jeremiah speaks about the planned punishments as retractable in case the culprits repent.<sup>181</sup> Good plans are retractable in case of not repenting.<sup>182</sup>

Eilburg’s summary of the philosophical theories of prophecy of earlier Jewish thinkers employing rational argumentation is quite succinct and right to the point.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 52v

<sup>180</sup> Soul is understood as the site of visual and other faculties in medieval philosophy.

<sup>181</sup> Jer 18:7-8

<sup>182</sup> Ibid 18:9-10

<sup>183</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 53r-53v

He presents prophecy as natural act in accordance Fārābī's heritage. Although he ascribes the origins of the theory to Aristotle, the theory has been first proposed by the Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī.<sup>184</sup>

Eilburg mentions the difference between the theories of Maimonides and Gersonides. Maimonides ascribes important role to the imaginative faculty in the process of prophetic hallucinations,<sup>185</sup> whereas Gersonides understands rational faculty as being the sole faculty for prophesizing.<sup>186</sup> Eilburg neglects the differences in mechanism of obtaining the prophecy. Eilburg seems to understand prophecy as a process, where the prepared soul obtains information through a process of emanation from the Active Intellect.

In chapter 36 of the second part of the Guide, Maimonides describes three types of belief in prophecy. The third one tells that even the most perfect man does not have to become a prophet. A special divine permission is needed although in an indirect way – God may prevent a candidate from becoming a prophet if He wishes so. Maimonides states that “*the third view is that which is taught in Scripture.*”<sup>187</sup> Eilburg gives this idea about supernatural nature of prophecy into the mouth of a man rising doubts about Eilburg's stances. This doubtful man is replied by Eilburg's stipulated figure – the opponent. According to the opponent, there is no supernatural feature in the prophecy. It is influenced by stars at two time point: time of birth and time of attaining of prophecy. This theory is the typical fore medieval lore; the laws of the earth are not valid for stars. The astrological theory of prophecy was already present in teaching of Gersonides and Eilburg follows this teaching. In his theory Gersonides broaden the impact of stars on imagination, saying that the continuous activity of celestial bodies influences dreams and visions.<sup>188</sup> The inspiration that causes possibility of foreknowledge is not divine, but celestial. The opponent comes

---

<sup>184</sup> Watt, John. W: From Themistius to al-Farabi: Platonic Political Philosophy and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric the East*, Vol. 13, No. 1. 1995; p. 17-41

<sup>185</sup> Guide II, 35-36

<sup>186</sup> Wars II, 6

<sup>187</sup> Guide II, 32

<sup>188</sup> Wars III, 6; MS JTS 2323; fol. 54r

to conclusion: “...*the prophecy follows the laws of nature and conjunctions and this is the eternal divine will just as some of the recent thinkers understand.*”<sup>189</sup>

Eilburg’s approach is based on standard post-Maimonidean Jewish lore, which combined the astrological heritage of Ibn Ezra with the Aristotelian heritage of Maimonides.<sup>190</sup> Gersonides’ astrological theory appears to be the main source of direct influence on Eilburg’s thought.

It is clear that the theory with the heavy astrological influence bears marks of Gersonides’ approach to coherence of philosophy and astrology. However, Eilburg’s identification of the theory with recent thinkers suggests existence of operating group that perceive sublunar nature as heavily determined by stars. It is possible that they read Gersonides and Maimonides in the same way as Eilburg does.

Eilburg also discusses witchcraft, divination, and magic as phenomena related to prophecy. He argues that the prohibition of witchcraft in the Torah is not due to the inefficiency of witchcraft, but due to its power and effectiveness.<sup>191</sup> Eilburg thinks that Gersonides decided to include foreknowledge in the system of examination of the prophet, because he believed divination to be effective. Eilburg follows Gersonides’ criticism of Maimonides. Gersonides refers to Jeremiah as the archetypal prophet who claims explicitly that prophetic predictions may fail to hit the target since both punishments and rewards may be cancelled if human beings change their morals to the better or worse.<sup>192</sup> This passage of Jeremiah was ignored by Maimonides, who famously argued that God never revokes rewards promised by a prophet. Eilburg agrees with Gersonides that Maimonides’ theory is refuted by the aforementioned biblical verses.

However, in an important aspect, Eilburg differs from Gersonides.. Since prophetic predictions may fail to hit the future as both Gersonides and Eilburg agrees, prophetic predictions do not differ essentially from divinations practiced by astrologers or witches. Thus Eilburg turns Gersonides’ argument against the idea of

---

<sup>189</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 54v

<sup>190</sup> Visi, Tamás: Ibn Ezra, a Maimonidean authority: the evidence of the early Ibn Ezra supercommentaries, in *The Cultures of Maimonideanism*. (ed. Robinson, James T.) Leiden: Brill, 2009; p. 89-131.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid; fol. 55v

<sup>192</sup> Wars VI, 13

prophecy itself. If in the previous discussion Eilburg shows that miracles can be just magical operation now he argues that prophetic predictions can be just well-known practices of divination. Eilburg emphasizes that, the actual possibility of foreknowledge is not exclusively restricted to prophets. Eilburg would certainly endorse much wider group of people and objects engaged in foretelling future.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, prophetic prediction of future cannot serve as the principle of the proof defining true prophets.

*Belief based on miraculous character of the teachings and laws of the prophet as a divinely inspired lawgiver*

A third argument which Eilburg points out as a possible way of proving the divine origin of the Torah is based on the miraculous character of the *content* of the revelation transmitted by Moses. If we do not believe Moses on account of the miracles he made, or on account of his successful prediction of future, we may believe him on account of the marvellous doctrines and laws he taught. In the last part of the First Question Eilburg's purpose is to scrutinize this argument.

In general, Eilburg's critique of the apologetic arguments is based on a strategy which he formulates using Aristotelian logical terminology. Aristotle's theory of scientific demonstration focuses on the "middle terms" that are the keys for constructing a valid syllogism. Take for example, in the syllogism:

Every A is B

Every B is C

Therefore: Every A is C

In this syllogism the middle term is B; it does not appear in the conclusion but it has a key role in the demonstration. This is why the middle term is considered the "principle of demonstration" in Aristotelian logic. Eilburg wants to show that no middle term and no "principle of demonstration" exists to prove the apologetic statement.

---

<sup>193</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 55r



Eilburg employs a dilemma argument, which can be traced back to early medieval Islamic freethinkers. The argument goes as follows: The content of prophetic revelation either agrees with the teaching of reason or not. If the content of revelation agrees with reason, then content of the teachings that Moses supposedly received in a supernatural way does not differ from the teachings of those rational thinkers, who reached it without receiving supernatural revelation from God. However, once it is possible to reach the same content without supernatural interference, then that content of the revelation cannot be the “*principle of demonstration*” to prove that the prophet indeed received supernatural revelation. This argument can be compared to Eilburg’s position concerning foreknowledge in a broader context: just as predicting future is not a privilege of prophets, since astrologers can also do it, similarly teaching wise doctrines and establishing laws is not an exclusive activity of Moses or other prophets.

The second horn of the dilemma argument examines what follows, if the content of revelation does not agree with the reason. In that case, Eilburg argues there is no room for finding the principle of demonstration either. Eilburg seems to assume that whatever is not supported by reason is susceptible of being a merely arbitrary assumption. In that case there is no method to exclude the possibility that Moses invented those doctrines or rituals “out of his own heart” without any supernatural aid whatever. Perhaps Moses had a sort of moral certitude that the revelation came from God and not from his own heart, Eilburg admits, but *we* cannot check the veracity of this claim.

Eilburg anticipates and answers three possible objections to this argument: (1) perhaps criterion of divinity is irrationality itself, that is to say, the less reasonable a doctrine, law, or ritual is, the more supernatural it is; (2) there can be a special set of rules to prove the supernatural character of doctrines and laws, (3) the miracles that continued to happen to Jews who kept the commandments of the Torah prove the supernatural origin of Torah.

The first objection is attributed to a recently emerged group of kabbalists (“as some of the sucklings of the new kabbalah responded me, which arose earlier during my life”). It is worthy of noting that Davis (2001) identifies this group of kabbalists

as the strong anti-rationalists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; for example Josef Jabetz or Meir ibn Gabbai.

Eilburg replies, that applying that criterion Christianity will be the most divine religion:

*“...there is nothing which would contradict reason more than the dogmas of the Christians as I shall show, so if this is the case, (Christianity) should be an even more divine (religion than Judaism).”*<sup>194</sup>

The second objection is dismissed by Eilburg as an instance of wishful thinking. The opponent wishes the existence of specific rules which could establish the veracity of revelation, but in fact, there are no such rules, Eilburg points out:

*“My soul dies to see eye to eye such a research. Where is it? How is it? And their proofs should be of a strength and perfection that would prevent any disagreement to enter [the findings] and we could call them ultimate evidence and we would enjoy them and they would cheer us up.”*<sup>195</sup>

The most interesting is Eilburg’s reply to the third objection. Being aware of the rich and complex cult of saints in Christianity as well as the recent controversies between Protestants and Catholics about the legitimacy of the saints’ cults and the veracity of medieval legends about them, Eilburg says plainly that the Jewish belief in miracles that were done to holy men for their pious observance of the commandments of the Torah stand or fall with the analogous beliefs of the Christians. If we believe Jewish hagiographical stories, we must believe the Christian ones as well. On the other hand if we point to the possibility of error or fraudulence in the case of Christian reports about miracles — such as contemporary Protestants did — then the same sort of criticism is applicable to Jewish hagiography as well.

Comparison of Judaism to Christianity and to other religions and cultures continues to play an important role in another argument as well. Criticising the laws

---

<sup>194</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 56r

<sup>195</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 56v, in context of the intuition as the faculty of prophet that is the only one to be awakened in order of prophecy. Topic of intuition as a prophetic faculty has its place already in the Guide (II, 36), however, Eilburg opposes the idea of the prophet, whose intuition is the only requirement for prophesizing. He opposes the prophet as a simple fearing man. Eilburg’s prophet, even though rejected as biblical concept, has to fulfill intellectual pre-requirements.

of the Torah Eilburg takes into account two further aspects: wellbeing of the soul and wellbeing of the body. His understanding of the law is focused on the practical aspect of life.<sup>196</sup> Here Eilburg reveals his unwillingness to maintain rabbinic understanding and application of legal power through statements embedded into his philosophical text by pointing out that there are no clear proofs that Jewish laws are any better than non-Jewish laws.

*“[C]an you boast with the practical aspect, that is to say, aspect concerning wellbeing of society? And who can say and who can prove that whatever the princes of philosophy established and their council [consulted] considering political wisdom that they promulgated, such as the laws of the [pagan] magicians of Rome and Greece, that are called nowadays the laws of Emperador (datei ha-emperador‘) and the ethical instruction of the Ismaelites about Ismaeli laws, [and the laws of] Babylonians, Chaldeans, Indians, Persians, and many more similar to them, that they are not more proper to the practical political intellect than [your laws]?”<sup>197</sup>*

Apparently, Eilburg tries to draw a similar line between what Spinoza already perceived as the line between theology and philosophy. Eilburg trivializes nature of Moses’ commandments; they are either reachable by reason, or known among nations.<sup>198</sup> Such division was understood within different context even before. However, Eilburg uses the argument as a tool of direct criticism of the image of Moses and divinity of the revealed law.

---

<sup>196</sup> For the general context see: Melamed, Abraham: Medieval and Renaissance Jewish political philosophy, in *History of Jewish Philosophy* (ed. Frank, Daniel H.; Leaman, Oliver), New York: Routledge, 1997; p. 352-388.

<sup>197</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 57r

<sup>198</sup> This distinction appears already in Daud’s *Emunah Ramah* (5:2; ed. Weil., p. 74-6). He divides the laws into generally known (*mefursamot*) and traditional (*mequbbalot*). This division supposes that the values are relatively defined through social consensus. Maimonides contributes to perception of laws with recognition further laws that are held for proper maintenance of the society (Guide III, 32). Majority of later Aristotelians follow the principle of dividing commandments according to utility.

## 4 Conclusion

Eilburg's She'elah Rishonah is not simple criticism of miracles, prophecy, or divinity of laws. It shows us what a 16<sup>th</sup> century Aristotelian understands as the basic pillars of belief not only in Judaism, but he goes further to underline the similar patterns between Judaism and Christianity. In one of the most tentative parts of the text he says:

*“This work is my “glorious crown” that raises in me more perplexity,... because I see emanation of orders of stories of other religions and they are publicly spread among them, and they are strongly attached to them, and they are executed (ready to die) for them remembering particular details, all of them corroborated through adding [particular] individuals, their times and names, their families, the time when they existed, that is to say, in days of a certain king, in days of a certain emperor, and the season in which the action happened or this story or a legend took place, and names of their feasts, and other things that are most perfect [literary] compositions also in poetical metre,... All of them are one mouth agreeing in the truthfulness of their religion and they are strengthening their belief.”*<sup>199</sup>

Eilburg was aware of non-Jewish literature (see the reference to the “chronicles of the nations” in the first part of the first question) and of the similarity between Judaism and other religions (especially Christianity) much more than his medieval Jewish predecessors. A century later, Spinoza will have a similar comparative approach to the Bible, when he points out similarities between Biblical and pagan stories and beliefs. Therefore, in this respect Eilburg was closer to Spinoza than to the medieval tradition. Eilburg has serious doubts about the veracity of biblical narratives about miracles. Both of them, Spinoza and Eilburg, are comparable in respect of their scepticism concerning veracity of biblical narratives about miracles.

There is also other similarity, although Eilburg does not express his view as the crucial. The passage at the end of the first question reveals that Eilburg did not read the

---

<sup>199</sup> MS JTS 2323; fol. 57v

Torah as a work with philosophical content. In contrast to Spinoza, who sets the division of theology and philosophy as the main aim of the Tractate, Eilburg does not emphasize this approach to the Bible, although it does not deviate from Spinoza's attitude.

*"What is the hidden wisdom, he hid there for you so that you can refute the proofs of your opponents, [who] made huge insights supposing separate existence of incorporeal and eternal first cause and existence of prophecy together with practical commandments or admonitions alluding [to the aforementioned concepts]. About that the philosopher can boast more; because he reached them through the power of his reason and the spirit of wisdom of his rational inquiry and [his results] are amazing."*<sup>200</sup>

Spinoza provides new hermeneutical methods related to work with the Bible. He draws the line between theology and philosophy. No such a project is present in Eilburg's text. Eilburg's point is to dismiss rabbis as incompetent to answer metaphysical questions. Eilburg reached this stance without rejection of medieval philosophical heritage. Unlike Spinoza, Eilburg did not build a new metaphysical system; in respect of metaphysics and natural philosophy he remained within the paradigm of late medieval Jewish Aristotelianism. Nevertheless, he managed to develop a criticism of religious belief which is comparable in some respect to Spinoza's. It is worthy to realize that Eilburg's glimpse of modern biblical criticism could have appeared in such conditions. Eilburg is faithful to the theory of prophecy based on emanation and preparation of the soul as was the common opinion of Maimonidean philosophers. He follows Gersonides in his deterministic theory of heavenly spheres as he reminds his reader in his short summary at the end of the text.<sup>201</sup> He relies on a naturalistic-magical theory of miracles based on the heritage of Ibn Rushd. Spinoza abolishes miracles as ontological categories, whereas Eilburg diminishes their epistemic value.

We can speak about Eilburg's work as about a legacy only with a proper dose of irony. There is no explicit evidence that Eilburg was indeed read or spread by any

---

<sup>200</sup> JTS MS 2323, fol. 57r

<sup>201</sup> JTS MS 2323, fol. 58r

other means, although further research may shed more light on this topic. Nonetheless, we can appreciate how the legacy reached Eilburg; the legacy of Islamic and Jewish Aristotelianism, which he transformed into an effective weapon utilized against his contemporary opponents. Philosophical polemics is not restricted to philosophical background. His harsh criticism addresses people, thinkers, scholars, rabbis that were fighting for their monopoly in organizing communal life. Understanding Eilburg's position required certain level of education and background that even Eilburg did not believe could be attainable for all people. He, certainly, does not provide any universal truth for all the people of Jewish faith. But he shares his reservation against rabbinic dogmatism as the central idea that organizes and manages people.

*"Even if it was true that no other religion [is truly unique] except your religion, then what is your wisdom and what are your arguments that you can reply to a philosopher to many of his proofs and evidences concerning the falsity of the creation of the world out of nothing, [individual] providence, rewards and punishments? How much help will you [obtain] from the words of Moses, your master?"<sup>202</sup>*

Eilburg reveals us that good old Ashkenazi ways were not enough for an early modern man. The Ashkenazi cultural circle appeared to be endangered by penetration of foreign thoughts into the system. Partially, the influence was Jewish, Sephardi culture spreading thought printing. Another part, as Eilburg testifies, came from Christian milieu. Eilburg was aware of the discussions that appeared with the Reformation including issue of miracles. There were other possibilities and other opinions concerning the very basic question, but not obvious question 'what we believe in' for Eilburg. And he did not hesitate to formulate his own view that included value of practical benefit a human being may obtain from the law.

Finally, our last remark is on the possible audience of the two thinkers. Spinoza addresses his treatise to a general public; he uses both Christian and Jewish sources in his theological-political tractate. On the other hand, Eilburg, despite his eloquent

---

<sup>202</sup> JTS MS 2323; fol. 57r.

description of other cultures and Christianity, addresses Jewish audience exclusively. Not only that his criticism is directly pointed on the bearers of organizational power within the Jewish community, it also quotes only Jewish philosophical sources.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>203</sup> With the exception of Ibn Rushd and paraphrase of Aristotle, both of them belonged to medieval philosophical canon.

## Resumé

Táto štúdia je príspevkom k dejinám židovskej filozofie. Hlavným cieľom práce je analýza prvej kapitoly diela *Eser še'elot* (Desať otázok), ktorý pojednáva o zázrakoch. Rukopis sa v súčasnosti nachádza v Židovskom teologickom seminári v New Yorku (Jewish Theological Seminary, New York) a je jediným zachovaným rukopisom s týmto textom. Práca obsahuje preklad kapitoly z hebrejčiny do angličtiny a taktiež aj transkripciu relevantného textu (fol. 48v–58v). Predpokladá sa, že text je písaný na Morave, alebo v jej blízkom okolí. Napovedá o tom autorova otvorená kritika moravských rabínov, ktorú umiestnil pred samotnú filozofickú rozpravu v *Eser še'elot*. Napriek tomu, že autor priamo nevyznačil rok spísania, kapitola o datovaní textu sa vyjadruje k faktorom, ktoré nám pomáhajú determinovať rok spísania a priblížiť sa k roku 1567 alebo 1568.

Obsah prvej otázky, prvej kapitoly *Eser še'elot*, obsahuje Eilburgove kritické stanovisko k otázke zázrakov. Autor rozlišuje medzi tromi aspektmi náboženského pilieru viery, ktoré sú spojené so zázrakmi, a to: zázračné činy, zázračná vedomosť o budúcnosti javoch a zázračná povaha učenia a zákonov stanovených prorokom. Všetky tri aspekty zázračna boli diskutovanými témami v časoch pred Eilburgovou artikuláciou nesúhlasu. Práca obsahuje stredovekú diskusiu zázrakov, pre lepšie uchopenie problematiky v Eilburgovom podaní. Práve zasadenie Eilburgovho postoja do širšieho filozofického rámca je úlohou tejto diplomovej magisterskej práce.

Výber autorov je podmienený ich významnosťou a vplyvom. Priestor bol venovaný predovšetkým osobnostiam, na ktoré sa Eilburg odkazoval – Maimonides a Gersonides. Ďalej práca obsahuje aj koncept zázrakov Saadia Gaóna ako jediného predstaviteľa Kalāmu v tejto práci, a stručnú diskusiu na tému vplyvu filozofie Ibn Sīnu a Ibn Rušda a jej vplyv na teóriu zázrakov v židovskom prostredí. Táto časť tvorí jednotný celok, ktorý sa pozitívne vyjadruje k formulácii teórie zázrakov na filozofickej báze.



Druhá časť práce sa venuje kritickému hodnoteniu filozofie ako nástroja pre vysvetlenie fenoménu zázrakov. Obsahuje aj argument al-Ghazzālīho, ktorý ostal živou oporou pre odporcov Aristotelianizmu aj v 15. storočí. Ďalšia kapitola sa sústreďuje na Dona Izáka Abravanela, ktorý odmietol celú Aristoteliánsku fyziku a metafyziku, ako aj snahu filozofov pripísať Bohu, čo je a nie je dokonalé. Poslednou osobnosťou, ktorej sa táto časť venuje nie je Eilburgov predchodca, ale mysliteľ 17. storočia Baruch Spinoza. Vo svojom *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, ktorý vyšiel v roku 1669/1670, degraduje zázraky na ľudové povery spôsobené nedostatkom teoretickej vedomosti. Práve Spinozove názory sa objavujú aj v závere, kde sú komparované s Eilburgovými. Cieľom je odhalenie do akej miery ostáva Eilburg verný stredovekému modelu, a v ktorých bodoch je bližšie Spinozovi.

Analýza Eilburgovho textu ukázala, že zázraky chápe ako diela mágie. Po vzore Averroistov, ktorý mágiu považujú za prirodzený, zákonmi determinovaný jav, Eilburg predstavuje zázraky ako úplne prirodzené momenty, ktoré nemôžu slúžiť ako dôkaz nadprirodzenosti a božej prozreteľnosti. Eilburg dospel k svojím záverom na základe stredovekej Aristotelianskej tradície, ku ktorej sa pozitívne hlási. Na rozdiel od neho, Spinoza vytvoril vlastný metafyzický systém, ktorý jeho zavrhnutie zázrakov podporil. Eilburgova kritika je plne orientovaná na židovské obecnstvo, kým Spinoza adresuje svoje dielo širšiemu okruhu čitateľov. Eilburg však prekonáva svojich stredovekých predchodcov vo svojom záujme o iné kultúry, predovšetkým o kresťanskú, ktorá ho obklopovala. Tento záujem mu pomohol uvedomiť si, že každá z nich uchováva paralelné príbehy o vzniku náboženstva, ku ktorému sú viazané aj zázraky.

## **Abbreviations**

Bodl.	Oxford- Bodleian Library
Guide	Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed
JTS	Jewish Theological Seminary
MT	Maimonides, Mishneh Torah
PM	Maimonides, Commentary on the Mishnah
SM	Sefer ha-Mada‘, part of Mishneh Torah
Treatise	Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise
UP	University Press
Wars	Gersonides, Wars of the Lord
YT	Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah, section of Sefer ha-Mada‘, which is a part of Mishneh Torah

## Selected Bibliography:

### *Primary sources:*

#### *1. Manuscripts:*

Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS Neubauer 1969

Jewish Theological Seminary, New York: MS 2323 [photographs]

Jewish Theological Seminary, New York: MS 2324 [scanned microfilmed]

Jewish Theological Seminary, New York: MS 2692 [photographs]

#### *2. Printed Sources*

Al-Ghazali; Kamali, Sabih Ahmad: *Al-Ghazali's Tahafut al-falasifah: Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Lahore: 1963.

Al-Ghazzālī: *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. (transl. Marmura. M.) Brigham: Utah University Press, 1997.

Halevi, Judah: *The Kuzari – Kitab al Khazari* (transl. Hirschfeld, H.) New York: Schocken Books, 1964

Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic*, ed. and tr. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 129

Khalidi, Muhammad Ali, tr. *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.

Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides): *The Wars of the Lord*. (transl. Felman, Seymour) Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984–1999.

Maimonides: *Maimonides: Výber z korespondence* [Maimonides: selected letters], (transl. Boušek, Rukriglová). Praha: Academia, 2011.

Maimonides: *Mishne Torah*. Venice: Daniel Bomberg, 1524. [Hebrew]

Maimonides: *Perush Mishnah in Mishnah*. Naples: Joshua Solomon Soncino, 1492. [Hebrew]

Maimonides: *Perush Mishnah in Mishnah*, vol. II, Venice: Marco Antonino Giustiniani, 1546. [Hebrew]

Maimonides: *The Guide for the Perplexed*. (transl. Friendländer, M.) New York: Dover Publications, 1956.

Maimonides: *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Roma: Ovadijah, Menashe, u-Benjamin mi-Roma, 1475. [Hebrew]

Maimonides: *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Sabbionetta, 1543. [Hebrew]

Saadia Gaon: *Saadia Gaon: The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. (Rosenblatt, Samuel) New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976

Spinoza, Baruch: *Theological-Political Treatise*. (transl. Israel, Jonathan) Cambridge University Press, 2007.

*Secondary Sources:*

Ackerman, Ari: Miracles in Nadler, Steven, Rudavsky, T. M. (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; p. 362-387.

Adamson, Peter: Aristotelianism and the Soul in the Arabic Plotinus, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 62, No. 2. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001; p. 211-232.

Alon, Ilai: Al-Ghazzālī on Causality in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 100, No. 4, 1980 ; p. 397-405.

Altmann, Alexander: Saadya's Theory of Revelations: Its Origin and Background, in *Saadya studies*. (ed. Rosenthal, Erwin I. J.) New York: Arno Press, 1980; p. 4-25.

Assis, Yom Tov: Spanish Jewry – From Persecutions to Expulsion (1391–1492), in *Studia Hebraica*. Vol. 4. Bucuresti: Universitatea din Bucuresti, 2004; p. 307-319.

Brody, Robert: *The Geonim of Babylonian and Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Brown, F., Driver, S. R., Briggs, Ch. A.: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub, 1996.

- Davidson, Herbert A.: *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Davis, Joseph: *Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller: portrait of a seventeenth-century rabbi*. Oxford, Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004.
- Dweck, Yaakov: *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press [epub], 2011.
- Eran, Amira: Intuition and inspiration: the causes of Jewish thinkers' objection to Avicenna's intellectual prophecy; in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*. Vol 14, No. 1. [s.l.]: Moher Siebeck, 2007; p. 31-79.
- Feldman, Seymour: Gersonides on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Agent Intellect, in *AJS Review*. Vol. 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978; p. 99-120.
- Feldman, Seymour: *Gersonides: Judaism within the Limits of Reason*. Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010.
- Feldman, Seymour: *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel: defender of the faith*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003.
- Frank, Daniel, H.; Leaman, Oliver: *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Funkenstein, Amos: *Perception of Jewish History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Giacaman, George; Bahlul, Raja: Ghazali on Miracles and Necessary Connection in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9, Cambridge University Press: 2001; p. 39-50.
- Glassner, Ruth: Levi den Gershom and the Study of Ibn Rushd in the Fourteenth Century, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series. Vol. 86, No. 1/2. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; p. 51-90.
- Goldstein, Bernard, R.: Levi Ben Gerson's Astrology in Historical Perspective, in *Gersonide en son temps*. (ed. Dahan, G.). Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1991, p. 287-300.
- Heschel, Abraham: *A Concise Dictionary of Hebrew Philosophical Terms*. [s.l.]: Cincinnati, 1941

- Hughes, A.: The Three Worlds of ibn Ezra's Hay ben Meqitz, in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*. Vol. 11, No. 1. [s.l.]: Routledge, 2002; p. 1-24.
- Iqbal, Muzaffar: *The Making of Islamic Science*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2009.
- Jacobson, Arthur, J.: Prophecy as expertise, in *Hebraic Political Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 4. Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2009; p. 329-336.
- Kellner, Menachem Marc: Maimonides and Gersonides on Mosaic Prophecy, in *Speculum*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Jan.). Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1977; p. 62-79.
- Kellner, Menachem: Gersonides on Imitatio Dei and the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series. Vol. 85, No. 3/4. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; 275-296.
- Kellner, Menachem: Jewish Dogmatics after the Spanish Expulsion: Rabbis Isaac Abravanel and Josef Ya'beš on Belief in Creation as an Article of Faith in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 72, No. 3, University of Pennsylvania Press: 1982; p. 178-187.
- Klatzkin, Jacob, *Thesaurus Philosophicus Linguae Hebraicae et Veteris et Recentioris*, Berlin: Eschkol, 1928–1930.
- Kogan, Barry, S.: Understanding prophecy: Four Traditions, in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*. (ed. Nadler, Steven, Rudavsky, Tamar)Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009; p. 481-523.
- Kreisel, Howard Theodore: Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*. Vol. 75, No. 2; p. 99-133.
- Kreisel, Howard: *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Dordecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.
- Langermann, Israel Tzvi: Maimonides and miracles: The growth of a (dis)belief in *Jewish History* Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2004; p. 147-172.
- Langermann, Y. Tzvi: Acceptance and Devaluation: Nahmanides' Attitude Towards Science, in *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*. Vol. 1, No.2. Brill, 1992; p. 223-245.

- Leaman, Oliver: *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999.
- Levenson, Alan T.: *the Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*. Maiden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- Manekin, Charles: *Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Marmodoro, Anna: The Union of the Cause and Effect in Aristotle: Physica III 3, in *Oxford Studie in Ancient Philosophy*, 2007; p. 205-232.
- Melamed, Abraham: A legitimating myth: Ashkenazic thinkers on the purported Jewish origins of philosophy and science, in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, Vol. 8, [s.l.]: Göttingen, 2009; p. 299-315.
- Melamend, Abraham: Isaac Abravanel and Aristotle's "Politics": a Drama of Errors. In *Jewish Political Studies Review* 5, 3-4. 1993; p. 55-75.
- Mičaninová, Mária: *Koruna kráľovstva rabi Šlomo ben Gabirola s komentárom*. [Keter Malchut of r. Shlomo ibn Gabirol with Commentary] Praha: Bergman, 2010. [Czech]
- Najjar, Ibrahim: *Faith and reason in Islam: Averroes' exposition of religious arguments*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2001.
- Neubauer, Beit-Arié Malachi, May.: *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Suppl. Of Addenda and Corrigenda to Vol. 1., Oxford: Claredon Press, 1994.
- Preus, J. Samuel: A Hidden Opponent in Spinoza's "Tractatus". In *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol.88, No. 3, Cambridge UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1995; p. 361-388.
- Ravitsky, Aviezer: The Anthropological Theory of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy. In Twersky, Isadore (ed.): *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*. Vol.2, Cambridge, Mass.: Harward UP, 1984; p. 231-272.
- Reiner, Elchanan: The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript versus Printed Book, in *Polin*. Vol. 10, Oxford: 1997; p. 85-98.
- Reiner, Elchanan: The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society to the New Science in the Sixteenth Century., in *Science in Context*. Vol.10, No. 4. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997; p. 589-603.

- Reiner, Elchanan: The rise of an urban community: some insights on the transition from the medieval Ashkenazi to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish community in Poland, in *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*. Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2003; p. 363-372.
- Reines, Alvin: Maimonides' Concept of Miracles. In *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 45. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974; p. 243 – 285.
- Ross, Tamar: Maharal on Miracle as Added Dimension, in *Da'at*. Vol. 17; [s.l.]: Ramat Gan, 1986; p. 81-96. [Hebrew]
- Rudavsky, Tamar M.: Creation, Time and Infinity in Gersonides, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Vol. 26, No. 1. [s.l.]: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988; p. 25-44.
- Rudavsky, Tamar M.: Creation, Time and Infinity in Gersonides, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Vol. 26, No. 1. [s.l.]: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988; p. 25-44.
- Ruderman, David, B.: *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Ruderman, David: *Early Modern Jewry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Saunders, J. J.: *A History of Medieval Islam*. London. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Schweid, Elizer: *The Classic Jewish Philosophers: From Saadia Through the Renaissance*. Vol. III. Leiden [u.a.]: Brill, 2007.
- Sirat, Colette: *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Sládek, Pavel: Širší kontext pražské židovské renesance. [Broader context of the Jewish Renaissance in Prague], in *Dialog myšlenkových proudů středověkého judaismu* [Dialog of Thoughts in Medieval Judaism]. Praha: Academia, 2011; p. 332-342. [Czech]
- Steinschneider, Moritz: *Die Hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*. Berlin: 1893.
- Steinschneider, M.: *Jewish Literature from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century*. London: 1857.



- Strauss, Leo: *The City and Man*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964.
- Stroumsa, Sarah: Saadya and Jewish Kalam, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003; p. 78-81.
- Walzer, Richard: Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination, in *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies*. Vol. 77. [s.l.] Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 1957; p. 142-148.
- Watt, John. W: From Themistius to al-Farabi: Platonic Political Philosophy and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric the East*, Vol. 13, No. 1. 1995; p. 17-41.
- Wiener Dow, Leon: Opposition to the 'Shulhan Aruch': Articulating a Common Law Conception of Halacha, in *Hebraic Political Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 4. Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2008; p. 352-376.
- Wolfson, Harry Austryn: *The Kalam Arguments for Creation in Saadia, Averroes, Maimonides and St. Thomas*. New York, 1943.

## Appendix A: Translation: the First Question by Eliezer Eilburg

MS JTS 2323; fol. 48v–58v

[fol. 48v] And from now on [I shall discuss] my doubts that awakened me, and inspired me to write about this article of faith agreed by all sons of Israel, deceased and living, who received it one from another. Since God, may [his name] be blessed, God of gods, gave us the entire Torah with all its stories, commandments and all its admonitions through Moses Our Master, our prophet of prophets. [He gave it] out of his personal individual will only on the basis of grace and mercy as an act of donation. By loving us He, may [his name] be blessed, wanted just extraordinary love just as He creates everything, as we believe, according to His will and not by necessity. [fol.49r] And it was possible for Him not to create it, but this is how He wanted it. And it came to His mind to give us graciously all kinds of His mitzvot, commands and laws for our benefit all times and not out of necessity [He gave us the Torah] and not on account of our merits. And He did this good and marvellous thing to us that He favoured us for the sake of His loving us or His loving our forefathers. As it is said: “*When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt*”<sup>204</sup> and the Lord chose them, and in other verses mentioned in *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) in parashat *Va’etchanan*<sup>205</sup> and parashat *Eiqev*<sup>206</sup>, which teach us the true instruction on this [topic]. And on account of this our fathers and we ourselves following them rely on the interceding messenger Moses, may peace be upon him, his wonderful words and deeds, and his marvellous miracles. This is the very root and the first principle of our religious community.

I thought, before I ask about the root [of the problem], I will proceed to a brief introduction so that I have a firm ground concerning the question I intend to ask first. I say that this belief, this agreed dogma, which our holy fathers believed in, following

---

<sup>204</sup> Hoshea 11:1

<sup>205</sup> Dt 3, 23 – 7, 11

<sup>206</sup> Dt 7, 12 – 11, 25

Moses Our Master, may peace be upon him, it must be subjected to the division: Either our belief in it is based on simple plain belief, or on proofs<sup>207</sup> and complete evidence. [And we consider it] until we repeat [the distinction] and we make statement that through simple belief alone, we cannot draw conclusion. If this is the case, then it must be based on sign, and proof, and demonstration.<sup>208</sup>

And the way to demonstrate the impossibility [to avoid] this repeated distinction is either on the basis of the Torah, or on the basis of intellect. [1] On the basis of the Torah: For the Scripture witnesses that their belief was based on miracles. And the proof is that Torah tells and declares “*and Israel saw the Egyptians, etc.*”<sup>209</sup> and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.<sup>210</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “*Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud,*”<sup>211</sup> and they believed forever. This shows that on the basis of his actions and deeds that surpass natural law they believed that his [i.e. Moses’] words were from Him, may He be praised. Also in Deuteronomy when Moses appeals to the people’s heart and deepens them in belief, then he reminds them, i.e. Israel, about some of the signs and the miracles that happened previously in their presence [to their eyes] to the extent it was needed to take them as essential middle term and principle of demonstration to build argument and make conclusion, that God may He be blessed [fol. 49v] gave them this Torah through him, and all of the marvellous deeds, that he did in Egypt and in the wilderness, occurred out of His will — may [His name] be blessed — alone, and it took place on the basis of miracles as kindness and mercy for them.

And in the Torah we have a commandment and sign to examine every prophet at the beginning of his prophecy. And it is known about the re-assemblage of our [people from the Exile] and it is a prophecy about it that the Messiah, that we hope in, will make signs on the heavens and the earth for us. He will make countless

---

<sup>207</sup> Hebrew word מופת *mofet* could be translated either as wonder, miracle or proof, argument. On the history of the word, see Jacob Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus Linguae Hebraicae et Veteris et Recentioris*, vol 2, part 3 (Berlin: Eschkol, 1930), s.v. “mofet.”

<sup>208</sup> Eilburg expresses himself in an obscure way here. It seems that the backbone of the argument is the following: belief is either (1) plain belief or (2) based on evidence. But it cannot be just plain belief (perhaps Eilburg means that such a belief would be arbitrary), so it must be based on evidence. After settling this issue Eilburg proceeds to examine what evidence for belief is there.

<sup>209</sup> Ex 14:30

<sup>210</sup> Ex,14:31, also part of liturgy

<sup>211</sup> Ex 19:9

miracles.<sup>212</sup> We will believe him and know that he is the messenger of God, or [we will believe in him] on the basis of some of prophecies brought by prophets that allude to future events, or [we will believe him] on the basis of reason.

It is proven concerning religions that if belief was part and parcel of their nature, this is because it had spread and settled before. However from the beginning of its becoming and existence [of this belief], there is no doubt that it is not possible and it cannot escape without introducing of miracles and strange, astounding actions [powers] that terrify people, because they deviate from the natural order and are impossible by its laws. [Strange deeds that ] either appear in front of their eyes or [they consist in] foreknowing possible near hidden future events just as the prophet warned those who pretend to be prophets and boast with prophecy, „*Declare the things that are going to come afterward, That we may know that you are gods*,“<sup>213</sup> etc. And nobody has ever seen, or ever heard of any religion and *nomos*<sup>214</sup>, which would come into being without this, that is to say, [without] performing strange actions, or predicting the future in advance. When Moses understood that it was necessarily so, and that the level of human ignorance would not reach as far as they would believe in those unusual acts, i.e. the existence of a messenger of God [who is elected] through individual will and [his] giving Torah and *nomos* commanded by Him, unless miracles or any evidence [accompany these claims], then he said and raised a problem telling Him: “*they may say to me, 'What is His name?'*”<sup>215</sup> and he thought he did not receive satisfying answer [to this first question], or it was fulfilling answer to that question, but he asked two questions as the Master of blessed memory explained in part one, chapter 63 [of the Guide of the Perplexed].<sup>216</sup> “Then Moses said, “*What if they will not believe me*”<sup>217</sup> etc. God, may He be blessed, answered him

---

<sup>212</sup> See Isaiah 29:14

<sup>213</sup> Isa 41:23

<sup>214</sup> *dat ve-nimus*: דת ונימוס; according to Heschel (1941) term refers to political and social order, or natural order, general custom. It is often combined into term מניח הדנימוס the founder of religion.

<sup>215</sup> Ex 3:13

<sup>216</sup> Guide I, 63: the chapter interprets Ex 3:13. For Maimonides revelation of God's name is revelation of the intelligible proofs of God as an absolute being. Moses is told to instruct this teaching to ignorant people. Only after revelation of God's name, sign will take place. It is highly probable that Eilburg, who supports esoteric reading of Maimonides, understands this passage as evidence of Maimonides belief in God as necessary existent and eternal.

<sup>217</sup> Ex 4:1

in a manner that dissolved all doubts concerning his question: “*What is that in your hand?*”<sup>218</sup> and “*if they do not pay attention to the first miraculous sign*”<sup>219</sup>, etc. as if [He] may He be blessed, wanted to say that the sign [fol. 50r] of the unnatural action will cause them to surrender and believe in him and it does not matter whether it occurred only in the soul of the prophet or outside of it, because this has no relation to the investigation that we do now.

In a similar way we saw Elijah on the Mount Carmel, when he wanted to make the villains of Israel to repent, and to put the Torah of God into their hearts. In polemics with prophets of Ba'al he saw that there was no perspective in defeating them without making a wonderful miracle, and he became incited until he ordained a temporary instruction that is to sacrifice burning sacrifice [on Mount Carmel, i.e. outside of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem] and he told them: “*How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him,*”<sup>220</sup> etc. “*Then Elijah said to the people, “I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD,*”<sup>221</sup> etc. “*Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves*”<sup>222</sup> and all what follows in the story until it says: “*And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God,*”<sup>223</sup> etc. This [passage] tells us true instruction, because on account of Israel's having seen some of that tremendous miracle, the nation repented and Ahab with them,<sup>224</sup> though the prophets of Ba'al did not; therefore they were slain by the river. And Gideon said to the angel of God: “*Show me a sign that it is you who speak with me.*”<sup>225</sup> And he made that sign to him by fire springing up from the rock and consuming meat and unleavened bread. It does not cause any damage, nor it is beneficial to [consider] this

---

<sup>218</sup> Ex 4:2

<sup>219</sup> Ex 4:8

<sup>220</sup> 1 Kings 18:21

<sup>221</sup> 1 Kings 18:22

<sup>222</sup> 1 Kings 18:23

<sup>223</sup> 1 Kings 18:39

<sup>224</sup> He alludes to 1 Kings 21.

<sup>225</sup> Judges 6:17

matter [as occurring] in [state of] prophecy<sup>226</sup> or outside it. This is not issue we discuss.

Thus every single nation, every single society<sup>227</sup> tells in a narrative of their religion, each in accord with its kind, about some of these unparalleled deeds and strange miracles that were seen and narrated man by man from their first [witnesses] until today and forever. [These deeds] that cannot be imagined or estimated as we will testify later on. And after [all] this, their founders and guardians of religion command and admonish [the community] not to ask a sign in whatever they see and hear concerning the following of the religion. They should believe on the basis of tradition and belief. No contradiction stems out of this.<sup>228</sup> Since, it is necessary in accordance with political arrangement that it should be so after the naturalization of religion's basis and implementation of its fundamentals and foundations. [fol. 50v] If it is so, the truth is clarified, based on both Torah and intellect, that Israel believed in Moses, — i.e. that he [was] a messenger of God through [the divine words that delegated him] *Go and speak*, i.e. to give the Torah, — only after seeing many of his miracles and strange and marvellous deeds. [That means this belief] is not based only on simple faith. We rely on them [i.e. on the first witnesses of the miracles] and their testimony that is transmitted from man to man. We believe [it] without Sun appearing to our eyes and without demonstration found in our intellect.

## The First Question

If this is the issue as I have [already] brought forward concerning the shared dogma and in the suggestion that I proposed in all the aforementioned remarks I wrote, I wish I knew what was the greatness and excellence that Israel saw in Moses that was [high] enough and [what was] sufficient to set the *essential middle term*, which is used for building an argument and drawing this conclusion. I want to say, [that Moses became a] messenger of Lord by saying *Go and speak*, and that is to say, to establish

---

<sup>226</sup> Here he means if prophecy has imaginary nature; and therefore, it does not excess barrier of prophet's mind. The second variant includes prophecy as historical event occurring in reality, usually through particular volition of God.

<sup>227</sup> Emunah, אמונה – the term can have wide range of interpretation. It primarily suggests existence of a group that shares certain belief; therefore, I chose term society that seems to be neutral for contemporary reader, however, I admit that it is more controversial in the context of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>228</sup> I.e. it does not contradict that belief is based on miracles.

such a religion [which was so marvellous that it] would not be possible except that it was a [direct] divine gift. [I say this] because the [upcoming] division cannot be prevented: The middle term and the reason why they believed him was one of these three: [1] because of his deeds, i.e. signs and miracles as the aforementioned biblical verses show; or [2] because of foreknowing future possible events that are hidden as [we can] see in the examination of a prophet; or [3] based on fostering theoretical metaphysical opinions and concepts and new practical commandments that he taught them, which were so marvellous that they could not arise from human inquiry and discursive comprehension. They include praiseworthy *nomos* and excellent religion for attainment of social happiness, and scientific<sup>229</sup> happiness for [both], a sage and a common man in accordance with his abilities. Just as many people said that for this reason it [the Torah] is called divine. And this could not be possible, unless it is in possession of God. It is said keep all these laws and “*for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples*”<sup>230</sup>. And this kind of wisdom and understanding will be [helpful] for [attaining] these two types of happiness, i.e. natural and scientific.

And it is clear that this is a necessary division, which has no room for a fourth alternative; just these three things may specify the prophet and distinguish him from a sage, who is no prophet either entirely or partly, just as the sages suppose. And it is clear that any of these are not [fol. 51r] sufficient to be a principle of demonstration concerning this thing that we want to infer and a cause of inferring the desired conclusion pertaining to the dogma shared by us, believers of the Torah.

[1] From the side of his deeds, the issue is clearly doubtful and great perplexity and suspicion is revealed in [words] that the Rabbi of blessed memory wrote in *Sefer ha-Mada*, chapter eight: “*The Children of Israel did not believe in Moses because of the signs he presented. Whenever anyone's belief is based on wonders, [the commitment of] his heart has shortcomings, because it is possible that one performs*

---

<sup>229</sup> This expression is unusual, Eilburg probably means “intellectual happiness” in accordance with standard Maimonidean doctrine. See Alexander Altmann, “Maimonides’ ‘Four Perfections,’” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 15-24.

<sup>230</sup> Dt 4:6

*signs through sorcery and magic, etc.*”<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, before that [i.e. before the previously quoted passage] in chapter seven he writes: “*It is possible that although a person presents a sign and proof he is not a prophet, and the sign can be refuted, etc.*”<sup>232</sup> So one must wonder how the Rabbi of blessed memory disagrees with the Scripture, since the latter is claiming: “*they put their trust in Him*”<sup>233</sup> and “*they will always put their trust in you, etc.*”<sup>234</sup> This is the evidence given by Torah in some respect. [However], I am not heading for [further explanations] now and I leave [this issue] aside.

Moreover the Rabbi of blessed memory writes in his honoured book, part three, chapter 29 mentioning narratives of the chronicles of the community of the Sabbeans: “*The book describes things as having been mentioned by Adam, in his book; a tree which is found in India, and has the peculiarity that any branch taken from it and thrown to the ground creeps along and moves like serpents; it also mentions a tree which in its root resembles a human being, utters a loud sound, and speaks a word or words; a plant is mentioned which has this peculiarity, that leaf of it put on the neck of a person conceals that person from the sight of men, and enables him to enter or leave a place without being seen, and if any part of it is burnt in open air a noise and terrible sounds are heard whilst the smoke ascends. Numerous fables of this kind are introduced, etc.*”<sup>235</sup> Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra in the book *Talismot*<sup>236</sup> writes “*how the plant grows in Land of Israel among the fences of vineyards and in other distant countries, and its leaves are lying on the ground. It is called in Arabic as liqana qanum (ליקנא קאנאם)*”<sup>237</sup> and in sacred language as *leshon kelev* [dog’s tongue]<sup>238</sup>. He

---

<sup>231</sup> Maimonides: Mishne Torah [MT], Sefer ha-Mada’ [SM], Yesodei ha-Torah [YT], 8:1 You should refer to the English tr. you’re quoting unless it is your own translation.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid 7:7

<sup>233</sup> Ex 14:31

<sup>234</sup> Ex 19:9

<sup>235</sup> Guide III, 29. However, text slightly varies from the printed editions. This variation does not imply any changes in the idea presented. That’s why the translation comes from Pine’s English translation.

<sup>236</sup> A treatise with such a title by Ibn Ezra is not known.. The quoted text has not been identified so far.

<sup>237</sup> The Arabic phrase cannot be identified. Is it a corrupted form of Latin “*lingua canis*” i.e. “dog’s tongue”?

<sup>238</sup> The author probably means the plant Blue Hound’s Tongue.



writes that with its aid the primordial man did many miracles, and many similar vanities, etc.”<sup>239</sup>

On the basis of these two passages it seems that there is possibility that these achievements are of other [nature] than what [people usually] think. There is no objection to it in what the Rabbi of blessed memory seemed to refute the possibility of such deeds and that he calls “vain” these vanities, because he actually made himself clear in the aforementioned sentence in, *Sefer ha-Mada*’, where he allows this possibility [i.e. magical actions] completely. And observe that he does not say there that the opponent is able to say that it [i.e. magic] is not true and it is not real. And add to this that his [apparent] refutation [of magic] and his declaring it to be vanity is just one type of *seven types of contradiction* mentioned in the introduction [of *Moreh Nevukhim*]. [fol. 51v] And he also instructs us in his *Instruction* to consider every single word [in the *Guide*]. And this is what he’s saying: “*Your attention should not be occupied only by understanding every single issue in the chapter, but you should concentrate on every single word that comes up in the discussion, even if it does not concern the topic of the chapter.*”<sup>240</sup> His (Maimonides’) choice to quote from all the words of the Sabbeans [precisely] these ones about their deeds, miracles and similar [things] is marvellous. Hereafter the investigation, understanding and agreement with these two passages from treatises, in *Mada*’, chapter eight and seven, and in *Moreh*, part three, chapter twenty-nine, you should connect to them subsequent information from the *Instruction*, [and then you will see that] the Rabbi of blessed memory does not see any remoteness of the possibility [of the efficiency of magical acts], as these deeds, and also a number of Sabbean accomplishments and their deeds, and those of Egyptian magicians prove their existence and augment the possibility of Sabbean deeds [to occur]. So we conclude that there are spells in a prophet’s work, even if he is above wise man and above all levels. In every disposition and struggle, it is not possible that one faction will not win over another. Because of this the heart of the Pharaoh may have hardened plague after plague. He may have suspected the deeds of Moses to be the same as [those of] the Egyptian magicians, even if this is not clear

---

<sup>239</sup> Unidentified quotation; Ibn Ezra did not write any work under name *Talismot* according to my best knowledge.

<sup>240</sup> *Guide*, *Instruction*.

from the Scripture. We are not surprised by Pharaoh, because according to the opinions of several commentators there were people even in Israel, who suspected him (Moses) concerning that [miracles] – not distant people and haters, but relatives and the most beloved to him, and they are Aaron and Miriam concerning this Cushite woman that he [Moses] married, and the Talmudic sages explain that the name Cushite means that her deed were Cushite as well.<sup>241</sup> They [i.e. Aaron and Miriam] said: “did God not talk through us as well?!” The meaning [of this verse] is that perhaps his accomplishments were done through spells and magic of Midian. And particularly, [was not it a case of] his father-in-law (Jethro), the high priest, about whom the sages of Talmud say that he never passed [an idol without worshipping it].<sup>242</sup>

In case of Qorah, according to my opinion, when quarrel and strife broke out against Moses, the point of all its issues was, in my opinion, of the same kind, that is to say that the reason why they suspected Moses is connected to an apparent usurpation of whole power by him and his brother, despite Qorah was a great sage – even if Moses was wiser and reached higher level. And he told them: “*Take the fire from the burners and burn the incense.*”<sup>243</sup> The sages of Talmud say: „*Inside there was deadly poison, etc.*”<sup>244</sup> Ibn Ezra’s investigation [of this matter] follows them (the sages) saying: „*it says qetoret [incense] but, it does not say ha-qetoret [the incense] and the intelligent will understand.*”<sup>245</sup> Ibn Ezra teaches that the punishment was not done through absolute divine will [but through natural means] [fol. 52r] And from one [case] you can [derive] proof in respect the other [cases] as well. We wonder about this [information] even more than [the previous one] that the sages of Talmud broaden it for those who understand apertures of tracteries<sup>246</sup> [as a reply] concerning

<sup>241</sup> I.e. she practiced witchcraft. See bMo’ed Qatan 16b.

<sup>242</sup> The source is probably tannaitic midrash Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Tractate Amaleq, chapter 1 (parashat Yitro), ed. Horowitz, Frankfurt a. M., 1931; p. 194: [שמות] "מכל האלהים" [תלמוד לומר] "ומה ת"ל [=תלמוד לומר] "מכל האלהים" [שמות] English translation: “Why Scripture says “[Now I k now that God is greater] than all the gods”? They said, Because there was no idolatrous cult on the world which Jethro passed without returning to it and worshipping it, as is said “than *all* the gods” (translation and identification of the source done by Tamás Visi).

<sup>243</sup> Paraphrase of Nm 16: 6-7

<sup>244</sup> Rashi, Nm 16:6

<sup>245</sup> Ibn Ezra, on Nm 17:11: וישים קטרת – ולא אמר הקטרת והמשכיל יבין

<sup>246</sup> Maimonides: Guide, Introduction to part I (paraphrase); interpretation of Proverbs 25:11.

[the question] why is their name is ‘wizards’? Because they oppose the heavenly familia [i.e. God and angels]. If the witchcraft could reach such a level [i.e. they oppose God], even more it can reach the “lower family”<sup>247</sup>, and what could be the greater proof to us than this.

And behold, the examination of the prophet, which we have from the Torah, does not include miraculous acts and deeds. If they were sufficient for us to become principle of proofs when conducting the examination of a prophet, i.e. whether he prophesizes from the mouth of the Almighty, as we understand [the regulation concerning prophecy], there is no doubt that [the Torah] would have given such an examination and a trial. And even more so [I am right] since the Torah itself with its wisdom admonishes us to [examine] miracles concerning the possibility of suspicion and doubt about such deeds, and it [also] commands not to trust them at all. It says: *“If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder and if the sign or wonder, etc.”*<sup>248</sup> And concludes: *“The LORD your God is testing you, etc.”*<sup>249</sup>

And the Rabbi of blessed memory writes in the introduction in the Commentary to Mishnah: *“The crowds and even some of the learned were wrong when they imagined that prophecy is not related to all what it should be, until [the prophet’s] doing signs and marvellous miracles, like those of Moses, peace upon him.”* He concludes: *“It is not true.”*<sup>250</sup>

His intention follows the Torah [claiming] that all miracles can be suspected of that perhaps they were done in occult manner or by human ruse. If it is necessary, that some of them are prevented [to occur] in reality, then they [the miracles] cannot happen unless it is willed by the Divine Providence. As we believe, it is not enough that we are given signs and proves of signs of a prophet and of his prophecy from the Torah. If so, it is very strange that the Torah says: *“[they] put their trust in Him (the Lord) and in Moses his servant.”*<sup>251</sup> The meaning is that through the miracle at the Red Sea they [started to] believe in Moses. *“I am going to come... and so [they] will*

---

<sup>247</sup> By this Eilburg probably means the prophets.

<sup>248</sup> Dt 13:1-2

<sup>249</sup> Dt 13:3

<sup>250</sup> Maimonides: the Comentary on the Mishnah [PM], Introduction.

<sup>251</sup> Ex 14:31

*always put their trust into you, etc.*"<sup>252</sup> More [of that sort of evidence] besides that is found in, parashat Va'ethanan, "*Now ask about... Has any other people...Has any [god] tried...From heaven, etc.*"<sup>253</sup> Apparently, Moses' intention was there that miracles are sufficient and suitable for taking an evidence and a demonstration (from them) as a cause of existence of his Torah and his actions that [come from] God, may He be blessed. [fol. 52v] As he always says, *in which Lord talks to me.*

And similarly, I wish I understood it, and one can wonder about our Rabbi of blessed memory what he expounds [on these issues] mentioned in Mada', chapter eight by saying this: "*What is the source of our belief in him? The [revelation] at Mount Sinai. Our eyes saw [it] and not those of strangers, our ears heard [it], and not another's. There was fire, thunder, and lightning. He approached the fog and a voice spoke to him: Moses, Moses, go and tell them, etc.*"<sup>254</sup> And why this act is not of a genre of those actions that are allowed to be suspected? How can this be real demonstration in any respect? If you answer that the Rabbi of blessed memory meant that the whole Israel prophesied and saw [it] and apprehended in vision the prophecy with great apprehension and that could not be achieved through spell, [then I reply to this that] behold, these are works of talismans themselves and even more [it is true] since the holy writings themselves testify it as it could be seen in deeds of a female diviner to whom Saul went; [she] was excellent in necromancy. And the image of Samuel appeared to the eyes of Saul and his ears heard his voice. There are no doubts for any wise man that [such an image] did not occur extramentally. The Rabbi of blessed memory<sup>255</sup> writes in his commentary to Samuel and in his book, the Wars of the Lord he says: "*...but this message for Saul was in some respect magic. That is to say, magic requires some activities in which spiritual concentration*<sup>256</sup> *is perfected, so that the imaginative faculty would receive higher power. And divination is one of the methods of perfection of sorcery, etc.*"<sup>257</sup> In this way it becomes clear to us that his

---

<sup>252</sup> Ex 19:9

<sup>253</sup> Va'ethanan (Dt) 4: 32, 33, 34, 36.

<sup>254</sup> MT, SM, YT 8:2

<sup>255</sup> He cites Gersonides, which is usually abbreviated as RaLaG. However, in this case Eilburg uses the same formula as that which is used for Maimonides: ha-Rav ZaL.

<sup>256</sup> Seclusion, solitude in which you calm down sensual abilities and rise quality of absorbed emanation.

<sup>257</sup> Wars VI, 14; See also Gersonides: Commentary on the Torah, Samuel 28.

deeds are deeds of necromancy inasmuch it can enchant someone else and his visions and spiritual visions reach the point that foretelling of future is accomplished through them.

And even if it occurred extramentally as the Torah-ists want to say, then even more the actions of divination and necromancy are higher, since they could take out Samuel's soul out of Eden and make it descend to the pit below. And if this soul can be even incarnated, how much more it is possible and capable that it is more plausible and appropriate that [the miracles of Moses] can be performed<sup>258</sup> by it [i.e. by magic] and by its marvellous level.

If you reply that the miracle happened from above and God wanted it to happen as a miracle and through particular providence, it is not possible, since if Saul had not known about a possibility of [such] an action and fact that the veracity had been known from other famous deeds that she [i.e. the diviner] had done, he would have not gone to her, and his servants would have not invited her [fol. 53r] and searched for her, if she had not been known for her expertise. If so, then, concerning [Israel's] standing at Mount Sinai, Israel's apprehension of something of the thunders, fog, noise and light either in literal or incorporeal apprehension, I don't see in any respects [how the theophany on Sinai could be a proof for Moses' being a prophet] in absolute necessity and without possibility to suspect and doubt as in his other deeds that are allowed to be doubted. [Thus,] there is a great doubt concerning the Rabbi of blessed memory.

Ibn Rushd writes about a matter, which is similar to what is sought here in one of his sayings [as beautiful as] pearl: *"Generally, it seems that this verification based on this miracle is good only for crowds, whereas the verification based on relation is shared by crowds and wise. For those doubts and problems that we perceive concerning this miracle are not perceived by the crowds etc."*<sup>259</sup> If so, it is clear and visible that it is not sufficient to use the existence of miracles as principles of demonstration in examining and justifying the founder of religion and giver of the Torah.

---

<sup>258</sup> literally: fulfilled

<sup>259</sup> The source has not been identified yet. The quotation is not from the Epitome to Metaphysics or the Incoherence of Incoherence, the two works by Ibn Rushd that Eilburg mentions elsewhere.

Even if I feel embarrassed and ashamed, I do not know how to answer in convincing and true way to Epicurus, the opponent if he says, “perhaps this generally known story happened either wholly as it is written or [only] partially, or it did not happen [at all]. No man is trustworthy [when speaking about] himself.” How good the testimony of [other] nations, especially from Egypt and its neighbours, would be. And they would appear in the chronicles of their kings, because writing down such events was a custom followed by all nations. There is a marvellous thing, a question proper to be asked whether Egyptians perceived anything that was done by [powers] above the human wisdom. If the story happened completely as it have been said, why they did not open their eyes and why they did not convert to Moses’ religion, or why they did not oppose it less [than they did], unless you say that God, may He be blessed, made their *neck stiff*<sup>260</sup>. But the opponent, Epicurus, will not agree and will not admit this. Thus the Philistine kings Amalek, Sihon, and Balaq, the king of Moab heard about one nation, the slaves of Pharaoh, and [how] all of them departed from Egypt [a country] full of valiant men, [leaving] with force, doing [in the city] deeds of Moses and Aharon without help of a king or a ruler without relying on their support, and in the end drowning [fol. 53v] Pharaoh and his soldiers, while they passed through sea in dry, entering the desert through pillar of cloud by day<sup>261</sup> and pillar of fire by night. The rain of bread descended to them, and it was manna from heavens stopping on the seventh day and in double portion on the sixth day, and a lot of similar ones. It is marvellous how they did not go out towards the route to see the miracles of strange things [happening]. And [why they did not] convert to their religion. They should have listened to all what they longed for or [at least] to fear of such a nation so that they [Israelites] would have not done to them the thing done in Egypt, to Pharaoh by the sea and to his nation. But they did the opposite. As it is seen [in the case] of Amalek, Og, Balaq and others, who irritated Israel and aroused in war against them and [caused] battles and conflicts. But the opponent would say that it

---

<sup>260</sup>Prov 29:1; implies that God did not wanted them to accept the religion through active prevention of such activity to take place.

<sup>261</sup>Ex 13:22.

happened either all or none of that.<sup>262</sup> Or he would say that the king did not tremble, because these deeds were [of] human [origin]. That is why Balaq chose Ba'alam, as if he thought that he could take the position to counterbalance Moses and Israel. There is a more serious issue and a great [reason to] wonder concerning Jethro saying: "*Now I know, etc.*"<sup>263</sup> And his son-in-law was a king and leader of the [group of] people and he did not want to remain with these people forever, despite Moses plead persistently and promised him to do him good<sup>264</sup> as it is said in parashat *Be-haalotekha*. And although commentators [explain this problem away by] saying that he did not want to separate from them forever, [but he returned] only [because] he wanted to proselytize the people of his land,<sup>265</sup> this [explanation] does not fit at all what is written [in the scripture] and the opponent would not believe it.

But we have digressed from our topic and now we return to what we have been discussing. If this is the case, then, under any condition, the first class of the actions and wonders are not enough for us to provide us with verification and complete examination of the prophecy of the prophet and his religion that it reaches us from heaven only through [divine] Will and particular Providence. Here we finish the discussion about this argument and move on to the second argument and we say:

If [belief in religion is] based on foreknowing future possible events — and this seems to be a more specific to prophecy from the side of its essence, as it can be seen from the examination of a prophet that the Torah gave us, which shows that nothing of his [the prophet's] words should remain unfulfilled, but everything he says and tells should come and arrive [into existence], — this is impossible as the Scripture indicates the opposite as in a case of [parashat] *Beshalach* and [parashat] *Jethro*. Also in the case of Moses we will not find any foreknowing of future events prior to giving of Torah neither at the time of the giving [it]. Not only that this examination [of the veracity of prophetic claims] is not sufficient, but it is obviously more confused than the previous one [i.e. examination of the prophetic claims through

---

<sup>262</sup> This is a euphemistic way of saying that the kings did not believe that the miracles narrated in the Bible indeed took place.

<sup>263</sup> Ex 18:11

<sup>264</sup> Nm 10:29-32 where this phrase is repeated several times. (להטיבו)

<sup>265</sup> Nm 10:30



miracles]. [fol.54r.] This is [demonstrated] either on the basis of argumentation or on the basis of the Torah.

If on the basis of the argumentation,, then the opponent would say: This is a natural thing and it follows necessarily the perfection of the imaginative faculty from the principle of its nature.<sup>266</sup> And as the philosopher [i.e. Aristotle] established this [theory of the imaginative faculty] and explained what is sufficient according to his intention and it is present in the book *Sense and Sensibilia*<sup>267</sup>. And it seems that concerning [the theories about] sense the great sages of our religion were following him. And Maimonides in the second part (of Guide), chapter 36 says: “*It consists in the most Perfect*<sup>268</sup> *development of the imaginative faculty, etc.*”<sup>269</sup> together with everything what follows in the words of the chapter in its entirety and [with the words of] Gersonides in the second part of the Wars of the Lord, even though according to Gersonides, the bearer of the prophetic capacity is the material intellect, not imagination; it does not make any difference [to the argument]. And the emanation is perpetual and will not stop; only the preparation should occur.<sup>270</sup>

If you reply to me: but not to everybody, who is prepared [by having] the desired composition<sup>271</sup>, the prophecy will arrive, if no divine help is added to it. And this is clear on the basis of the senses and the same is what Maimonides intent to say in the second part, chapter 32: “*For we believe that, even if one has the capacity for prophecy, and has duly prepared himself, it may yet happen that he does not actually*

---

<sup>266</sup> Yetzira – possibility to create images. /a/ Creation in the proper sense, or /b/ inclination to imagination and visual creativity, therefore nature of the soul. In this case, /b/ is the valid translation.

<sup>267</sup> *On Senses and Sensibilia* is one of Aristotle’s books on physics. According to medieval philosophical study curriculum, it should be read before the wannabe philosopher reads works on metaphysics. There was in circulation Hebrew version of Pseudo-Avicenna *De celo et mundo* incorporated into Aristotle’s work. Therefore, we have to be more cautious with evaluating Eilburg’s reference. See *the Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy*; p. 323-324; fn43.

<sup>268</sup> This phrase means: it is experienced by the senses. Eilburg means that our personal experiences know about persons who are perfect enough to become prophets, but they do not become prophets.

<sup>269</sup> Guide II, 36

<sup>270</sup> Eilburg means that in case there is no prophecy this is not because the emanation of the Active Intellect ceased, but because the conditions to receive the emanation are absent.

<sup>271</sup> This is a widespread notion in medieval Arabic and Jewish Aristotelianism: the key condition of receiving emanations from above is the suitable composition of the matters that build up the substrate. See, for example, Guide II, 36.



*prophecy. It is in that case the will of God [that withholds from him the use of the faculty].”*<sup>272</sup> And if so, then it is not natural.

Know that it is necessary for the opponent to reveal to you the great secret that is derived from the acceptance of reality and will call your attention to formulation of the words of Maimonides, in which he might have intended to say that it is true that the prophecy is not absolutely natural and without any other connection to other things, and not everyone who prepares will prophecy, but it is a thing that is depended on conjunction of the stars at the time of the birth and the moment of attainment of spiritual and prophetic forces. There is also preparation in learning from other men certain science more than another science that depends on this. And also having veridical or false dreams, telling future [are dependent on this]. And the proof for this is the foreknowledge of one's ability at the time of his birth that he will be so and so in this respect. And indeed with such information the book of astrological judgments is filled. And the author of *Meggilat ha-Megalleh*<sup>273</sup> wrote about the Messiah according to his horoscope that came to his hands. It is not unlikely that Maimonides alluded to this divine will. This is the well preserved tablet<sup>274</sup> as Abu Nasr [Fārābī] and Ibn Sīna wrote in their books, and this is the Book of the First Man<sup>275</sup> in [the sayings of] the [Talmudic] sages. Understand in a precise way the words of Maimonides in the very same chapter: “*when these have created the possibility then it depends on the will of God, etc.*”<sup>276</sup> [fol. 54v] If so, clearly there is a possibility that the opponent to say that the prophecy follows the laws of nature and [the astral]

---

<sup>272</sup> Guide II, 32

<sup>273</sup> Astrological prognosis of the appearance of the messiah written by Abraham Bar Hiyya. He predicted beginning of the Messianic Age on 1358.

<sup>274</sup> Qur'an sura Buruj (85:21-22) says: “*Nay this is a Glorious Qur'an, (inscribed) in a Tablet Preserved.*” Theologians explain that this refers to the uncreated Qur'an held in heavens, which served as the original for the first copy. In the philosophy of Ibn Sīna this idea was used to support the theory of divine omniscience and the doctrine of divine foreknowledge and predestination. The “well-preserved tablets” became an allegory of all the body of knowledge, especially the knowledge about the movement of the celestial bodies” which is eternally known by God. The image of the “well-preserved tablet” was adopted by medieval Jewish philosophers as well, although most of them was not aware about the connection to the passage in the Qur'an.

<sup>275</sup> Book of the First Man – according to an aggadah Adam had a book in which all the future history of humanity was recorded.

<sup>276</sup> Guide II, 32

conjunctions and this is the eternal divine will just as some of the recent thinkers understand it.<sup>277</sup>

If [you say that you can prove that prediction of future is a criterion of prophecy] on the basis of the Torah, then there is no [criterion] of examining [the prophet] and no general rule [of deciding whether he is a prophet,] which would not fail ever, because Jeremiah the prophet confused all of us in „*if at any time I announce, etc.*“<sup>278</sup> and in „*If another time I announce*“<sup>279</sup> And it implies that whatever He will witness — good or bad —, He may retract it and it is not necessary that any of these two will be realized. And He contradicts his own words and disagrees with Himself, as He told to Hannaniah ben Azzur,<sup>280</sup> but the sages of the Talmud distorted the literal sense of this [biblical passage] and [the same was done] especially by Maimonides who followed them in saying that for good prognostication it is appropriate to examine the prophet but not for negative prognostication, because as he said that it is possible that [God] revokes [making] bad. When Maimonides estimates that it is possible also through the law of reason [to conclude] that if He retracts bad, he can retract good, and it is possible that it also would be a doubtful [issue], and one could say that the sign given to us in the Torah is not a real rule for us – so he says [i.e. Maimonides replies to these possible objections] in the introduction to [the Commentary on the] Mishnah and this is the text: “...*but that God Almighty would tell the prophet to promise mankind in good tidings in an absolute unconditional statement and afterwards no such good would occur – this is absurdity and it cannot be, because there would not be possibility for us to maintain the belief in prophecy etc.*”<sup>281</sup> The intention of Maimonides was to [show] that if this alternative is not left for us without the possibility of error, I mean the positive prognosis that He does not withdraw it, then we will not have any ground to examine

---

<sup>277</sup> Here he talks about determinists with strong naturalistic tendencies. As a philosophical theory it appeared as a popular theory among Iberian medieval thinkers. Also Gersonides follows the theory of astrological influence, however he does not advocate for absolute natural determinism, but underlines contingency of deeds in the unfolding history. See the chapters on Gersonides and transitory period in the thesis.

<sup>278</sup> Jer 18:7

<sup>279</sup> Jer 18:9

<sup>280</sup> Jer 21

<sup>281</sup> PM, Introduction.

the prophet. And by God, isn't it a *petitio principii* <sup>282</sup> according to the opponent, and his argument stands on its place [i.e. remains unanswered].

It is marvelous from Maimonides, how could he have forgotten to mention a biblical verse “*If at any time I announce, etc.*”<sup>283</sup> in his investigation. [It is] neither in [Sefer ha-]Mada‘, nor in the Commentary to Mishnah. In connection to this [issue], what I observe is that his words in the Commentary on the Mishnah are filled with doubts concerning the distinction between prophets and astrologers, if someone says that when astrologers errs in foreknowing future, [that happens] because what has not come [into being] of the [predicted] future is due to the reason, that God regretted a bad thing [that He promised] or He postponed the punishment. In general, despite his [Maimonides’] intellect and estimation, this is complete confusion of the whole matter. He writes in the text of the Mada‘ in chapter seven “*Since he is a great man, [fol. 55r] etc.*”<sup>284</sup> Until he says “*hidden matters belong to the Lord, our God, etc.*”<sup>285</sup> And he writes more and this is that text of chapter eight: “*Thus in any prophet*” until “*through witchcraft and spells.*”<sup>286</sup>

If so, then I do not see what we could do to make a general rule [about the prophets] that is not suspected in the future. By God, according to my opinion, this thesis is one of the most suspicious and confusing [things] in the Torah, and much more [it will appear so] as we proceed and suspect [the issue]; and the more we proceed, the more we suspect it. Even more is so in the opinion of the opponent, who would say in his strong argument that the art of astrological judgment is an art and the true divinations is [an art] for those who know them and understand them. And even more so the art of talismans, in which there is much veracity for those who understand them and they do not mislead those who understand them with the exception of minor cases caused by lack of knowledge and by mistake.

We should also fear from the opponent, the one who asks a question [or asks for an omen] [from God] — blessed be He — will not find [what he’s looking for the

---

<sup>282</sup> *Petitio principii* – circular reasoning; Heschel, Abraham: *A Concise Dictionary of Hebrew Philosophical Terms*. [s.l.]: Cincinnati, 1941; s.v. דרוש על המרעכה.

<sup>283</sup> Jer 18:7

<sup>284</sup> MT, SM, YT 7:6

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid 8:6

answer to the question]; as if it were possible to say that error and sin in foretelling of future is in [God], may He be blessed, and He is not always right, and [this is the case] even in cases [of divine speeches] which are not for admonition or recommending the proper [but about telling the future directly], as it is said [in case of the] concubine in Giva'ah when Israel asked God, may He be blessed, by the Name and He did not tell them the truth [in the answer].<sup>287</sup> And this [happened] two times, therefore it needs much consideration and investigation [researching the questions] how and why he misled Israel in telling [them] “Go!” these two times. And then happened to them what happened. And if you reply that it is so, because he did not say “Go and you shall win”, then behold [I answer to you] that every “go”, which is there in the Scripture is of this category.<sup>288</sup> Moreover, the intention of a question was whether they will succeed or not. And then [this point] cannot be avoided: He answered to something that was not asked or He misled the people.

Do not say that the one who posed a question made a mistake. The opponent will not admit it. And also I see from what the Scripture says, from the text of the last question that He replied and told them according to what was indeed to happen in the future. He himself [God] told it [i.e. the future] on the basis of the very same text of the first and the second questions, concerning which He had told them [before] what had not been to occur and happen. And what Scripture says about God's answering the last question is derived from the first answers.

And I wish I knew [how] to reply to an opponent, who is an astrologer, saying that what happens to him in his foretelling of future, namely that it was misleading and erring, is something, which also happens to the prophet or seeker of omen from God<sup>289</sup> in respect of telling future.

Let's leave [the topic] and let's return to our words. And we say that enchanting and divination from the omen according to their species, chiromancy, looking into silver mirror and many more such things – mostly they are publicly justified, and they relate stories told about them, which astonish people when they hear them. That is why Saul hurried to a necromancer [fol. 55v] and the king of Israel to Ba'al Zebub,

---

<sup>287</sup> Jud 20

<sup>288</sup> i.e. it means “go and you shall win.”

<sup>289</sup> *Shoel ba-Shem* - שואל בשם

the god of Ekron<sup>290</sup> and many similar [stories]. That is why I say that if [according to the assumption implied] in the laws of the Torah these divinatory arts, which are [understood] as true words, had been lies, the Torah would have not rejected [these divinatory arts] knowing that Israel recognized by the senses<sup>291</sup> that they were false. But since it [the Torah] assumes that Israel would find evidence [for their being true], they would follow them and perhaps they would err and think about them as about gods, so [Torah] kept them [the Israelites] far away from them (from magical practices).

Look, in other nations you will find books, their magicians' announcements and ancient oracles of which nothing was left unfulfilled.. I mean they all happened and occurred as they imagined it. And Bileam approves it [as well as] the Scripture testifies it about him, and even more what the wise men of Talmud tell and add [considering] his highness by comparing it to that of Moses. One cannot but be very surprised that Rabbi Levi of blessed memory in the book the Wars of the Lord writes that one of the methods of the examinations of a prophet is foreknowledge [of the future] in a miraculous way since he (Gersonides) agrees with the Rabbi of blessed memory (Maimonides) that miracles may possibly be done through spell and in occult places. If this is the case, under any condition it does not seem that this part [of the argument] is sufficient to draw the conclusion that we yearn for.

Since the state of affairs is so, namely that the examination of the prophet is "little"<sup>292</sup> and the principle of miracle is weak, [so] our conclusion coming from these two alternatives, that is to say from the deeds and from the determination of future, [is also weak].<sup>293</sup> Therefore, no other way of examination and no other middle term are left for us, except the perspective of theoretical and metaphysical postulations and strange and tremendous commandments alluding to them, which cannot be achieved through rational inquiry and cognition. And it seems, that this was the main point among the topics [discussed] by the Rabbi of blessed memory in part two, chapter

---

<sup>290</sup> 2 Kings 1

<sup>291</sup> I.e. through sensual perception.

<sup>292</sup> Very limited or of very little worth.

<sup>293</sup> Unfinished sentence.

forty saying “you will find laws” until “these laws are divine.”<sup>294</sup> And the intent is more [visible] in Ibn Rushd in *Tahafut al-Tahafut* in the definition of a prophet as a prophet, [and the same in] Rabbi Levi of blessed memory, chapter six of *Milhamot ha-Shem*, and according to Efodi<sup>295</sup> in one of his wonderful sentences. And by God it is indeed better explained by the possibility of human ruse and invention than the two aforementioned options.

Now listen to me, my lords! I will tell you, these opinions and theoretical announcements that Moses laid down in the Torah and our forefathers believed in him [following] them and because of them [speaking] in accordance with this third alternative.<sup>296</sup> [As for the content of Moses’ teaching] it cannot escape the following division: either it [fol. 56r] agrees with reason or not. Moreover, each [option takes into account] either improvement of the soul or improvement of body.

If they [i.e. the commandments] agree with reason — whether they concern the corporreal or the psychical [aspect], — then they are not special in relation to the Torah inasmuch it is this particular Torah. On the basis of this, his [Moses’] prophecy cannot be examined. Because why and how should they listen to them and accept them as [revelation] from the mouth of God, when the same [commandments] have already been apprehended by other men than him [Moses] who investigated without talking to Lord, the Blessed one. With what can he boast over the others, if they share [the knowledge] with him? And why should it be more special in respect to its perfection and superiority [over the other laws]?

If they [the laws of Moses] do not agree [with reason], as it is more likely, but differ from the [results of] rational inquiry, then what is the proof? But indeed if this is the case, then it is necessary to examine it in accordance with the third alternative<sup>297</sup>, that implies for us that those opinions like the creation of the world out of nothing, reward and punishment, which [the Torah] teaches,, are in accordance

---

<sup>294</sup> Guide II, 40

<sup>295</sup> Efodi, also called Profiat Duran (d.c. 1414) was a Catalan Jew known for his polemics against Christianity: *Al Tehi ka-Avotekha* and *Kelimat ha-Goyim*. In 1391, he was forcefully converted, but reverted to Judaism. He argued for the Jewish faith that besides Talmud accepts philosophy and sciences. His philosophical views are presented in the introduction of his chief work *Ma’aseh Efod*.

<sup>296</sup> Eilburg refers back to the threefold division he has proposed at the beginning of the chapter: faith is based on (1) miracles, or (2) prediction of future, or (3) the marvelous content of the revelation of the prophet. So far he has examined (1) and (2), and now he turns to (3).

<sup>297</sup> See previous footnote.

with the common people's understanding, so are we [obliged to believe] that they come from God, may He be blessed?! And what sort of [valid] examination and experience does exist concerning it that they perhaps did not<sup>298</sup> rise from his heart (willfulness) and he did not invent them?! The gates of examination are closed in this respect. And it is different from case of foretelling the future and miracle-making, which are demonstrated [directly] eye to eye and face to face.

If you say that the examination in it is that the more they [the laws] disagree with rational inquiry [the more they are of divine origin], so that they will have no relation to reason, research or rational cognition at all, and it is their bragging and their virtue, and this is the very reason why you call them divine, as some of the sucklings of the new kabbalah responded me, which arose earlier during my life. – [so if you reply this, then I say that] there is nothing which would contradict reason more than the dogmas of the Christians as I shall show, so if this is the case, [Christianity] should be an even more divine [religion than Judaism]!<sup>299</sup> It is absolutely clear that even more so, when the case is as many great sages of our nation thought – and Maimonides [figures] as their leader in certain respect even if he seems to disagree in another respect — that it is impossible for a prophet to apprehend theoretical intelligibles — but in this case let those [things] be primary intelligibles according to his [Maimonides'] opinion which [things] are secondary intelligibles for a scholar who is not a prophet. And also it is impossible for a prophet to obtain a knowledge or concept during his prophecy while he is in the state of prophetic trans in which the knowledge of a sage, who is no prophet, has absolutely no share as was thought by Rabbi Levi [Gersonides] of blessed memory in his introduction to his respected book [fol.56v] the Wars of the Lord and two princes of great wisdom: R. Kalonymus ha-Nas'i [saying so] in one of his collections of qoutes, and the nas'i R. Avraham ha-Levi ben Hasdai in one of his glosses to the *Moznei Tzedek* of al-

---

<sup>298</sup> This is probably a euphemism again. Eilburg's point is that we cannot prove that Moses did not invent his teaching in an arbitrary manner.

<sup>299</sup> Davis (2001) identifies this group of kabbalists as the strong anti-rationalists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; e.g. Josef Jabetz or Meir ibn Gabbai.



Gazzali.<sup>300</sup> It reveals that it is clearly nonsense that this hypothesis [of the divine nature of the prophecy] is an essential attribute specific and primary [determined] for a prophet as a prophet; so that no other option is left for us but to say that it [i.e. the teaching of the prophet] is impossible [to explain] unless it is from the mouth of God in accordance with the general rabbinic consensus.

In case you reply that he [Moses] established them [the laws] on the basis of intuition<sup>301</sup> only; and [you say] that there is great and specific intuition for a prophet, that everyone who is not a prophet cannot be awakened [to that intuition] by himself alone, even though it is discursive and we believe in it and [we can] examine it [to the degree it concerns] the desired state. My soul dies to see eye to eye such a research. Where is it? How is it? And their proofs should be of a strength and perfection that would prevent any disagreement to enter [the findings] and we could call them ultimate evidence and we would enjoy them and they would cheer us up.

Since this is the case, we have found in these three terms and principles of demonstration [that they] are faulty and weak that will not be of benefit. We saw that they stirred up great doubt and many suspicions. What shall we respond to the opponent? And who will stand up against him on our side? He will shoot his arrows on our towers and pour asphalt over our walls.<sup>302</sup> This is how I ask you, believer of Moses, tell me where is your wisdom and your great understanding, which is found in your religion and your laws dictated by Moses. Because of its [the Torah's] opinions, its concepts, its commandments and its laws you are called among nations "*this great nation is a wise and understanding people.*"<sup>303</sup>

Where is the big thing being more excellent than any rational cognition that charmed your fathers and yourselves after them? This man has something established only through stories and legends like creation of the world in certain time and a

---

<sup>300</sup> Rabbi Avraham ibn Hasdai, the early 13th century author, writes in his rephrasing of Al-Ghazali's *Mizan al-Amal*, in *Sefer Moznei Tzedek*, a hadith which was in some accounts attributed to `Ali ibn Abi Talib, but most popularly attributed in various hadith narrations, to Muhammad.

<sup>301</sup> *Iyyun* – in the present context it should be understood as level of consciousness, or state of mind which is available only to the prophet. Al-Ghazzali supposed the existence of such a supra-rational state, of mind in his polemics against the philosophers. See, for example, his "The Rescuer from Error" in Muhammad Ali Khalidi, tr. *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 80-84.

<sup>302</sup> No biblical parallel found.

<sup>303</sup> Dt 4:6



certain way. Are they so highly elevated [doctrines] to establish and tell the story that God, the Blessed one, talk with men and women, and He supervises their actions, He rewards and punishes according to the fruits of their deeds and He gets furious against those who oppose him, and [there are] many more ideas from the opinions necessary for the wellbeing of the state society in order not to have the settlement destroyed, [are these ideas so great] that your father decided such a treatise could not have come into existence without intervention of God [fol. 57r] and that it was not possible that Moses establish them with his reason?! Look, all the religions before this one and after this one did the same. Look, this is very pleasing through their eloquence and their telling of stories; the invention of their [heroic] deeds are beautiful and [there is a] wonderful metre that is established in the heart of the believers and will be firmly engraved into their imagination, just as your religion had been founded and engraved into your [mental] images and your thinking.

Even if it was true that no other religion [is truly unique] except your religion, then what is your wisdom and what are your arguments that you can reply to a philosopher to many of his proofs and evidences concerning the falsity of the creation of the world out of nothing, [individual] providence, rewards and punishments? How much help will you [obtain] from the words of Moses, your master? What is the hidden wisdom, he hid there for you so that you can refute the proofs of your opponents, [who] made huge insights supposing separate existence of incorporeal and eternal first cause and existence of prophecy together with practical commandments or admonitions alluding [to the aforementioned concepts]. About that the philosopher can boast more; because he reached them through the power of his reason and the spirit of wisdom of his rational inquiry and [his results] are amazing.

And [there is] more; can you boast with the practical aspect, that is to say, aspect concerning the wellbeing of society? And who can say and who can prove that whatever the princes of philosophy established and their council [consulted] considering political wisdom that they promulgated, such as the laws of the [pagan] magicians of Rome and Greece, that are called nowadays the laws of Emperador (*datei ha-emperador*) and the ethical instruction of the Ishmaelites about Ishmaelite laws, [and the laws of] Babylonians, Chaldeans, Indians, Persians, and many more

similar to them, that they are not more agreeable to the practical political intellect than [your laws]? So what is the proof and evidence that [can exclude the possibility that] they [i.e. the laws of the Gentiles] are balanced and rectified [to such a degree] that it is impossible to establish and comprehend them by human intellect, unless [they are established] through prophecy and from the mouth of God?

And moreover [there is] the case of the tablets with Ten Commandments written on them that Moses brought down from the heavens. What is so wonderful about them? All of them [have their origin] either in apprehension through rational inquiry or they are well-known for all the nations. The people of Noah are also commanded to obey them. If you understand chapter thirty-three from the part two [of the Guide of the Perplexed], you will wonder [about this] even more, when you see it necessary in every respect without doubts.

[fol. 57v] If you reply to me, sir, isn't there in our opinion a poof, which is clear and very apparent for the senses that we cannot contradict? It is within its power to [provide] a principle of demonstration. It is [meant] rewards and punishments and particular providence, which we always experience either completely as a nation or in an individual way as it can be seen in the Torah and the Prophets in punishments that followed immediately after their [the Israelites'] rebellions and disobedience. And this [happens] generation after generation until today.

This work is my "glorious crown"<sup>304</sup> that raises in me more perplexity in addition to my previous one and distress to my disease, because I see emanation<sup>305</sup> of orders of stories of other religions and they are publicly spread among them, and they are strongly attached to them, and they are executed [ready to die] for them [i.e. for the veracity of the stories] mentioning particular details, all of them corroborated through adding [particular] individuals, their times and names, their families, the time when they existed, that is to say, in the days of a certain king, in the days of a certain emperor, and the season in which the action happened or a story or a legend took

---

<sup>304</sup> Kelil tif'eret – "glorious crown" an expression taken from the Sabbath version of the Amidah (the blessing beginning with the words, "yismah Moshe" "Moses rejoiced when his portion [i.e. the Torah] was given to him, because You called him 'truthful slave', and a crown of glory You put on his head."

<sup>305</sup> The word *emanation* probably points at the continuous flow of the stories appearing in great numbers. Implicitly, Eilburg shows that emanation is not restricted to Jewish background, but it is at work in the gentile stories as well.

place, and names of their feasts, and other things that are most perfect [literary] compositions also in poetical metre, about the deeds of their prophets and stunning deeds of their saints, which were great and miraculous, namely that they produced [actions] by their will that were not possible that you could foretell in any respect, that never happened [before] in order to publicize that issue<sup>306</sup> among the religious community. All of it [is presented] partly in deeds, partly in speech, and partly in written records from their religious books and [signed with] signatures,<sup>307</sup> that are invalid according to us, names of sentences and verses and spells specific to their gods and relics of the saints and priests.<sup>308</sup> And all those great testimonies that we have in order to establish our opinion [about God's providence] are like these words and things themselves, which are accepted [by the Gentiles as traditions] through oral narration and it is apparent to their eyes; eye to eye according to their stories. There is no end to their words; this is about that and that about this. All of them are one mouth agreeing in the truthfulness of their religion and they are strengthening their belief.

If the opponent awakes and he pays attention to this [point], he will say and find the same response to this one and that one [i.e. to Judaism or Christianity alike] that consists of one of the [following] three ways, [fol. 58r] either in all of them together we have no means to contradict their possibility [or in all of them, we have to reject the possibility. And the three ways are the following:] If, first, it is an influence and cause from heavens as Rabbi Levi [Gersonides] of blessed memory writes it in his respected book *Wars of Lord*, chapter six of the third part saying „*These things have already happened on the basis of [cosmic] system, etc.*“ until he says „*will reach him in return.*“<sup>309</sup> And it is appropriate to meditate over his words, because they are wonderful.

If, second, [the miracles reported in Jewish and Christian hagiographic texts are due] to the causes of this general divine providence, than it is from the side of the Governor of existence, that is to say the divine nature and that, which unites and ties

---

<sup>306</sup> It's not clear what Eilburg means by this.

<sup>307</sup> חותמות הפסולים

<sup>308</sup> “the memory” of their saints

<sup>309</sup> Wars III, 6

the parts of the universe one part after another in such a way that they are in an ultimate order and perfection, which intends [to keep the reality in] the existence of the universe. And this is profound and very minute and amazing [insight], which cannot be apprehended except by the best of the philosophers – the philosopher (Aristotle) says so in book Lambda of *Metaphysics* and Ibn Rushd in *Incoherence of Incoherence* in question three. Many places from Narboni testify it. And all of this, according to my opinion, Gersonides testifies and alludes in that chapter of his treatise saying “*And more as*” until he says “*did not abolish*.”<sup>310</sup>

The third [case] is taking that what is an accident in place of an essence and vice versa; and this often causes people to think, when they see that some of the circumstances follows some of the actions, [so it make them think] that this thing happens on account of that thing essentially; and therefore the point is that it is an essential, active and intentional cause – but it is not so, because it does not occur always after this [particular] action and it would not miss [its point], but [it happens only] once or twice a day.

And the Rabbi of blessed memory [Maimonides] writes in the third part, chapter thirty-seven saying: “*We must also point out that originators of false, etc.*”<sup>311</sup> And he continues that there are many intellectual rewards and punishments necessarily following good and bad deeds, but in an obscure way; [that is] very [intensive] intellectual apprehension of true intelligible as Ba'al ha-Nissim explained in his books in the Commentary to the Torah.<sup>312</sup> In addition, what to respond to the opponent, when sometimes guardians of religion establish and proclaim words [of stories] that either happened or not, in order that the society should listen to and comprehend [them] so that it [i.e. the society] should be improved; because it is

---

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Guide III, 37

<sup>312</sup> About Baal ha Nissim, also called as Nissim of Marseilles (early 14th century), nothing is known of his life. We know that he wrote a commentary on the Torah with a philosophical introduction following the post-Maimonidean philosophy of his age. Baal Ha-nissim: see Howard [Hayyim] Kreisel (ed.), *Maaseh Nissim: Perush la-Torah le-R. Nissim b. R. Moshe mi-Marseilles* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 2000), p. 12-15 (Kreisel's introduction).

In the chapter 10 of Ma'aseh Nissim (ed. Kreisel, 2000; p. 118-119.) Nissim of Marseille writes: יעודי התורה והקבלה וחכמינו ז"ל נחלקם לשלשה חלקים: ונאמר, שמהם מחוייבים שכליים, ומהם מונחים מוכרחים, ומהם מה שיררכבו משני אלו הפנים. This means that Nissim understood the process of merits and rewards, and sins and their punishment in completely natural and mechanic way. There is a high probability, that this is the idea Eilburg had in mind.

permitted to change [the story] for the sake of peace of the world.[fol. 58v] And it is necessary according to Plato<sup>313</sup> as it is necessary for a doctor and it is permitted according to him (Plato) to conceal not [only] some of the truth from them [the commoners], but even to substitute it with a lie in order to improve them [i.e. the subjects].

Let's leave the response of the opponent, because it is not appropriate for us [to resolve the issue] in any way. I will return to my question and perplexity, which has a source in [what I found] in other religions just as in our religion. And I say: If this is so, as it is explained that if our Torah is divine, that is to say, divine gift out of particular will and mercy as we believe, then it is not possible that they [i.e. the other religions] are right. For is the crowds of religions, and many doctrines together – three, four or five, according to every “roots” of our [faith], and the “roots” of each and every religion, and according to their principles have been multiplied in the past and they exist still today, [so is it true that] if one of them is right, then it is necessary that all the others lie according to the [opinion of *any*] founder of religion and order?!

This was the first consideration that made me to investigate and research the correct opinion concerning [the criteria] according to which the Torah should be examined if it came from God, may He be blessed. And You who is the sun and shield for the ones who are walking in the darkness, may the light of Your great wisdom enlighten my darkness and shine from Your glory of Your brilliance scarcely or greatly, because if You are not for me, then who is for me. And may God give me atonement.

---

<sup>313</sup> For the concept of noble lie by Plato see *the Republic*, 414b-414c. Eilburg may have learned this concept from Averroes' paraphrase of Plato's *Republic* which circulated in Hebrew translation, see *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic*, ed. and tr. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 129: “But the lie (employed by) the rulers towards the masses is right and proper for them; it is like medicine for illness. Just as it is only the doctor who administers the drug, so it is the king in the exercise of rulership who employs a lie towards the masses. For lying tales [*sippurim kozvim*] are necessary for the education of the citizens. There is no lawgiver [*maniah nimus*] who does not employ fictitious tales, because this is necessary for the masses if they are to attain happiness”

## Appendix B: Transcription: the First Question by Eliezer Eilburg

MS JTS 2323; fol. 48v–58v

fol. 48v

ומעתה קושייתי שאתעורר לכת'  
גזרה מוסכם עליה מבני ישראל כולם החולפים והנמצאים מקובלים  
איש מפי איש, כי השם ית' אלקי האלקים נתן לנו באמצעות  
משה רבינו נביאנו נביאו התורה כלה ספורה מצותיה ואזהרותיה  
ברצונו הפרטי האישי לבד על צד החסד והחנינה ומתנה גמורה  
ורצה השם ית' באהבתו אותנו לבד אהבה יתירה, כמו שחרש  
השלם לפי אמונתנו ברצונו ולא בהכרח

fol. 49r

והיה בידו שלא לחדשו, כך רצה הוא ית', ועלה במחשבתו  
לזכותינו במצותיו חקתיו ומשפטיו, לטוב לנו כל המינים  
ולא להכרח עצמותי ולא לזכותינו, והטיבנו כוח הטוב הנפלא  
שחננו למען אהבתו אותנות או את אבותינו, וכמו שאמר  
כי נער ישראל ואוהבתו וממצרים קראתי לבני ויבחר ה' בהם  
וגו',<sup>314</sup> ויתר הפסוקים הנוכחים במשנה תורה פרשת ואת חנן  
ובפרשת עקב המורים על זה הוראה אמתית, ומזה  
נשענו אבותינו, ואנחנו אחרים על המלאך המליץ משה  
רבינו ע"ה לפי דבריו ומעשיו הנוראים ומופתיו הנפלאים וזהו  
השרש הגדול וההתחלה הראשונה לאומתינו.  
**אמרתי** טרם אשאל לתכלית השרש אקדים הקדמה  
אחת קטנה למען תהיה לי שרש מנח אמיתית במה  
שארצה לשאל ראשונה. ואומר כי האמונה הזאת והגזירה  
המוסכמת אשר האמינו אבותינו הקדושים נשענים על  
מרע"ה לא תמנע מחלוקה, אם שהאמינו מצד האמונה

---

<sup>314</sup> Hoshea 11:1

לבד מופשטת, ואם מצד אות וראיה מוחלטת, עד נשנה  
ונאמר, אבל מצד האמונה המופשטת לבד אי אפשר  
יוליד, אם כן הוא מצד האות והראיה והמופת, ואופן הביאור  
בהמנע זה החלק הנשנה הוא אם מצד התורה ואם מצד  
השכל, אם מצד התורה, כי הכתוב מעיד כי האמנותם  
היתה מצד המופת והראיה אמרה והעידה התורה, וירא  
ישראל את מצרים וגו',<sup>315</sup> ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו,<sup>316</sup> אמרו ית'  
הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן וגו',<sup>317</sup> וגם כך יאמינו לעולם  
אשר זה מורה שמצד פעולתיו ומעשיו היוצאים מכל חק  
טבעי האמינו לדבריו, כי מאתו ית' היתה לו, גם במשנה  
תורה במשך משה לב העם והחזיקם על האמונה זכר  
להם לישראל מהאותות והמופתים שהקדים לעיניהם  
מה שבהם די לקחת אותם גבול אמצעי עצמי והתחלת  
מופת אמתי לבנות חקש ולהוליד תולדה שהשם יתברך

fol. 49v

נתן להם התורה הזאת על ידו, ושכל מה שנעשה מהפעולות  
הנפלאות במצרים ובמדבר היה ברצונו ית' לבד היה על צד  
המופת והחסד והחנינה להם, ויש לנו גם כן ממנה  
ר"ל מן התורה צווי ואות בבחינת כל נביא בתחלת נבואתו, גם  
ידעת יעידתנו היא ונביאיה, שהמשיח אשר אנחנו מקוים  
יחדש לנו אותות בשמים ובארץ, ויפלא הפלא ופלא, ונאמין  
לקולו ונדעה כי שליח אלהים הוא, אם מצד קצת נבואות אשר  
הביאו הנביאים רומזות למה שעתיד, אם מצד השכל  
הוא מבואר, כי התורות, ואם מחקם האמונה הנה זה הוא  
אחר התפשטה והתפרסה, אבל בתחלת מציאותה והויתה  
אין ספק, כי אי אפשר ולא תמלט בלעדי הקדמת מופתים  
ופעולות זרות מתמיהות מבהילות האנשים להיותן יוצאות  
מהסדור הטבעי, ונמנעות בחקו, או נראה לעיניהן או הקדמות  
ידיעת דברים עתידיים אפשריים נעלמים הקרובים, וכמו

<sup>315</sup> Ex 14:30

<sup>316</sup> Ex 14:31

<sup>317</sup> Ex 19:9

שהיה מוכיח הנביא למתנבאים ההם המתפארים בנבואה  
הגידו האותיות לאחור ונדעה כי אלהים אתם וגו',<sup>318</sup> ולא  
נראה לעולם, ולא היה למשמע אוזן חדוש דת ונימוס בלעדי  
זה ר"ל חדוש מעשים זרים, או הגדת עתיד בראשונה  
ובהרגישו משה בשכלו זה הענין מחוייב ושלא יגיע מדרגות  
שכלות האנשים כל כך עד שיאמינו הדברים הזרים ר"ל  
היותו שליח השם על צד הרצון האישי לתת תורה ונימוס  
מצוה ממנו בלתי מופתים וראיות אמר והקשה אחר  
אמרו ואמרו לי מה שמו וגו',<sup>319</sup> ולא השיב לו הש"י תשובה  
מספקת לפי דעתו, או היתה מספקת, ובי לשאלה  
ההיא כי שתים שאל, וכמו שפיר' הרב ז"ל א"א פרק ס"ג  
וען משה ויאמר והן לא יאמינו וגו',<sup>320</sup> והשיב לו אז הש"י  
מה שיספוק התר לשאלתו מה זה בידך וגו'<sup>321</sup> והיה אם לא  
ישמעו לקול האות הראשון וגו',<sup>322</sup> כאלו כונתו יתברך שאות

fol. 50r

המעשה הבלתי טבעי יביאם לי כטעם להאמין לקולו ולא  
ולא להיות אם היה זה בנפש הנביא לבד או ח"ל כי אין לו  
בזאת החקירה אשר אנחנו בה, וכן ראינו באליהו בהר  
הכרמל, ברצותו להשיב רשעי ישראל בתשובה, ולתת תורת  
ה' בלבם, והתוכחו עם נביאי הבעל, ראה כי אין צד  
לנצחם בלתי מעשה מופת נפלא מה, וחם לבו בקרב עד  
שהורה עליו הוראת שעה, והוא להעלות עולה ואמר עד  
מתי פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים. אם ה' אלהים לכו  
אחריו, ואם הבעל לכו אחריו וגו',<sup>323</sup> ויאמר אליהו אל העם  
אני נותרתי נביא לה' וגו',<sup>324</sup> יותנו לנו שתים פרים  
ויבחרו להם הפר האחד וגו',<sup>325</sup> וכל הנמשך מהספר

<sup>318</sup> Isa 41:23

<sup>319</sup> Ex 3:13

<sup>320</sup> Ex 4:1

<sup>321</sup> Ibid 4:2

<sup>322</sup> Ibid 4:8

<sup>323</sup> 1Kings 18:21

<sup>324</sup> Ibid 18:22

<sup>325</sup> Ibid 18:23



עד אמרו וירא כל העם ויפלו על פניהם, ויאמרו ה' הוא האלהים וגו',<sup>326</sup> יורה זה הוראה אמיתית כי בעבור שראו ישראל מהפלא ההוא העצום שבו בתשובה עם אחאב עמהם, ואם שלא שבו נביאי הבעל, ולכן נשחטו בנחל, ואמר גדעון למלאך ה' ועשית לי אות שאתה מדבר עמי,<sup>327</sup> ועשה לו אות הבשר והמצות שעלה אש מן הצור ואכלה אותם, ואם הענין הזה היה בנבואה, או חוצה לה לא יזיק ולא יועיל ואינו מהענין שאנחנו בתוכו, וכן מספרים כל עם עם ועם ואומה ואומה בספור תורתם כל אחת למינה מהחידושים הבלתי הקשיים והמופתים הזרים שחיו נראים ונמשכים מראשיהם איש אחר איש עדן או עדנים תמיד מה שלא ידומה ולא ישוער כמו שנעיד במה שיבא, ואם אחר כן מניחיהם ושומרי התורה יצוו ויזהירו לבלתי ישאלו אות בכל מה שיראו וישמעו מהנמשך אחר הדת ושיאמינו על צד הקבלה והאמונה לא יקרה מזה סתירה, אבל הוא מחוייב לפי התקון המדיני שיעשה כן אחר שהוטבעו אדני התורה והושרשו יסודותיה

fol. 50v

ושתותיה, אם כן הענין מבואר האמות אם מצד התורה אם מצד השכל שלא האמינו ישראל למשה היותו שליח, הש"י בלך אמור ר"ל לתת תורה כי אם אחר ראותם רבות מופתיו ומעשיו הזרים והנפלאים לא מצד האמונה לבדה ואנחנו נשענים עליהם ועל עדותם מקובלים איש מפי איש מאמינים בלתי חמה נראית לעינינו ומופת נמצא בשכלנו

**השאלה הראשונה** ואחר שהענין כן כמו שהקדמתי מהגדרה המוסכם עליה ומה הצעה שהצעתי מכל דברי רמיזות ההקדמות שכתבתי מי יתן ואדע מה ראו ישראל במשה גדולות ונפלאות שהיה בו די או מחוייב

<sup>326</sup> Ibid 18:39

<sup>327</sup> Judges 6:17

שיהיה גבול אמצעי אמתי אשר בעבורו בנו הקש והולידו  
 התולדה הזאת ר"ל היותן שליח השם בלך אמור ר"ל להניח  
 התורה שלא היה אפשר היותו בלעדי מתן אלהי כי לא ימנע  
 הענין מחלוקה בזה הגבול האמצעי וסבת האמינם לו שלא  
 תהיה אחת משלשה, אם מצד הפעולות כלומר האותות  
 והמופתים, וכמו שנראה מהפסוקים הנזכרים המורים על  
 זה. אם מצד הקדמת ידיעת הנעלם העתיד האפשרי  
 וכמו שנראה מבחינת הנביא, ואם מצד הנחת דעות ומושכלות  
 עיוניות אלהיות ומצות מעשייות זרות מאד מורות עליהן  
 שהן לא עלה מכל חקירות אנושית והשגה שכלית הקשית ובכלל  
 נימוס משובח ותורה מעולה להקנות מציאות ההצלחה  
 המדינית, וההצלחה המדעית לחכם ולהמון איש ככפי מדרגתו  
 וכמו שרצו רבים שבעבור זה תקרא אלהית, ושכמו זאת אי  
 אפשר כי אם באחזה האל, וכמו שאמר ושמעו את כל החקים  
 האלה ואמרו רק עם חכם ונבון הגוי<sup>328</sup> הגדול הזה ויהיה המין בחכם  
 ונבון אל שתי ההצלחות הצד' ר"ל הטבעית והמדעית, והוא  
 מבואר שזאת חלוקה הכרחית, שאין בכאן צד רביעי כי כאלו  
 השלשה לבד יסוגל הנביא ויבדל מהחכם שאינינו נביא אם  
 בכלם או במקצתם, וכמו שהניחו החכמים, והוא מבואר שאין

fol. 51r

די בשום א' מאלה להיות התחלת מופת, למה שנרצה להוליד  
 וסבת הולדת הדרוש המכוון מהגזירה המוסכם עליה אצלינו  
 אנחנו מאמיני התורה. אם מצד הפעולות הענין מבואר  
 הספוק, ורב המבינה והחשד מבואר נגלה הוא מה שכתב  
 הרב ז"ל בספר המדע פרק ח' וזה נסחו משה רבינו לא האמינו  
 בו ישראל מפני האותות שעשה, שהמאמין על פי האותות  
 יש בלבו דופי, שאפשר שיעשה האות בלאט וכשוף וכו',<sup>329</sup> עוד  
 כתב פרק ז' לפני זה ואפשר שיעשה אות או מופת  
 מי שאינו נביא, וזה האות יש לו דברים כגו וכו',<sup>330</sup> עד

<sup>328</sup> Dt 4:6

<sup>329</sup> MT, SM, YT 8:1

<sup>330</sup> Ibid 7:7

שהפלא מהרב ז"ל איך חלוק עם הכתוב והוא שאמר הכתוב  
ויאמינו ב"ה ונ"ו,<sup>331</sup> וגם בך יאמינו לעולם, וגו',<sup>332</sup> ועדות התורה  
באופן מה, אבל אין זה כאשר איני עתה בדרכו ואניחהו, וכתב  
הרב ז"ל עוד בספרו הנכבד חלק שלישי פרק כ"ט זוכר ספורי  
דברי הימים לאומת הצאב"ה וז"ל שם יספור על אדם  
הראשון שהוא זכר בספרו שהודו אילן כשילקחהו סעיפיו וישליכו  
הסעיף בארץ יהיה רומש ומתנועע כרמשת הנחשים, ויש אילן ששרשו  
בצורת אדם ישמע לו קול גדול יצא ממנו הדיבור, ושיש עשב  
שתארו כך כשיקח אדם מעליו וישימים בבית הצואר יתעלם  
מבני אדם ולא יראה אנה יכנס מאנה וכשיקטירו ממנו הוברי  
השמים תחת השמים ישמעו בני אדם באויר הסמוך לנו  
צליל וקולות נוראות, בכל עוד שהעשן עלה [וכיוצא באלו ההבלים הרבה עכ"ל]<sup>333</sup> ור אב"ע  
החכם

כתב בספר הטלסמות איך שההוא עשב נמצא באי' בין גדר  
הכרמים ובמרחקים מדינות אחרים ועלים שלו שובבים באלן  
ונקרא בלשון ערבי ליקנא קאננס לשון כלב בלשון קדש וכתב שאדם  
הראשון עשה פעולת הרבה עמו וכיוצא באלו הבלים הרבה<sup>334</sup> עכ"ל  
נראה משני מקומותיו אלו אפשרות הפעלים בזולת מה שיחשב  
ואין טענה על זה הפרק מה שיראה הרב ז"ל מרחיק אפשרות אלו  
הדברים ומהביל למהביל אותם כי הוא בעצמו כתב בלשון ייבואר  
המאמר הנ"ז בספר המדע, ומניח אפשרות במוחלט והבין כי  
אינו אומר שם שבעל הריב יוכל לומר ושלא יהיה אמתי ויצורף  
כי הרחקתו והבילו אותם הוא ממין הסבה השמעית מסבות

fol. 51v

הסתירה הנ"ז בפתיחה, גם כי הוא צוה לנו בצואתיו שנדקדק  
על כל מלה ומלה, כי אמר וז"ל ולא תהיה דעתך מן הפרק ה'  
הבנת כלל עניינו לבד אלא להעלות בידך ג"כ כל מלה ומלה  
שבאה בכלל הדברים, ואעפ"י שלא יהיה מענין הפרק<sup>335</sup> עכ"ל

<sup>331</sup> Ex 14:31

<sup>332</sup> Ex 19:9

<sup>333</sup> Guide III, 29; written sideways on margin.

<sup>334</sup> Unidentified quotation; Pseudo-Ezra.

והפלא ממנו בבחרו ז"ל להביא מכל דברי צאב"ה אלו המעשים והפעולות ודומיהם, א"כ אחר העיין הרק והבנת והסכמת שני אלו המאמרים במדע פ"ח ופ"ז. ובמורה ח"ג פ' כ"ט מצורפת עמהם מה שבא בכלל הצואה אינו רואה רחוק בעיני הרב ז"ל, אפשרות, כמו אלו המעשים, גם רוב פעולות הצאב"ה ומעשיהם, ומעשי חרטומי מצרים יוכיחו ויוסיפו אמות באפשרות מעשי הצאב"ה, ויולידו: חבובה במעשה הנביא לולא כי בחכמים גבוה מעל גבוה ומדרגה על מדרגה, ובכל רוח ומערכת ריב, אי אפשר שהבת האחת לא תנצח האחרת ולזה אולי היה מקשה לבו פרעה מכה אחר מכה, והיה מפקפק שמא היה מעשי משה במעשי ארץ מצרים, ואם לא יראה כן מהכתוב. ואינו מהפלא בפרעה כי גם בישראל היו מי שחשדוהו על זה וכפי דעת קצת מפרשים, ולא רחוקים ושונאים כ"א קרוביו ואוהביו היותר עצמיים לו, והם אהרן ומרים על אודו' האשה הכושית אשר לקח, עם מה שדרשו חכמי התלמוד מה שמה כושית, אף היא כושית במעשיה. ואמרו הלא גם בנו דבר ה' הכונה שמה היו פעולותיו בלט במעשה מדין. ובפרט חותנו הכהן הגדול, אשר דרשו עליו חכמי התלמוד, שלא הניח וכו' <sup>336</sup> [לכן באה תשובת MS (*illegible*) עליהם מתיחסת (*MS illegible*) נת ומת המבוכה]. <sup>337</sup> וענין קרח אצלי והתעוררו ריב ומדון אצל משה וכונת כל דבריו הם אצלי מזה הכת, כלומ' חשדו משה. מצורף מה שראה לקחת השררה כלה לו ולאחיו כי קרח חכם גדול היה לולא כי יותר נתחכם משה רהע לא עלתו והשגתו בגדולה. ואמ' להם קחו איש מחתנו ושימו עליהם קטרת, <sup>338</sup> ודרשו חכמי התלמוד וסם המות נתן בתוכו וכו' <sup>339</sup> ודקדק בן עזרא נמשך אחריהם אמר קטרת ולא אמר הקטרת והמשכיל יבין <sup>340</sup> ע"כ מורה א"ע כי לא היה פועל ענש ברצון אלהי מופשט

fol. 52r

<sup>335</sup> Guide, Instruction

<sup>336</sup> Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Tractate Amaleq, chapter 1; see footnote in the translation.

<sup>337</sup> Written sideways on margin.

<sup>338</sup> Paraphrase of Nm 16: 6-7

<sup>339</sup> Rashi, Nm 16:6

<sup>340</sup> Ibn Ezra, on Nm 17:11

ומהאחד נקח ראייה על האחרים. ומה לנו והפלא מזה, והנה חכמי התלמוד הרחיבו למבין נקבי המשכיות באמרם למה נקראו שמם כשפי' שמכחישין פמליא של מעלה. א"כ אם פעולות הכשוף יגיעו לזאת המדרגה מה שיגיעו כ"ש שהיה אפשר להכחיש פמליא של[מתיה] ומה לנו אות יותר גדול מזה, והנה בחינת הנבי שיש לנו מהתורה אינ' כלל בפעולו ובמעשה הפלא, ואלו היה די בהם להיותם לנו התחלת מופת לבחון בחינת הנביא שהוא מנבא מפי הגבורה, וכמו שאנחנו מבינים אין ספק שהי' נותנת לנו הבחינה ההיא והנסיון ההוא גם כי התורה בעצמה העירנתו בחכמתה באפשרות החשד והפקפוק על הפעולות וצותה לנו שלא נבטח בהם כלל, אמרה כי יקום בקרבך נביא או חולם חלום ונתן אליך אות או מופת וגו' ובא האות מהו והמופת וגו'.<sup>341</sup> וחתם כי מנסה ה' אלקיהם אתכם.<sup>342</sup> וכת' הרב ז"ל בפתיחתו לפי המשנה ז"ל וכבר שגו המון העם גם מתי מספר מיודעיהם שהם מרמים בנפשם שהנבואה לא תתיחס לכל המתיחס אליה עד עשייתו אות או מופת מופלא כגון אות מאותות מרע"ה וכו'. סוף דבריו אומ', וזה אינו אמת וכו'.<sup>343</sup> כונתו נמשך אחר התורה שהפעלות כלנה יש לחוש עליהם שמא יעשו באופן נסתר ובתחבולה אנושית, ואם היה מחויב בקצתם היותם נמנעות המציאות, אינו כי אם להשגחה אלהית על צד הרצון וכמו שאנחנו מאמינים לא מספק שנתנו לנו מהתורה אותות ומופתים אותות הנביא ובנבואתו. וא"כ הפלא הוא ממה שאמרה התורה ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו<sup>344</sup> שהכונה בו שבעבור מופתי הים האמינו במשה ואמרו הנה אנכי בא וגו'.<sup>345</sup> וגם כך יאמינו לעולם וגו', ויותר מזה במשנה תורה פרש' ואתחנן באמרו כי שאל נא וגו'. השמע עם וגו', או הנסח וגו' מן השמים וגו'.<sup>346</sup> שנראה שכונת משה היתה שם שהפעולות מספיקות וראויות לקחת מהם ראייה ומופת סבה על היות תורתו ופעלתו מסביבות

<sup>341</sup> Dt 13:1-2

<sup>342</sup> Dt 13:3

<sup>343</sup> PM, Introduction

<sup>344</sup> Ex 14:31

<sup>345</sup> Ex 19:9

<sup>346</sup> Va'ethanan (Dt) 4:32, 33, 34, 36

מהשי' וכמו שהיה אומ' תמיד באשר דבר ה' לי ודומה לזה מי יתן ואדע  
 והפלא מהרב ז"ל. מה הרויח במה שזכר במדע פ' ח' באמרו מה שזה  
 נסחו, ובמה האמינו בו במעמד הר סיני שענינו ראו ולא זר  
 ואזנינו שמע, ולא אחר האש והקולות להלפידים והוא נגש אל  
 הערפל והקול מדבר אליו משה משה לך אמור להם כו'<sup>347</sup>. ולמה  
 הפעל הזה איננו ממין שאר הפעולות שאיפשר החשד עליהם  
 ואיך זה מופת אמתי עכ"פ. ואם תשיב שרצון הרב ז"ל שכל  
 ישראל נבאו וראו והשיגו במראות הנבואה השגות גדולות וכי  
 זה איננו אפשר עשותו בלט. הנה אלו מעשי הטלסמאות בעצמו  
 כ"ש שכתבי הקדש בעצמם מעירים בו, וכמו שנר' מפיעל האשה  
 הקוסמת אשר הלך אליה שאול שהפליגה במעשה האוב שנראה  
 לעיני שאול תמונת שמואל ונשמע לאזניו קולו אשר אין ספק לשום  
 משכיל שזה לא היה חלו' לנפש, וכמו שכתב הרב ז"ל בפירושו  
 לשמואל, ובספרו מלחמות ה' א' ז"ל אבל הית' זאת ההודעה  
 לשאול באופן מאופני הקסם, לזה כי הקסם יצטרך לפעולות  
 מה ישלם בהם התבודדות לכח הדמיון בדרך שיקבל כח עליון  
 והנה האוב הוא אחד מהמינים שישלם בו הקסם וכו'<sup>348</sup>, הא לנו  
 מבואר פועלו פעולות האוב במה יגיעו שמקסימות זולתם ומרא"ו  
 מראות רוחניות יגיע וישלם מהם הגדת העתיד. וגם כי היה  
 הענין דבר נמצא ח"ל וכמו שרוצים עכ"פ התורנים כ"ש שמעלת  
 פעולת הקסם והאוב יותר גבוה והוא להוציא נפש שמואל מגן עדן  
 והורידה לבור תחתית ואם נתגשמה הנפש ההיא על אחת כמה  
 וכמה שהיא יותר נחשבת וראוי להמלא ממנה וממדרגתה הנפלאה  
 ואם תשיב שמעלה נס היה והשי' רצה זה על דרך המופת  
 ובהשגחה פרטית זה לא יתכן, כי שאול אם לא היה יודע מאפשרו'  
 הפעל והיותו מפורסם האמות הזה מצד פעולות אחרות מפורסמו'  
 שעשתה לא היה הולך אליה, ונעריו לא היו מזמנים אותה וממציאי'

<sup>347</sup> MT, SM, YT 8:2<sup>348</sup> Wars VI, 14

אליה אם לא היו יודעי בקיאותה. א"כ השגת ישראל במעמד  
הר סיני מהקולות והענן וראש והלפידים הן שיהיה כפשטן הן  
שיהיו השגות רוחניות, איני רואה אותן עכ"פ, ובהכרח גמור  
באופן שלא היה אפשריות החשד והספק כמו שאר פעולותיו שהן  
אפשריות להכנים ספק בהן. וחשד גדול אצל הרב ז"ל. וכתב ב"ר  
על כמו זה הדרוש באחד מפניני מאמריו וז"ל, ובכלל ידמה שיהיה  
האמות הנופל מפני הפלא הזה הוא דרך ההמון לבד, והאמות  
הנופל מפני המיוחס דרך משותף להמון וחכמים, כי אותן  
הספקות והקשיות אשר שערמם על הפלא הזה לא ישערם ההמון  
וכו<sup>349</sup> א"כ מבואר הוא ונגלה שאין די למציאות הפעולות לעשות'  
התחלות מופת לבחון ולאמת מניח הנימוס ונותן התורה גם כי  
אבוש ואכלם ולא אדע איך אשיב תשובה נצחת אמיתית  
לאפיקורס בעל הריב אם יאמר שאולי זה הספור הנרחב קרה  
כלו כמו שנכתב או מקצתו, או לא קרה, ואין אדם נאמן על  
עצמו, ומה טוב היה עדות האומות ובפרט ממצרים ושכניה  
והיה נמצא בספרי דברי הימים למלכיהם כי כמו אלו הענינים  
הרשומים היה מנהג האומות כלנה לכתבם, והפלא הוא ודבר  
ראוי לשאול אם מצרים הרגישו בזה כל' שהיה מה שנעשה  
למעלה מהחכמה האנושית והיה המעשה כלו כמו מה שסופר  
למה לא היו פוקחים עיניהם והיו שבים בתורת משה, או  
לא היו מתקשים כל כך מה שנתקשו אם לא שתא' שהי"ת היה  
מקשה ערפם, אבל בעל הריב האפקורס לא ישר בעיניו ולא  
יודה וככה מלכי פלשתים עמלק סיחון ועוג ובלק מלך מואב בשמעם  
עם אחד עבדי פרעה כלם יוצאים ממצרים עיר שכלה חכמים  
על כרחם ופעלו בה בתוכה מה שפעלו משה ואהרן בלתי עזר  
מלך ושר בלתי נשענים על מי שמחזיק ידם וגם בסוף התביעו

fol. 53v<sup>350</sup>

פרעה וחילו בים והם עברו בחרבה על הים הולכים במדבר בעמוד  
ענן יומם ועמוד אש לילה, יורד להם מטר לחם הוא המן מן השמי'

<sup>349</sup> Ibn Rushd; unidentified quotation.

<sup>350</sup> On this folio there is marginal note that represents another hand of later date – it is not part of the original text.

נח ביום השביעי ובשישי כפלים, ומכמו אלו לרוב הפלא איך לא היו יוצאים להם בדרכים לראות אלו הפלאות להדברים הזרים ושבים אליהם ובתורתם ונשמעים אליהם לכל אשר יחפצו או לפחות שהיו יריאים העם כזה שמא לא יעשה בהם מה שעשה במצרים ועל הים לפרעה ולעמו ועשו ההפך וכמו שנרא' מעמלק ועוג ובלק ואחרים שהכעיסו ישראל ועוררו להם מלחמה וריב ומדון אלא שיא' בעל הריב כי זה היה כולו או לא היה או שיאמ' כי לא נבהלו המלכים מפעולות אנשים ולזה בחר בלק בבלעם כאלו חשב שזה יעמד אצלו במקום משה וישראל ויותר קשה מזה ופלא גדול מיתרו שא' עתה ידעתי וגו'<sup>351</sup> והיה חתנו המלך והמנהיג לעם בזה ולא רצה לשאר עמהם. עם כל מה שמשה הפציר בו ונדר לו להטיבו וכמה שבא בפ' בהעלותך, עם שהמפרשים אמרו כי לא רצה להפרד מהם לעולם כ"א שרצה לגייר בני ארצו' זה לא נראה כלל מה כתוב ובעל הריב לא יאמין בו, וכבר יצאנו מהמכוון ונשוב למה שהיינו בו ש"נ א"כ עכ"פ שזה החלק ראשון מהפעולות והמעשי' אין בו די להקנות לנו אמות ובחינה כוללת בנבואת הנביא ותורתו שהגיע מפי הש' ברצון לבד והשגחת פרטית ובכאן נשלים הדבור בזה החלק ונעתק אל החלק השני ובאמר.

אם מצד הקדמת ידיעת העתיד האפשרי

והוא הנראה יותר מיוחד אל הנבואה מצד מהותה וכמו שנראה מבחינת הנביא שנתנה לנו התורה כלומ' שלא יפול מדבריו ארצה ויבא ויגיע כל מה שידבר ויגיד זה אי אפשר כי הכתוב מעיד ההפך כ"פ בשל

ח וכ"פ יתרו גם כי לא מצאנו למשה הקדמת

ידיעת העתיד קודם מתן תורה ולא בעת ותיבתה עם שאין די

בזאת הבחינה כ"ש שהוא יותר מבואר הבלבול מן הראשון, וזה

fol. 54r

אם מצד ההקש, ואם מצד התורה. אם מצד ההקש כי יאמר בעל הריב כי זה ענין טבעי מחויב ונמשך אחר שלימות הכח המדמה מעקר יצירתו וכמו שהניח הפלוסוף וביאר בו מה שיש בו די במהותו ואמ'

<sup>351</sup> Ex 18:11



ומציאתו בספר החוש והמוחש, ויראה בחוש היותו כן נמשכים  
אחריו גדולי חכמי תורתנו, והרב ז"ל ח"ב פרק לו או ז"ל והענין  
ההוא הוא תכלית שלימות הכח המדמה וכו' <sup>352</sup> עם כל מה שנמשך  
בדברי הפרק כולו והר"ל ז"ל ח"ב מספר מלחמות ה' אע"פ שאצל  
הר"ל נושא הכח הנבואי והוא השכל ההיולאני לא המדמה אך  
זה לא יועיל ולא יזיק בזה וההשפעה תמידית לא תפסק ובלבד  
שההבנה תמצא ואם תשיב לי כי לא כל מי שהוא מוכן הרכנה  
המבוקשת תגיע לו הנבואה אם לא יתנסף בזה עזר אלקי וזה  
מבואר בחוש וזה הנרצה אצל הרב ז"ל ח"ב פ' ל"ב או' ז"ל וזה  
שאנחנו נאמין שהראוי לנבואה המכין עצמו לה אפשר שלא יתנב'  
וזה ברצון אלהי וכו' <sup>353</sup> וא"כ איננה טבעית. דע כי הכרחת  
בעל הריב לגלות לך סוד גדול מאמות המציאות ויער(ר)וך על  
דברי הרב ז"ל במה שאולי כווננו והוא כי אמת שהנבואה אינ'  
טבעית במוחלט ובלתי הקשר דבר אחר ולא כל המכין עצמו לה  
יתנבא אך הוא דבר תלוי במבט כוכביי בעת הלידה ובעת  
הגעת הרוחניות הנבואי, והנה ההכנה ג"כ בלמוד האנשים  
חכמה מיוחדת יותר מאחרת תלוי בזה וכן היות בעל חלמות  
צודקים או כוזבים או מגיד עתידות, והראיה בזה הקדים ידיעת'  
ביעד מעת מולדו שיהיה כך וכן במין הזה והנה מלאו ספר  
המשפט בזה, והנה בעל מגלת המגלה כתב ככה על משח כפי  
מולדו שעלה בידו, ואיננו רחוק שהרב ז"ל רמז הרצון האלהי  
לזה וזה הלוח השמור שכתבו אבונצר ובן סיני בספריהם, והנה  
ספרו של אדם הראשון אצל רז"ל והבן ודקדק דברי הרב ז"ל האותו  
הפרק עצמו ז"ל ואז יהיה האפשרות הנתלית בו גזירת השי' וכו' <sup>354</sup>

fol. 54v

א"כ הוא מבואר שיש מקום לבעל הריב לומר שהנבואה נמשכת בטבע  
ובמבט כוכביי והוא הרצון האלהי הקדום וכמו שקצת המשכילים האחרוני  
מבינים אותו. אם מצד התורה כי אין לנו

<sup>352</sup> Guide II, 36

<sup>353</sup> Guide II, 32

<sup>354</sup> Guide II, 32

כפי האות והמופת הנתן לנו בחינה וגזירה כוללת שלא תחטיא לעולם כי ירמיה הנביא בלבל כלנו באמרו רגע אדבר וכו'.<sup>355</sup> ורגע אדבר וכו'.<sup>356</sup> הנראה ממנו שאיזה יעיד שיהיה טוב או רע חוזר ושאינו מחוייב על כל פנים המצא אחד משניהם וסותר דבריו. וחולק על עצמו כמו שאמ' לחנניה בן עזור שהוציאו ממנו ומפשטו המבואר חכמי התלמוד ובפרט הרב ז"ל בנמשך אחריהם שעל היעוד הטוב ראוי שיבחן הנביא לא על הרע כי אמ' שאפשר שנחם על הרעה וכאשר שער הרב ז"ל כי אפשר ג"כ בחק השכל שאם ינחנו על הרעה שינחם על הטובה ושאפשר שיסופק ג"כ ויאמ' שזה האות הנתן לנו מאת התורה ואיננו כולל אמתי אמ' בפתיחת המשנה מה שזה נסחו אבל שיאמ' הקב"ה לנביא להבטיח בני אדם בבשורה טובה במאמר מוחלט בלא תנאי ואח"כ לא יתקיים הטוב ההוא זה בטל ואי אפשר להיות בשביל שלא יהיה נשאר לנו מקום לקיים אמונת הנבואה וכו'.<sup>357</sup> הכוונה ממנו ז"ל שאם לא נשאיר לנו זה החלק בלתי מחטיא כלום מהיעוד הטוב שאינו חוזר לא יהיה לנו צד להבחין הנביא והאלקים אם איננו דרוש על המערכ' אצל בעל הריב סבורו במקומו מונח, והפלא ממנו ז"ל איך לא זכר פסוק רגע אדבר וכו' [רגע אדבר וכו'].<sup>358</sup> בחקירתו לא במדע לא כפי' המשנה מצורף מה שאני רואה דבריו בפירוש המשנה נמלאים מספק במה שהבדיל בין הנביאים וההוברים כי יאמר ההובר בהחטיא הקדמת ידיעתו שמה שלא הגיע העתיד ההוא היה כי נחם ה' על הרעה או האריך אפו ובכלל הוא לרוב שכלו ושערו בלבול הענין הזה כולו כתב מה שזה לשונו בספר המדע פ' ז' הואיל ואדם גדול

fol. 55r

וכו'.<sup>359</sup> עד אמרו הנסתרות לה' אלקינו.<sup>360</sup> ועוד כת' ז"ל פ"ח [נמצאת אומ' שכל נביא וכו']<sup>361</sup>

עד אמרו בכשוף

ולאט ע"כ א"כ איני רואה מה שנוכל לעשות הגזרה כוללת שלא תחש'

<sup>355</sup> Jer 18:7

<sup>356</sup> Ibid 18:9

<sup>357</sup> PM, Introduction

<sup>358</sup> Jer 18:7

<sup>359</sup> MT, SM, YT 7:6

<sup>360</sup> Ibid

<sup>361</sup> Ibid 8:6; refers to Ex 2:4; Written sideways on margin.

בעת מהעתיד, והאלקים כי הוא אצלי ולפי דעתי דרוש מהיותר גדולי הספק והמבוכ' שיהיו בתורה ומהיותר יקדים ואנחנו מחשים ממנו כ"ש אצל בעל הריב בחזק טענתו שיאמ' שמלאכת המשפט מלאכת והגורלות האמתים ליודיעהם ומביניהם ויותר מזה מלאכ' התמונת הם רבות האמות בזה ולא יחטיא למביניהם כ"א על המעט מצד חסרון היודע וטעותו. גם כי יש לנו לירוא מבעל הריב שמא לא ימצא בשואל ב"ה כבי כול לומר טעות וחטא בהגדת העתיד עמו ית' ושלא יצדק תמיד. ואף במה שאיננו על צד התוכחת והישרה וכמו שנ' במעשה פלגש בגבעה ששאלו ישראל ב"ה בשם ולא הגיד להם האמת וזה פעמים אשר הוא צריך עיון וחקרה מהרבה איך ולמה הטעה ישראל לומר תעלה שתי פעמים. ואח"כ קרה להם מה שקרה, ואם תשיב כי לא אמר תעלה ותצליח הנה כל תעלה שתמצא בכתוב הוא מזה המין ועוד כי כוונת השאלה הית' אם יצליחו ואם לא, ולא ימנע א"כ שהשיב במה שלא נשאל או שהטעם וא"ת שטעה השואל בשאלה זה לא יודה בעל הריב גם כי אני רואה מה שמגיד הכתוב מנוסח השאלה האחרונ' שהשיב והגיד להם כמו מה שהיה בעתיד הוא בעצמו מגיד מנוסח השאלה הראשונ' והשנית שהגיד להם מה שלא היה ושלא קרה גם במה שמגיד הכתוב מהמשיב ה' מהתשובה האחרונ' מגיד מהתשובות הראשונ' ומי יתן ואדע להשיב אל ההובר בעל הריב כי יאמר כי אשר קרה לו בהגדתו העתיד [להיות מחטא וטעות יקרה לנביא או לישראל ב"ה בהגדתו עתיד]<sup>362</sup> ונניח זה ונשוב לדברינו ונאמר כי הקסם והנחש למיניהם ומביטי הכף והכסף וכאלה הרבה לרוב מפורסמי האמות ומגידים ספורים מהם מה שישתוממו בהם האנשים בשמעם ולזה מהר שאול אל

fol. 55v

הפעלת אוב ומלך ישראל לבעל זבוב אלהי עקרון ודומים לאלו הרבה ולזה אומ' אני שבדתות התורה אלו מלאכות היעדות שהם דברים אמתיים היו שקר התורה לא היתה דוחה מה שידעה שישראל היו מכירים בחוש השקר והכרב אבל למה ששערה שבעבור מה שימצאו

<sup>362</sup> Written sideways on margin.

ישראל מאמותם ימשכו אחריהם ואולי יטעו ויחשבום לאלהות'  
 הדחיקם מהם והנה באומות אחרות תמצא ספרים מקראי קוסמיה'  
 ומשנים קדמוניות אשר לא הפילו מדבריהם ארצה והכל היה וקרה  
 כאשר דמו. ובעלם יוכיח ומה שמעיד עליו הכתוב וכ"ש מה שאומר'  
 עליו, ומוסיפים חכמי התלמוד במעלתו עד שהשווהו בזה למשה.  
 הפלא מהר"ל ז"ל בספר מלחמת ה' שכת' שא' מבחינת הנביא הנה  
 הקדים הידיעה בנפלאות אחר שהוא הודה לרב ז"ל שהמופתים אפשר  
 שיעשה בלט ובמקום נסתר א"כ לא נראה עכ"פ זה החלק מספיק  
 להוליד התולדה הנכספת אלינו ואחר שהענין בו ממעוט בחינת  
 הנביא וחולשת התחלת, תולדתנו משני אלה הדברים כלו'  
 מהפעולה ומהגזרת העתיד לא ישאר לנו אופן הבחינה והגבול  
 האמצעי כ"א מצד [הנחת] דעות עיוניות אלוהיות ומצות זרות ונפלאות  
 רומזות עליהם שאי אפשר שיושגי על צד המחקר וההקש השכלי  
 וזה נראה שהיה ענין גדול בעיני הרב ז"ל ח"ב פ' מ' אמ' וז"ל  
 וכשתמצא תורה שכל הנהגותיה וכו'<sup>363</sup> עד אמרו ושהתורה תהיה  
 אלהית ויראה יותר שרוצה אצל אבן רשד בהפלת ההפלה  
 בגדר הנביא מצד שהוא נביא הר"ל ז"ל פ' ו' ממלחמות ה'  
 ואצל האפודי בא' ממאמריו האלקיים האלקים אם איננו יותר  
 מבואר אפשר התחבולה והנחה אנושית מהשנים הנזכרים.  
 ועתה שמעני אדני ואדברה אלו הדעות והידיעות  
 העיונות דהניח משה בתורה והאמינו בו אבותינו אחריהם  
 ובעבורם לפי זאת החלוקה השלישית לא ימנעו מחלוקה אם שהם

fol. 56r

יסכימו עם המושכל או לא עוד כל א' וא' הוא תקון הנפש  
 או תקון הגוף אם יסכימו עם המושכל גופיים היו או נפשי'  
 אינם מיוחדת ומהם א"כ לתורה מצד מה שהיא זאת התורה  
 המיוחדת ומהם לא יוכל להבחין נבואתו כי איך ולמה  
 נשמעו שקבלם מפי הש"י והנה כבר הושגו לזולתו מהאנשים  
 החוקרים הבלתי מדברי עם הש"י ומה התפארות הוא על  
 זולתו אם מחרי' ישותפו עמו ולמה ייוחד זה בשלימות על

<sup>363</sup> Guide II, 40

זה ויותר ממנו ואם לא יסכימו כמו שנראה יותר אבל  
 יתחלפו מהחקירה השכלית מה המופת א"ח שבזה החלק  
 מוכרח להבחינו כפי החלוקה השלישית שיתן לנו שזה שהוא  
 מגיד מהדעות כאלו תאמר חדוש העולם וגמול ועונש כפי  
 הכוונה ההמוניות שזה יש לנו מפי ה' ית' ומה הבחינה  
 והנסיון הנמצאים בזה שמא לא מלבו בראם והמציאם כי  
 שערי הנסיון נעולים בזה הצד ואיננו כמו הענין בהגדת  
 העתיד והפעולות שעין בעין יוכל להראותם ופנים בפנים  
 ואם תאמר הבחינה בזה כל עוד שהם יותר חולקים עם  
 המושכל ושלא יהיה להם שום התיחסות עם השכל  
 והמחקר ההקשו וזה הפארתם ומעלתם ובעבור זה תקרא  
 אלקית כמו שהשיבו לי קצת גמולי ויונקי הקבלה החדשה אשר  
 מקרוב באה בחיי אין חולק על ההקש מה שאראה יותר מדעות  
 הנצרים א"כ היה יותר אלהית וזה מבואר ח הבטול כ"ש  
 אם הענין הוא כאשר חשבו חכמי גדולי אומנתינו הרבה  
 והרב ז"ל בראשם בצד מה ואם נראה חולק בצד אחר שיהיה  
 נמנע לנביא להשיב בנבואה המושכלות העיוניות ויהיה  
 אצלו מושכיל ראשון מה שהוא מושכל שני לחכם שאינו  
 נביא גם שיהיה נמנע לנביא להשיג בנבואה ידיעה או  
 מושכל מה שאי אפשר שתפיל בו לא בכל ולא בחלק ידיעת  
 החכם שאיננו נביא כמו שחושבים הר"ל ז"ל בפתיחתו לספרו

fol. 56v

הנכבד מלחמות ה' ושני הנשיאים הגדולי החכם ר' קלונימוס  
 הנשיא בא' מפניני מאמריו, והנשיא ר' אברהם הלוי בן חסדאי  
 בא' מהגהותיו בהעתקתו וספר מאזני צדק לאלקזלי הוא נגלה א"כ  
 שזה מבואר הבטול שיהיה זה החלק תאר עצמי מיוחד  
 וראשון לנביא מצד מה שהוא נביא עד שמה שיאמר ויניח לנו  
 יהיה נמנע היותו בלעדי מפי הש"י כפי הכוונה הכוללת הרבני'  
 ואם תשיב כי הניחם מצד העיון לבד ושיש עיון גדול מיוחד  
 לנביא לא יתעורר בו מעצמו כ"א שאיננו נביא אע"פ שהוא  
 הקשי ושנאמינהו ונבחינהו בזאת נכספה וגם בלתה נפשי

לראות עין בעין זאת החקירה אנה היא ואיך היא ונדעה כי מופתיו יהיו באופן מהחוזק והשלמות שיהיה נמנע הכנס המחלוקת בהם עד שנוכל לקראם מופתים מוחלטים ונשתעשע ונשמח בהם. ואחר שהענין כן ומצאנו באלו ה"ג גבולים והתחלות מופת מהחולשה והרפיון מה שלא יעלה וראינו אותם בחוש גדולי הספק ורבי החשד מה נשיב לבעל הריב ומי יעמד נגדו במקומו עלינו ויורה חציו במגדליו וישפוך סולליו בתוך חומותינו ויאומ' ככה אשאלכם אתם מאמינו משה ותודיעוני אנה היא חכמתכם ובינתכם הגדולה הנמצאה בתורתכם ובחוקותיכם שאומ' לכם משה, כי בעבור דעותיה ומושכליה מצוותיה וחוקותיה תקראו בין האומ' עם חכם ונבון הגוי הגדול הזה<sup>364</sup> איה הענין הגדול היוצא מכל הקש עד שנבהלו בו אבותיכם ואתם אחר הם היה לאיש מה להניח דרך ספור והגדה לבד חדוש העולם בזמן פלוני ובתואר פלוני הרמות גדולות הם להניח ולספר ספור שהשי' מדבר עם האנשים והנשים ומשגיח בפעולותיהם וגומל ומענש כפרי מעלליהם ויחרה אפו למי שימרה בו וכהנה רבות מהאמונות והדעות ההכרחיות לתקון הקבוץ המדינה וכדי שלא יפסד הישוב עד שהחליטו אבותיכם

fol.57r

המאמר שהיה נמנע היות אם לא מפי הש"י ושלא היה אפשר שמשה הניחהו בשכלו, והנה התורות כלנה לפני זאת ואחריה כן עשו והנה יפו מאד בזה מליצתם וספוריה' והמצאת מעשיהם יופי וסוד נפלא מה שהוא מיוסד בלבבות המאמיני' ומחוקק בדמיונם כמו שתורתכם מיוסדת ומחוקקת בציריכם ומחשבותיכם ואף כי לא נמצא בזה בתורה זולת לתורתכם מה חכמתכם והקשיבם שתש(י)בו לפילוסוף ברבות מופתיו וראיותיו על שקרות חדוש העולם והשגחה וגמול ועונש כמה תעזרו מדברי משה רבנם, מה החכמה הצפונה שהצפין לכם שתכזבו מופתי בעלי

<sup>364</sup> Dt 4:6

ריבכם המראות עצומות עשה, כי הניח מציאות עלה  
ראשונ' נבדלות ואחת קודמת ומציאות נבואה, עם מיצות  
מעשיות או אזהרות רמוזות ואלה מה שהפלוסוף יתפאר  
יותר בזה כי המציאם בכח שכלו ורוח בינת חקירתו והפליא  
בהם הפלא ופלא. העוד תתפארו בחלק המעשים כל' החלק  
מתקון הקבץ המדיני ומי יאמר ומי יוכיח שמה שיסדו אבירי  
הפילוסופי ועצתם בזאת החנמה המדינית ומה שחדשו  
כאלו הדינים לקסמי רומי ויון הנקראים היום דתי האמפרדור'  
ומוסרי חכמים מן ישמעאלי' אל דיני ישמאלי' בבליים כשדיי'  
הודיים פרסיים ודומיהם הרבה שלא יהיו יותר נאותים  
אל השכל המעשי המדיני מאלו ומה המופת והראיה שאלו  
יהיה באופן הסדר להיושר שיהיה נמנע בחק השכל'  
האנושי להניחם ולהשיגם אם לא בנבואה ומפי השי' ויותר  
מזה ענין הלוחות והכתוב בם מעשרות הדברות שהוריד  
משה מן השמים, מה נפלאות בהם והנה כלנה או  
מהשגות בחקירה או מפורסמות בכל אומה גם כי הם הם  
שנצטוו בני נח והמבין פ' ל"ג מחלק ב' יוסיף הפלא בזה

fol. 57v

אינ' רואה אותו מחוייב עכ"פ בלי ספק.  
ואם תשיבני האדון הלא אצלינו ראייה מבוארת נגלית מאד  
אצל החוש לא נוכל להכחישה יש לאל ידת  
שנעשה ממנה התחלת מופת, והיא הגמולים והעונשים  
וההשגחות הפרטיות אשר אנחנו רואים תמיד אם בכלל  
האומה ואם בפרט האישים וכמו שנראה לנו בתורה ובנביאי'  
מהעונשים שהיו נמשכים אליהם תכף מרותם ואחר מרדם  
וזה בדור דור ואף גם היום, העבודה כליל תפארתי שזה  
יותר מוליד לי מבוכה על מבוכתי ומצוקה על מחלתי כי  
אראה שפע סדורי ספורי שאר התורות והיותו מפורסם  
ביניהם אדוקים בהם ונהרגים עליהם זוכרים הפרטים  
כלם להוסיף באמות הענין האישים וזמניהם ושמותיהם  
ומשפחותיהם וזמן היותם כל' בימי מלך פלוני בימי

קיסר פלוני ופרקי השנה שבו נעשה המעשה ההוא או קרה  
הספור וההגדה ההיא ושם עידותיהם ויתר הדברים כלם  
המצאות שלימות מאד וספורים נערכים במזה במשקל  
מפעלות נביאיהם ומעשי חסידיהם הנוראים והנפלאות  
שהיו מחדשים ברצונם מה שלא היה אפשר שיא' בשום  
צד שלא היה ולא נברא לפרסום העניין ההוא באומה וזה  
כולו הן במעשה הן בדבור הן ברשומי אותיות מכתבי תורתם  
וחותמותם הפסולים אצלינו שמות מאמרים פסוקי ולחשים  
מיוחדים לאלהיהם וזכרון קדשיהם וכומריהם וכל אותן  
העדיות הגדולות שיש לנו בקיום דעתינו מכמו אלו הדברים  
והעניינים בעצמם מקובלים להם איש מפי איש ונגלה לעיניהם  
עין בעין לפי מאמרם אין קץ לדבריהם זה בזה וזה ככה  
כלם פה אחד מסכימי לקיום דתם והוסיף אמונה על  
אמונתם, ואם יתעורר בעל הריב וישמעו בזה יאמר  
וימציא לזה ולזה התר אחד כולל לכלם באחד משלשה דרכים

fol. 58r

או בכלם יחד אין לנו דרך להכחיש אפשרותם, אם האחד ענין  
וסבה שמי מיית וכמו שכתב הר"ל ז"ל בספרו הנכבד מלחמת  
ה' פ' ששי מח' ג' אמ' וז"ל וכבר יקרה זה הענין מצד המערכת  
וכו' עד אמרו יגיע לו נזק מצדם<sup>365</sup> וראוי לעיין בדבריו, כי  
מופלאים הם, אם השני לסבת השגחה כוללת אלהית  
מפאת מנהיג המציאות כלומ' בטבע האלהי המאחד  
והקשור חלוקי העולם קצתם בקצת באופן שהם בתכלית  
מהסוד והשלמות הרוצה בקים המציאות וזה עמוק ומופל'  
מאד רק מאד העיון לא ישיגוהו כ"א שרידי הפילוסופי'  
אמרו הפלוסוף באות הלמד ממה שאחר, ובן רשד בהפלת  
ההפלה שאלת ג' והעיד עליו בהרבה מקומות מנרבוני  
וכל זה לפי דעתי העיד ורמז הר"ל בפ' הפ' באמרו ז"ל  
ועוד שכמו וכו' עד אמרו לא בטלו.<sup>366</sup> והשלישית שלקחת

<sup>365</sup> Wars IV, 6; note that he refers to it as to *heleq gimel*.



מה שבמקרה מקום מה שבעצם, וההפך מביא האנשים הרבה פעמים בראותם קצת ענינים נמשכים אחר קצת פעולת לחשוב שזה נמשך בעבור זה בעצם ובצד שהוא סבה פועלת עצמית מכוונה מה שאיננו כן, כי זה לא יגיע תמיד אחר הפועל ההוא ושלא יחטיא אבל פעם אחד יום א' או פעמים וכת' הרב ז"ל ח"ג פ' ל"ז וז"ל, ומה שנעורר עליו שנותם שנותני הדעות וכו',<sup>367</sup> וימשך אחר הדעת ההוא, גם כי יש הרבה גמולים ועונשים שכליים נמשכים בהכרח אחר הפעל הטוב או הרע אבל באופן אחר סודי משכיל מאד עם המושכל האמיתי וכמו שבאר בעל הניסוי בספרו בפ' התורה, נוסף בזה אשר לבעל הריב להשיב כי לפעמים שומרי הדת יניחו ויגידו דברים היו או לא היו למען ישמעו ויראו ויתוקן הקבוץ המדיני כי מותר הוא לשנות

fol. 58v

מפני שלום העולם, וגם מחוייב לפי דעת אפלטון כמו שהוא מחוייב לרופ' ומותר אצלו להעלים מהם ולא קצת אמתות או להחליפם בשקר למען יתוקן ונניח התרה בעל הריב כי לא יאותן לנו בשום צד ואשוב לשאלתי ומבוכתי במה שנמצא לשאר התורה כמו לתורתנו ואומ' א"כ שהוא מבואר שאם תורתנו אלהית ר"ל מתן אלהי על צד הרצון הפרטי והחסד, וכמו שאנחנו מאמינים אי אפשר שתצדקנה, כי ההמון דתות תורות רבות יחד שלשה ארבעה או חמשה כפי שרשנו ושורש כל תורה ותורה והתחלותיהן כי רבו כמו רבו במה שעבר וכן עוד היום ואם האחת תצדק תכזבנה האחרות בהכרח אצל מניח התורה והנימוס זה יצא לי ראשונ' לחקור ולדרוש על הנבונה במה תבחן התורה שהאלוה ית' נתנה ואתה שמש ומגן להולך בחושך באור חכמתך תגיה חשכי הגדול הזה והאירה ממכבוד יפעתך מעט או הרבה על אהלי

<sup>366</sup> Ibid

<sup>367</sup> Guide III, 37

כי אם אינך לי מי לי והאל יכפר לי.

## **Annotation**

**Name:** Jánošíková Magdaléna

**Faculty:** Philosophical Faculty

**Department:** Germanistika – Kurt and Ursula Schubert Centre of Jewish Studies

**Name of the thesis:** Eliezer Eilburg: Criticism of Miracles

**Supervisor of the thesis:** Visi Tamás, M.A., Ph.D.

**Number of signs:** 241709

**Number of attachments:** 2

**Number of utilized sources:** 80

**Key words:** Eliezer Eilburg; philosophy; miracles; prophecy; Biblical criticism; Jewish studies; Jewish history; medieval ages; early modern period; Saadia Gaon; Maimonides; Gersonides; Spinoza; Silesia; Moravia; 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Characteristics of thesis:** The thesis analyzes a 16th century Hebrew philosophical text composed in Moravia, which criticizes Jewish beliefs in miracles, prophecy, and the preeminence of laws. The text is entitled “Ten Questions” (Eser She’elot) and was written by Eliezer Eilburg in the 1560s or 1570s. As the text is unpublished, the thesis contains a transcription of the relevant parts of the Hebrew text from the only surviving manuscript accompanied with an English translation. The content of the work is analyzed in the context of medieval and early modern Jewish philosophical discourse on miracles. Eilburg’s rejection of the divinity of the Torah through criticism of miracles makes him one of the most radical thinkers cultivating Aristotelian philosophy in early modern Central Europe.