Libes Briv

[1a] To my dear brothers and sisters in this exile. Some loving thoughts for you concerning the verse “Love your fellow as yourself” [Leviticus 19:18]. [trans.]

At the same time, however, a sorrowful meditation about our grievous exile, in concert with a thorough examination of the reasons for the length of our exile.

And finally, a proposal for the hope of our redemption. We should live to see the prophecy of Isaiah [59:20], “He shall come as redeemer to Zion,” speedily in our days, amen.

Introduction

[2a] Listen dearest brothers and sisters. I have endeavored to compose this Libes Briv for you. Will you show me the same love, as is proper, and read this brief letter? If there are scholars, they should not think that it is a waste of time to read Yiddish. They could well say that were this writer a scholar or a devotee of scholars, he would have written in Hebrew. However, I ask my dear brothers to pardon me, for I know that Hebrew is an exalted language and requires a knowledge of grammar. Whoever is not a good grammarian cannot write Hebrew without mistakes. I have found [such mistakes] in many new books and letters, written by so-called scholars. Therefore, I did not want to write in Hebrew, in order not to publicly expose the weakness of my knowledge before my dear brothers. Perhaps, exposing my shortcomings would have prevented you from reading my letter.

Secondly, think of it as a newspaper. Nowadays, the finest and most important people, scholars and rabbis read them, or have them read to them.

Third, I ask you to take an example from very great [2b] sages of Israel, such as Rabbenu Saadiah Gaon and his Sefer Emunot ve-Deot, Rabbenu Moses Maimonides and his Sefer More Nebukhim and other holy books which were written in Arabic. Similarly, Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot by
the sage Rabbenu Bahya was written in Arabic, so that everyone, even the common man, could read it and acquire benefit from it for himself and his soul. It was only later that these books were translated into Hebrew by R. Judah and his son R. Samuel ibn Tibbon.

Therefore, I have written this, my Libes Briv, in Yiddish as a common man who does not claim, heaven forbid, to be a scholar, to my equals, common people. But still, if a scholar should happen to read it, perhaps more good than harm will come of it. Indeed, although I cannot count myself among the scholars, be assured my dear brothers that, thank God, I served great scholars for many years and was diligent in my studies, thank God, at yeshivas. Afterwards, I diligently read very many old holy books which unfortunately are rarely available and are even more rarely read by scholars. I can count myself, in good conscience, among the ordinary students who served scholars. The sage, our teacher Rabbi Sheftel writes in his book Shefa Tai at the end of the introduction, Ben Meiiah Shanah where he calls himself a disciple of Rabbenu Moses Maimon and Rabbenu Moses Cordovero. [3a] “The disciples of the wise increase peace in the world.”¹ This can be understood [as meaning], those disciples of scholars who do not consider themselves rabbis, sages, or scholars increase peace and do not engender controversies. I hope that this, my Libes Briv will help bring peace to Israel, with God’s help.

If as I can imagine some scholars should find it objectionable even to read these few lines of introduction, I would ask my dear sisters, especially the wives of scholars, “the wife of a haver is like a colleague,”² including the learned women who are interested in reading what is new in Yiddish. “Arise you distinguished quiet women, hear my voice. You daughters who are quite confident, let my speech reach your ears.” [trans.] This was indeed said by the prophet Isaiah 32:9. I hope to God that when you have read this letter you will not, heaven forbid, find anything offensive in it. Therefore, please ask your dear husbands and your children [to read] these writings of a man who does not demand money, much less, heaven forbid, honor, but [writes] only out of inner sincere love from the bottom of his heart for his dear brothers and sisters for the honor of God. Take the time to read these few pages for your sake and mine.

Should someone find a mistake, according to his opinion, or in reality, [3b] I would ask [them] not to be hasty, but consider that we are all sinful people. Everyone has faults and naturally can make mistakes. There is hardly a book that exists that is read by many people where the author did not err, according to the opinion of some [readers], or in fact.

¹B. Berakhot, 64a.
²B. Avodah Zarah, 39a.
Rabbenu Moses Maimonides writes about this in his small book, *Ma'amor Tehiyat ha-Metim*, [and] gives a very nice example or *mashal* concerning the verse “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one” [Deuteronomy 6:4].\(^3\)

Also, Rabbi Joseph Albo in his *Sefer Ikkarim*, book two [has] a note\(^4\) that is [addressed] particularly to every scholar. It would be more useful and sensible to read this entire holy book. He too begs his readers not to be too hasty in attributing faults to the author when they read a book. Therefore, I ask you to pass over any mistakes I might make and completely read the few pages of this *Libes Briv* with patience. If you should find some difficulty, do not judge until you have read this letter completely. I hope and ask God to give you long life as merit for this. He will give you children and grandchildren who occupy themselves with Torah and God’s commandments for His great name’s sake, in wealth and honor. May the prophecy of the prophet Zechariah 14:9 be fulfilled in our lifetime, “In that day there shall be one Lord with one name.”

**Chapter One**

[4a] “Love your fellow as yourself,” [trans.] is a central principle in our holy Torah. It receives approval, not only from all the sages of Israel, but also from the sages of the world. Hillel went even further. Someone came to him wanting to convert to Judaism on condition that he teach him the whole Torah in the time that he could stand on one foot. Hillel said, “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary thereon, go and learn it.”\(^5\) [trans.] That you should love your friend as yourself, is a fundamental principle of our holy Torah. Or as Hillel said, what is hateful or loathsome to you, you should not do to your friend. This is the whole Torah. The rest is only a commentary. What person will or can be so blind not to observe such an important rule and in this manner not seek to observe the whole Torah and not to take the opportunity to observe this to the highest degree with all human diligence.

**Chapter Two**

Before we attempt to observe this principle we must first examine what is loved, good, and pleasant for us, or what is [4b] hateful, evil, or repugnant to us, in order that we not do anything contrary or repugnant to our friend or, heaven forbid, to ourselves. Often, there is something that we like very much and we think that this thing is good, useful and pleasant for us. In the end, it turns out to be the opposite. We often

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\(^5\) B. *Shabbat*, 31a.
lament that something is bad and repugnant to us and it turns out to be
good and pleasant for us. We find many verses concerning this in
Proverbs and examples in many books. Daily experience also teaches us
this fact. Concerning this, there is an old common maxim that one should
say, "this too is for good" about everything. Our sages said, "A person is
required to bless the bad just as he blesses the good." This is because we
do not know what is bad for us and what is good. Only God alone knows
the final outcome.

Chapter Three

However, in order to examine and reach clear conclusions it is
necessary above all to know and observe that everything God created
under heaven and on earth, no matter how small or how large, is
composed of the four fundamental elements, fire, wind, water and earth.
[trans.] This point has its truth and is not disputed by anyone until the
present. Indeed, there are some scholars who wish to dispute the number
of fundamental elements. [5a] It is not my aim or purpose to refute them.
I only wish to write that all of creation which contains within it these
four fundamental elements, falls into four categories or types of being.
The first is called inanimate, namely that which lies quietly in the earth
and cannot move. The second is called vegetable, i.e., that which moves
and grows out of the earth. The third is called living and has use of the
five senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and feel. The fourth is called
living and speaking. Not only does it live, but it can speak. This are we
human beings.

In addition, we must know that every category has many species and
every species has many individuals. The first category, inanimate,
contains within itself the four fundamental elements but consists of
numerous varieties, many of which are familiar. For example, stone that
cannot be smelted and metals that can be smelted. The stones too are
divided into many types, namely, building stone, slate, and the many
precious stones that are known to us. There are many types of metal that
can be smelted, namely, iron, lead, tin, copper, brass, silver and gold and
all types of metal. I want to leave the examination of this category’s
nature [5b] to the alchemists and materialists.

The second category or substance is vegetable, which grows out of
the ground. This one also contains the four fundamental elements within
it. However, it is called vegetable because it has something additional in
that it has potential to move and grows out of the ground. This category
contains within it very many species which are very familiar to us

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6B. Ta’anit, 21a; B. Sanhedrin, 108b.
7M. Berakhot, 9:5.
humans. Namely, all varieties of herbs, flowers, and grains: rye, oats, barley, wheat, peas, lentils and many more, as well as all varieties of trees. Every species has many thousands and thousands of individuals. Although we call everything that grows out of the earth vegetable and consider it one category, and although herbs, and all trees or grains are called one species, every farmer and even more so every gardener knows that not all herbs or all flowers or all trees or all grains have one nature. Each species must be treated differently. Each must be sown or planted in its own time. Every tree, fig, apple, vine, and cherry must be treated separately. Farmers and gardeners know their nature. God willing, I will subsequently discuss whether all people are required to study this.

The third category or substance is animals, that which is alive and contains within itself the four fundamental elements. It also grows, but has much more. [6a] It has life and five senses. This category, living, also has many species that are familiar to us. Namely, wild animals that live in the forests. Lions, bears, wolves, foxes, deer, etc., are all called living. On the other hand, there are many types of domestic animals. Oxen, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, dogs, cats, are all domestic animals and live. Birds, including chickens, geese, ducks, and similar domestic and wild fowl are also called living. There are also so many fish that they literally cannot be described. They are in the category of fish. There are also all kinds of vermin. Rats and mice are called vermin. Creeping things, all kinds of worms and insects are in the category of insects and are living things. Every intelligent individual can decide whether everything described here is considered to be within the category of living.

Undoubtedly, those species in the category called domestic animals do not have the same nature. Is what is good for one, good for the other? I will take an example from the domestic animals that are best known to us. A dog and a horse are considered in the category of living. They live and are in one category; they are both domestic animals. For example, a master has a very handsome horse and a very handsome and faithful dog. He loves them both very much, because they serve him very faithfully, both at home and on the road. The horse and dog also get along with each other very well. [6b] The dog does not allow anyone to harm the horse. The horse suffers patiently when the master rides and puts the dog on the horse or in the wagon with him. One day, the master comes home with his horse and dog in terrible weather and miserable roads. The master, as well as the horse and dog are all exhausted. He puts them in a dry stable and orders that both should be taken care of and fed well. If the servant puts a large sack of oats before them both, this is not only good for the horse, but his best [food]. On the other hand, the dog will die, because it is not his nature to eat oats. Similarly, if the
servant would put a large pot of meat and bones before both of them, this is not only good for the dog, but his best food. On the other hand, the horse’s nature is not to eat meat and bones and he would die.

Every person can find many similar examples of creatures familiar to us that do not belong to the same species, but are all called living things. Rather, they comprise many different species that are named domestic animals, wild animals, and birds, “according to their species,” as we find in the holy Torah in Genesis 1:21. Similarly, within each species, every individual is not identical. What one likes is not the same as what another likes or [considers] pleasant.

[7a] It is not my aim in this Libes Briv to describe the nature of all creatures. My knowledge of natural sciences is too weak. This is an important subject, as many sages and rabbis, whose souls are bound up in the bonds of eternal life, [have written]. Particularly what Rabbenu Moses Maimonides writes in his book More Nebukhim, especially in treatise 1, chapter 34. Every scholar should see what Rabbenu Shem Tov writes in his commentary on this chapter. Rabbenu Bahya also recommends it highly in his holy book, Hovot ha-Levavot.

There is a divine emanation [shefa] in every little herb or flower, in each and every tree, in every living thing, from the biggest wild and domestic animals, birds and fish to the smallest plant. As King Solomon said, “Lazybones, go to the ant” [Proverbs 6:6]. One can find important ethical lessons, if one only considers ants. “How many are the things you have made, O Lord; you have made them all with wisdom” [Psalms 104:24]. Here one can consider the might and wisdom of God. We can also recognize that he is “A compassionate and gracious God” [Exodus 34:6]. He is a merciful God and his providence is over each of his creatures.

The great sage, Abrabanel, writes much about this, especially in [the torah portion] Vayeze,8 concerning Jacob’s dream, “A stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky” [Genesis 28:12]. He wanted to show that everything God created, from the earth to the heavens, [7b] should be contemplated by degrees. Through this one can attain supernal wisdom. One finds the same [idea] in the book of the great sage and son of martyrs Moses Albelda, Reshit Da’at, treatise 3, principle 2, chapter 1, and in other holy books. I only wish to remind everyone the extent to which they are obligated to examine this according to their knowledge and abilities.

My aim in this treatise is to examine only one creature, to which my task belongs. Indeed, the one that God created last, that is, the human being. This creature belongs to the category of animal. Similarly, since

8Commentary on the Torah (Hebrew), loc. cit.
man grows he belongs to the category of vegetable. He also contains the four fundamental [elements] like the category, inanimate. But man has many more characteristics. He is not only called living, but living and speaking. A living creature that can speak. The term, speech, makes him much more advanced in that with his speech he can accomplish much more compared to other creatures. I do not want to undertake to examine all of human nature. It would be too lengthy to discuss here, but will be discussed later.9

Even if one only wants to study man, there is too much to write about, as many scholars report. One must write many thousands of pages to consider the might and wisdom of God [8a] with regard to one limb. Medical science has great knowledge of this as Maimonides informs us in his Peraqim.10 One can also gain not only knowledge of medicine, but also natural science and anatomical science. Many scholars, especially Rabbenu Moses ben Maimon make this knowledge an important discipline. He particularly cites in his Peraqim, chapter11 the verse from Job, "[When] I consider how I am created, I can see the might and wisdom of God" [19:26]. [trans.] Rabbenu Bahya, in his holy book, Hovot ha-Levavot also writes extensively about this in Sha’ar ha-Behinah.

I would like everyone to consider this according to his abilities as he is required to do. My examination only goes so far, that God with his fullness of mercy and grace, created me as a person that is called living and speaking. My primary purpose is to thoroughly examine the primary rule, “Love your fellow as yourself,” [trans.] and how best to fulfill and observe this, in the way that is beloved and pleasant to God. Therefore I wish to generally examine how God created the first person, whom we people are descended from, with God’s help, in order to explicate this central rule according to our holy Torah.

Chapter Four

[8b] We find in our holy Torah in Genesis chapter 1, verse 27 how God created the human being. “And God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him.” [It] further states in chapter 2, verse 7, “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being.” It would be too difficult and too lengthy for me, or someone like me, my dear common brothers to explicate the meaning of “In his image, in the image of God.” The learned will find many explanations in the books of the

9Wetzlar does not discuss this later.
10Shemone Peraqim, chap. 1.
11I could not find this verse in the Shemone Peraqim. The closest parallel is Job 11:7, at the end of chap. 8.
sage Rabbenu Moses Maimonides, in the books of the perfect scholar, Abrabanel, in the Akedat Yizhak, in Sefer Ma'ase Adonai by the sage R. Eliezer Ashkenazi, and in many similar holy books. I can refer to such [books] to overflowing, but they remain to be read. The true scholars of Kabbalah know more and I a poor, sinful and ignorant person must modestly restrain my hand from writing about it.

As for the other verse, however, “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being.” The way it is translated in the Yiddish Bible which was printed in Amsterdam, 1670\(^{12}\) is a good translation. “And the Lord God made the man out of the dust of the earth, and he blew a living breath into his nostrils and the man had a living soul or neshamah.” Indeed, if the words [9a] “breath of life” (nishmat hayyim) and “living being” (le-nefesh hayyah) are too complicated and difficult for us common people to understand, the scholars and rabbis in the above mentioned, and other holy books by certain sages and rabbis, whose souls are bound up in the bonds of eternal life, whose merit should preserve us, find it sufficient for us common people to know and understand that God first made a body out of the earth and then blew a living breath into it. This is how we acquired a holy soul.

Thus, we know that the species called people consists of a body and a soul. Through our body we, together with other creatures who live, come under the category of animal, since we too are living. We are much more advanced, however, because of our holy soul that God gave us, and are called speaking. Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan clearly [give] this translation of the verse, “He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being” [Genesis 2:7]. “He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a speaking spirit.”\(^{13}\) In short, we understand from this, that we are called speaking because of our holy soul. This is the highest species that God created under heaven, so to speak, and placed on the earth.

Chapter Five

So far we have found our sameness or equality. Namely, we people are called one species, living and speaking, equally consisting of a body and holy soul. [9b] Nothing remains for us in order to reach our goal, to properly observe, “love your fellow as yourself,” but to know what is truly good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant and repugnant to us. With this

\(^{12}\)The translation of Yekutiel Blitz, published in Amsterdam, 1678. Wetzlar probably got the date 1670 from the approbation of the Council of the Four Lands which was dated 1670.

\(^{13}\)Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan to Genesis 2:7.
[information], we can treat and love our friend or encounter him in such a manner that is good and pleasant for him.

This must naturally be studied by considering all the creatures that are below us or are inferior to us. What is good and acceptable to that category, and to consider the goodness and acceptability of that species and what advantages it has over the category that is below it, or inferior to it. Is it indeed considered good? For example, the category inanimate, which lies in the earth, such as stone, or similarly, copper, tin, silver, gold, consists of the four fundamental elements, fire, wind, water, and earth. They cannot move or grow out of the earth.

After this follows the category of vegetable, or all things which by their nature grow from the earth. [They] consist of the same four fundamental elements as the category, inanimate. However, they are superior to the inanimate category, or the category which cannot move. In contrast, vegetable or what grows out of the ground, can move out of the earth. The better and more beautifully it moves out of the earth, the lovelier, more beautiful, and better it is than the category inanimate and therefore, in the nature of the category vegetable quite proper. [10a] In contrast, if vegetables that are supposed to grow, remain lying in the earth and do not move, and do not grow out of the earth at all for which it was created and is called vegetable, it is inferior to and lesser than the category of inanimate, which is usually considered inferior. Such a plant is not good or pleasant for itself, much less for another. The category of inanimate is considered good, in comparison, when it can fulfill the function for which it was created.

So it is with the category animal or everything that is called living. This also consists of the four fundamental elements and is also called vegetable and grows like all herbs, flowers and trees. However, it is far better than the category of vegetable, which grows and has no life. Most of all, it has no senses. It cannot move itself from place to place by itself and run after what it likes or escape from what is harmful to it. It cannot help itself, much less others of its species. In contrast, is the category of animal or the species that lives, has its five senses, hearing, sight, smell, taste, and feel. It can move from its place and according to its nature, run, fly, swim, or crawl, wherever it wants. It can go to what is good or escape from what is bad for it. It can serve others in this or other ways, as quickly, skillfully, or strongly as each species [is endowed] with its senses and bodily strengths. As lovable or acceptable it is for itself, so it is lovable, useful, and helpful [10b] for others and for man and is therefore good.

In contrast, when an animal or living thing does not have full use of its senses or other physical powers, with which it was created, or out of lack of aptitude, laziness, disease, or some similar lack, cannot use them,
much less can they be used by others nor serve them, then such a living thing is inferior to or less pleasant and useful than a plant, which in its perfection grows out of the earth and can be used. Therefore, such an animal is not considered good or pleasant for itself, much less for others.

Dear brothers, so it is with us people. We are called living creatures that can speak. With the name, living, we are as good as other animals that are alive. With the great merciful help and grace of God, however, through the name speaking we also have something which is incomparably more precious and priceless than all other living things and all creatures of the earth. This is our holy soul that God gave us. It is a light, “The soul of man is the lamp of God” [Proverbs 20:27], which is given to us by God.

[11a] If we use this light correctly for the purposes that God gave it, we can, with God’s help, attain by degrees the highest level of that which is pleasant, beloved and most truly perfectly good, that is to the true light from which our soul derives. “By Your light will we see light” [Psalms 36:10], to attain the life of the world to come. This is called truly good, as is clearly demonstrated in many holy books. However, everything else in this world which is good or beloved, is only an imaginary, foolish and transitory good. This is so clearly demonstrated that every person, who is only a human being, or wishes to be a human being, can naturally comprehend that which is truly good and beloved for us.

This can, however, be more clearly and truly demonstrated with the intellect and from our holy books. It is an important question asked by many sages. Why has God created man, when he does not need us? In addition, as all sages agree, God created the whole world for the sake of man and put everything under his dominion. As at the beginning, it is clear to see in Genesis chapter one, verses 28, 29 to 44. King David also clearly says so in Psalms chapter eight. Though it was examined by very many great sages, no other, [11b] truer, reason was found. God did a great act of lovingkindness (hesed) when he made us as human beings and put a holy soul into our bodies which comes from a supernal light. We bring the soul higher than it was before, to the true light of the world to come, through good attributes and virtues and by being pious and doing good. Therefore, we can enjoy those things which are called true, beloved and good.

God has shown us his hesed even more by giving us a great light or torch in addition to this light, our soul, which is called “Lamp of God” [Proverbs 20:27]. This is his holy Torah which is called light (Or) and his commandments are called lamp (Ner), as the verse clearly states, “For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah a light” [Proverbs 6:23]. This great light, our holy Torah, is also called good, as all sages write and as the verse clearly states, “For I give you good instruction” [Proverbs 4:2].
Therefore, through the great and good light which is our Torah and commandments, we can bring the light which is our soul to the highest level, which is the highest possible good, the life of the world to come. Through this we can fulfill his holy will, to attain the great hesed or which God created us people.

Now that we know what is truly good and beloved, we can easily and immediately fulfill our ultimate purpose, "Love your fellow as yourself," to love our friend as we love [12a] ourselves so much as is humanly possible. When we fully and properly utilize that which makes us superior as speaking beings, that is our holy soul. In contrast, when we people as living and speaking beings, heaven forbid, do not utilize the image, superior to other living beings, which God in his infinite mercy and hesed has given us for our good, partly out of laziness or partly, because of our great sins, because of worldly lusts, or similar weaknesses, we do not do good for ourselves. Consequently, we can serve others or our friends even less. It is consequently natural to comprehend with human understanding that we, like other creatures, when they do not want or cannot use those things which make them superior to other creatures, are inferior to the species that are otherwise lower than us. We, heaven forbid, would be worse than other animals that are lower than us. This is also clearly shown from the verse in Isaiah, chapter 1, verse 3. "The ox knows its master or purchaser, the donkey the manger of its master, Israel however, does not know me, and my people do not want to think about me" [trans.] Everyone can read the end of Psalms 49 from [verse] seventeen to the end. The conclusion is "Man does not understand honor; He is like the beasts that perish" [Psalms 49:29].

R. Eliezer Alzar\textsuperscript{14} interprets this in his book [12b] Maasei Adonai, in [the section] the deeds of creation, chapter 10, "When human beings do not utilize or contemplate their perfection or dignity, they are compared to an animal. But not to a living animal, since the living animal which has attained the perfection for which it was created, is much better than him. Rather, such a person is only compared to an animal that is carved out of wood or some other material. He is compared to a living animal that is carved or cast." [trans.]

This is the highest level of that which is not good for us, but is evil and, may God protect us, hateful and repugnant. We have to exert ourselves, with the help of God, to keep these sicknesses and hateful, evil things away, or remove them from ourselves. Instead, we must keep in mind and aim with all our thoughts and deeds and always work with all

\textsuperscript{14}This should be R. Eliezer Ashkenazi. Cf., C.B. Friedberg, Bet Eked Sefarim (Tel Aviv, 1954), Vol. 2, p. 656.
our powers to reach that which is truly good, with the help of God, and fulfill, “Love your fellow as yourself.” “What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend.”¹⁵ [trans.] And seek to keep our friends from doing hateful, evil things and to get rid of these things. Through this [13a] we fulfill “You shall not hate your kinfolk, reprove your kinsman” [Leviticus 19:17]. Help him [attain], with the help of God, that which is truly good for him. So, we have found with the help of God, that which is useful, truly good, and beloved to have ourselves guided by it, and to attain our ultimate purpose, to fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself,” and “What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend.”¹⁶ [trans.]

Chapter Six

Dear brothers, I would like to continue my writing, but I must put the pen from my hand. My hands become heavy. My eyes are full of tears. My heart stands in water. I must call out: Woe to me. Woe to me that I have sinned. I have been wicked. I have transgressed. I am filthy from my sins. Because of our many sins, I am completely stained and unclean from sins. My soul, because of our many sins, is also sick. Should I write my dear brothers a Libes Briv? Should I fulfill, “Love your fellow as yourself” and “What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend?” Should I love my friend as myself when I, because of our many sins, do not love myself? Should I turn my friend into a sinner like myself, and thereby increase my sins even more? No. No. This is a physician who cannot heal himself. I do not, because of our many sins, love myself. My soul is also sick, because of our many sins. How can I love others or cure them? Therefore, I decided to put my pen down, to lament and bewail my sins [13b] and endeavor to first heal and love myself. At this opportunity, I turned to God, with many sighs and tears, to help me and to provide a physician who could cure or heal me, with God’s help.

Chapter Seven

Listen, dear brothers and sisters. After I had put down my pen, as mentioned, I dragged around days and years with my thoughts. How difficult a job it was to cure or heal myself, to make myself good, or to mobilize within me that which is truly good for me. How to fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself” was even more difficult. [trans.] I often thought, must you fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself,” to love your friend with your and his soul and do what is good and beloved for both of you, when you cannot do so for yourself? Fulfill the verse with his and your

¹⁵B. Shabbat, 31a.
¹⁶Ibid.
body, with that which is good and beloved for both you and him. Do you like good food and drink? Fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself” by giving your friend food and drink. Do you love honor? Give your friend honor. Do you love money? Give your friend money. In this manner you can easily fulfill the commandment “Love your fellow as yourself,” and educate your friend so that he would behave similarly toward his friend. [14a] This appears to be very easy. However, when one studies human nature, it is as difficult to fulfill physically as it is spiritually.

Chapter Eight

I must first briefly describe human nature. Namely, we people contain within us the four fundamental [elements] like all other species of creation that are below us or inferior to us. It is known to all scientists that if one fundamental [element] is dominant in man, such is his nature. Therefore, one can find clear examples of four types of human nature.

First, there exist people who do not think of money, property, honor, much less their soul, when they have gobbled their fill of food and drink and other desires of their heart. Such people are no better than the category of animals, namely domestic animals, wild animals, or fowl.

Secondly, there are people who think more than domestic or wild animals. They do not ask for food or drink at all, if they could only accumulate enough money.

Thirdly, there are people who go further. They ask for little food, drink, or money, if they could attain enough honor to [satisfy] their vanity. They spend money and provide food and drink when they can become a leader of the community (Parnas) [14b] or attain some similar honor.

Fourth, there are people who do not ask for food, drink, or money, much less honor. In short, they ask nothing for body or soul. They seek only revenge, saying that revenge is a tasty morsel.

So, dear brothers, how should one fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself?” If one takes the first type of people, those who only demand gluttony and drinking to excess, and the lusts of their heart, they are, as previously mentioned, no better than other animals, domestic or wild animals. They have various natures like other domestic or wild animals. As in the above example of the dog and horse, what one likes does not appeal to another and is contrary to his nature. He is not served by money or honor. Should I give him food and drink? If I had a good chicken, there are those who would say, I cannot eat chicken, it does not fill my stomach. I need good beef. If I give him beef and chicken in addition, it is not enough. He must have all types of food and deserts. If I have sweet, he prefers sour, etc. If I want to give him a glass of wine, he
does not want it. He must have good beer. In short, everyone will understand that when I want to love such a person like myself and give him food and drink as good as I have, they can starve because of their broad necks and normally pleasure filled lives.

[15a] If we take the second category of people, those who seek nothing in the world other than money and property. Were I to honor such people, give them food and drink, they would not accept it. Were they to accept it, they would be neglecting their business dealings. If they were to accept it and miss their business deals, they would curse me afterwards and say that I did not do this out of “Love your fellow as yourself,” but out of spite that he should miss out on his business deal. If I were to say that I want to share everything with him that belongs to me and which pleases me, it would not be nearly enough for him. Rather, he wants to acquire the whole world. Therefore, it is impossible to fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself” with such a person.

If we take the third category of people, those who, because of our many sins, have nothing but a puffed up empty arrogance and demand nothing but honor. When I give them food, drink and sufficient money, but if I do the slightest thing to damage their honor, with a little word or some similar foolishness, they become my enemy, and I have badly handled “Love your fellow as yourself.”

If we take the fourth category, devotees of victory and vengeance, no food, no drink, no money, no honor, or anything else in the world helps; only the unleashing of their angry thoughts and deeds. There are many other differences in human nature to write about. For example, the natures of people who live under oppressive governments. Human nature, like the nature of domestic and wild animals, like the nature of trees, vegetation, different landscapes and what grows in them, has many differences. [15b] However, I want to pass over this since it does not serve my primary purpose. Every person can decide that it is very difficult to physically serve our friend and to behave according to the verse, “Love your fellow as yourself.”

With these reflections, I once again put down my pen and thought that God only demands of us that which we can do. That which we cannot do, we must leave alone.

Here I cannot neglect to write that since the first time I put down my pen, I tried very hard to search for a helper in many places who would not only help cure my soul but also assist me in my goal that I have thought about reaching for many years. How I can fulfill completely the great principle, “Love your fellow as yourself” with regard to my dear brothers. Unfortunately, my efforts to find one living person who could or would help me reach my goal were in vain. Indeed, thank God, there are people in many holy communities who could, with God’s help, have
advised and helped me. However, the distance was too great and it was too difficult for me to travel around to them. It was also too difficult to write to them. Also in part, the burdens of business, earning a living and other hindrances made it impossible. Who knows if any of them would even answer me?

Chapter Nine

[16a] I contemplated the sad and pitiful condition of our grievous exile in such circumstances. I had already painfully thought about this for many years. However, now that I could not literally find a single living doctor in this exile to cure my soul and even more so to contemplate the grand causes, I decided to leave the living human doctors and helpers alone in my deliberations. I turned again to my holy books as my deceased human doctors and helpers. In this way, [I hoped] to make it possible for me to fulfill the verse “Love your fellow as yourself,” as I dearly desired, but could not. At the very least, I would see what was possible for me, with God’s help, to repair my soul and to guide my sons and daughters on the just path.

As soon as I turned to my deceased physicians with my painful considerations about the length of our exile, God brought into my thoughts the very first physician for my soul. This is Rabbenu Bahya, who in the very beginning of the introduction to his holy book Ḥovot ha-Levavot writes, in the name of a sage, “He who wishes to be truly cautious, should not anticipate too much.” [trans.] [R. Bahya] continues, “I said to myself, If everyone who intended to do something good, to demonstrate the right way or to proclaim justice, [16b] kept silent until he felt himself perfectly qualified, there would have been no word uttered since the days of the prophets whom God purified for the sake of his mission and then crowned with success.”17 Translation, when someone wants to be concerned with accomplishing good things and to show the correct path, if he would wish to remain silent until he was able to fully accomplish his desires, then after our prophets nobody would be able to begin to speak or to do anything. For God, has chosen the prophets and strengthened and helped them for this [task].

[R. Bahya] writes further, if someone wished to have all the good attributes and could not attain them, and would leave behind those he could indeed partially attain, then all people of this type would be completely devoid of all good attributes and good deeds. In brief, he continues more fully that this is, because of our many sins, the incitement

of the evil inclination, who seeks to restrain the person by force from doing even a little bit of good.

This holy book is readily available in Hebrew and Yiddish\(^\text{18}\) and everyone can read it. The condition of our grievous exile never left my thoughts though I have studied this holy book for more than twenty years, thank God, and had memorized this introduction. In contrast, I sadly found very many of our brothers and sisters preoccupied with clothes and other possessions in their puffed up arrogance and did not want to remind themselves of the condition of our grievous exile. I finally had cause [17a] to finish this *Libes Briv* for my dear brothers and sisters in our exile and to remind them of our condition so that they might also take to heart the sad condition of our lengthy exile. However, nothing held me back except that I wanted to fulfill the verse “Love your fellow as yourself” properly. I have found myself, however, that it is, because of our many sins, a subtle, clever incitement and hindrance by the evil inclination, as is fully explained in the holy book, *Hovot ha-Levavot*.

Once again I took the pen in my hand, thank God, and hope to demonstrate through this reminiscence a great love for my dear brothers and sisters which is very healthy for their bodies and souls. I hope and plead to God in his great mercy and lovingkindness that he account it to me as if I had completely fulfilled the commandment to “Love your fellow as yourself” and it should be a repair [tikqun] for my soul and God will resolve everything for the good.

**Chapter Ten**

If someone would wish to reproach me and say, who is this writer? He must certainly be some pauper or scoundrel, who must suffer much exile because of his shabby situation. No my dear brothers, whoever thinks this is mistaken. Thank God, whose lovingkindness has never left me. If every hair on my head [17b] and beard were one hundred thousand tongues, I would not be able to sufficiently praise and thank God for all the lovingkindness He has done for me. Especially, not only do I have an honorable income, but also, thank God, for the honor I have from all of my nobles and important people. Everyone who knows me and my circumstances would have to admit that less than twenty thousand Jews in this exile are as honored or favored by nobles and influential people as I am. Although we all pray in all our synagogues for

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our land's rulers and their advisers, as our sages say, "Pray for the welfare of the rulers,"\textsuperscript{19} I composed a special prayer for his majesty our king, his advisers and all the nobles.

Were I to write about my inner heartache, especially about our faith, a hundred folios would be insufficient. Though all nobles and [gentile] scholars know and admit that we believe in the one true and eternal God and that our holy Torah, the Torah of our teacher Moses is true, yet we must suffer many attacks. My constant sigh is to live to see the verse from Zechariah 14:9, "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; In that day shall be one Lord with one name." I hope that nobody will disagree with me and everyone, even if they are the richest person, the greatest magnate, the most influential, will find his share in this grievous exile.

[18a] Indeed, although the \textit{Olelat Ephraim} writes in his introduction, that there are four groups that do not think about the exile. With God's help, this story will be told later.\textsuperscript{20} They will nonetheless find their share in this grievous exile. As soon as they even walk in the street or travel on the roads, they will have to bear it when the smallest or most insignificant youth will throw stones or dirt at them and scream the most insulting curse words at them.

Here one can well ask or reproach me, is this called "Love your fellow as yourself," or "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend?" Is this love? Is this what is hateful to you, do not do to your friend? You yourself admit the indescribable anguish you have about the length of our exile. So you remind your dear brothers and sisters, some of whom, perhaps do not even think of it and live happily and contented, so that their joy is marred and they should live in indescribable anguish. Dear brothers and sisters, my reminiscence and reflection on our grievous exile is not for the purpose of leaving you in such anguish, heaven forbid. Rather, it is to examine the cause of our long lasting exile, and with the help of God, correct the causes and to clear the evil out of the way so that we might live to see the above prophecy of Zechariah chapter 14 and the other prophecies which are clearly found in our prophets.

\textbf{Chapter Eleven}

[18b] My opinion of the cause of our long exile, is, as befits a common man, not brought from far away, but from the prayerbook in which \textit{Pirke Avot} is printed and which every ordinary man and woman, boy and girl, even small children who can pray, recite at least three times

\textsuperscript{19}M. \textit{Avot}, 3:2.
\textsuperscript{20}He does not discuss this later.
every summer. Right at the beginning, in the first chapter, in the second mishnah it says, "Simeon the Righteous was of the remnant of the Great Assembly. He used to say, the world stands on three things, on Torah, on Avodah and Gemilut Hasadim." This is translated, Simeon the Righteous, who was one of the remnant of the Great Assembly, said, the world stands on three sorts of things, on the Torah, on worship, namely worship of God, through sacrifices or our prayer, as I will explain further more fully, and on acts of lovingkindness.

So dear brothers if these are the main three pillars on which the world stands and we examine how these three things are observed by us, then there is no reason to wonder about our long exile. Rather, we have much more to wonder about the great grace and compassion of God, that he still allows the world to exist and allows us to continue in it. We must praise and thank Him continually, day and night. [19a] If someone were to say, only one man, Simeon the Righteous, said this. Who was he? Does not the name Simeon the Righteous itself show that he already had the title "Righteous" in those times, but what's more, he was of the remnant of the Men of the Great Assembly. And who were the Men of the Great Assembly? Because of our many sins, not everyone knows. Whoever wishes to know this, need only read what the erudite scholar Rabbi Abrabanel writes in the first introduction, in his book Nahlat Avot. The prophets Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Ezra the Priest [and] scribe, who are well known to us, were among the Men of the Great Assembly, which consisted of one hundred and twenty members, among whom was Simeon the Righteous. Our holy sages in the Talmud, B. Yomah, 39a, tell that this Simeon the Righteous was high priest for forty years and many miracles occurred during his tenure as high priest. Everyone can see what kind of person he was.

The above mentioned erudite scholar Abrabanel writes even more in his book Nahlat Avot, in the above mentioned mishnah two, chapter one. Namely, how Alexander of Macedon wanted to wage war against Darius King of Persia. He traveled to Jerusalem and the Jews were very frightened. Simeon the Righteous went out to meet him, as high priest in his eight garments, along with other elders of Jerusalem. As soon as Alexander of Macedon saw Simeon the Righteous, he alighted from his wagon and bowed deeply to Simeon the Righteous. All the kings and officers were amazed. [19b] However, Alexander of Macedon said to them, do not be amazed. I see the image of this man every time I am victorious in my wars and vanquish my enemies. I saw him in a dream last night and he commanded me to do thusly. Alexander of Macedon went to Jerusalem with him, and left Jerusalem and the Jews in peace. As

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21The garments worn by the high priest only the most solemn occasions.
one sees further in this book, Alexander of Macedon's teacher, the famous scholar and philosopher, Aristotle, was with him and he discussed much with Simeon the Righteous about all the disciplines, both natural science and theology. Aristotle could not get over his wonder at Simeon the Righteous' wisdom. Aristotle cites many things in his writings that were explained to him by Simeon the Righteous.\textsuperscript{22}

Dear brothers, I have troubled you at great length specifically about this Simeon the Righteous and especially about our holy Men of the Great Assembly who did much good for us and in particular established our whole order of prayer which still lives more than two thousand years later in all communities of Israel. We are as obligated to believe and to practice what one of these sages said, as our oral Torah as well as our written Torah. There is no doubt that the world stands on these three things, as the above mentioned Simeon the Righteous said, namely Torah, divine service, and acts of lovingkindness. [20a] Whoever wants to be an proper Jew is obligated to be concerned that these three main pillars are conserved or maintained in good condition. In the contrary case, as mentioned, one should not wonder, because of our many sins, at the length of our exile.

\textbf{Chapter Twelve – The Pillar of Torah}

Many scholars write with regard to the first pillar, namely our holy Torah, that the world stands on this pillar alone. I, a poor sinner, an empty and ignorant person can unfortunately judge very little, only that little which I have found in our holy books, and what I have actually experienced, seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears and, because of our many sins, must still experience daily and see and hear. My dear brothers, that is, those like me who are only ordinary people, my goal, is to fulfill out of love, the verse, "Love your fellow as yourself."

"Your fellow" is translated, your comrade or friend, your equal. In order to fulfill [the commandment], and to contribute my meager and inferior opinion, I must first ask the pardon of all sages, rabbis, and learned men, those who are worthy to carry such titles and who study Torah for the sake of heaven, that what I am writing here is for my equals, my dear brothers, and is being written out of love. They should not assail me or, heaven forbid, become angry that I take God as witness that I am not writing this to make a spade out of it [Torah],\textsuperscript{23} or to make money from it, because, thank God, I do not need it. Thank God whose grace has never left me, I am also not writing this to make a crown out of it,\textsuperscript{24} or to

\textsuperscript{22}Cf., \textit{Encyclopedia Judaica}, 3:448f. for the sources of this legend.

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{M. Avot}, 4:5.

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}
make a reputation. I know myself and in my life have never [20b] portrayed myself as a scholar. I am only writing what is true, and as mentioned, what I have seen and heard. God loves the truth. His seal is truth. I hope to God that all the true sages, rabbis, and scholars of the Torah, who study the Torah of truth for the sake of heaven, will agree with me. My opinion is also strengthened by what I found in many old holy books by many sages and rabbis whose souls are bound up in the bonds of eternal life. I hope that their merit will support me and that through my writings I will remind several of my friends to repair their souls and my soul will also be repaired. For others, who might dispute it, thank God, nothing is intended.

Chapter Thirteen

Therefore dear brothers, we common people must first know what the word Torah means in order to examine how the great pillar of Torah is conserved. Torah is translated as teaching or law. The root of the word Torah is *yarah*. This is translated as instruction or teaching. We find both our positive and negative commandments in this holy Torah. Positive commandments means those things that we should do. The negative commandments are those things that are forbidden to us. These commandments are called light (*ner*) and our Torah is called light (*or*). This indeed means ordinary light, but it is also used specifically for a great light as is explained at length above in chapter five. This can also be seen in the beginning of the *Shnei Luhot ha-Berit*. [21a] *Or* is a great light, a torch. We also find in other verses *or ha-boker*, the morning light which is a great brightness and light. Our Torah, laws and teachings are our light through which we can find the true path and attain the true light of life in the world to come. Our holy Torah is truly a great and fundamental pillar.

We must honestly consider how we are required to treat this main pillar, namely our holy Torah, and how it is treated in reality, in this grievous exile. As far as I know, it is treated in very negative ways. Indeed, *Rabbenu* Bahya the Dayyan lists ten positive attributes in his holy book *Hovot ha-Levavot, Shaar Avodat Hashem*.25 This book is printed in Yiddish for our common use and great benefit. Therefore, every ordinary person, that is my equals, can read this book. However, I only want to write about what I have actually seen, heard, and experienced in our times.

First, concerning common people, especially those in the countryside. The ordinary person who unfortunately does not have the

ability to maintain a teacher must thank God when his children get so far as to be able to pray, read and write. It is easy to imagine how much they know about God, our holy Torah or much less about our faith. Yet, I have found many such common people who know that there is one God. They would [21b] gladly allow themselves to be martyred, for the sanctification of God’s name. They would not knowingly commit a sin. Their income could turn very bad and yet they would not demand anything from other people. They have no envy, no arrogance and no disputes. They behave in such a way that one can truly say as King David says in, “Happy are those whose way is blameless” [Psalm 119], verse 3, “They have done no wrong but followed His ways, to understand God and His ways.” [trans.] However, the majority, because of our many sins, do not know much more than cattle. Who is responsible? The common man has no greater ability to have his children taught more. Our communal and national leaders do not see this, much less think about establishing a fund for the teaching of Torah to help common people. I have often personally experienced, that a very wealthy person who has no children, or whose children are grown would let the common man drop dead rather than help him pay for a teacher. Such people ‘fulfill’ “Love your fellow as yourself” in the following way. Since they are useless, they want their friend and his children to be as useless as themselves. Often, when a common man complains to the head of his community, the leader says, of what concern is your pauper trade to me, I have to worry about the whole land.

It says in Pirke Avot, chapter two [mishnah 2], “Whoever occupies himself with communal affairs should do so for the sake of heaven.” [trans.] [21Aa] These communal leaders do not think enough about this. However, when presentations are made or there is a special occasion, these communal leaders know no limits to their puffery and in draining the blood of country people with their authority. They will even skin people alive. Woe to such communal leaders. Here no one will be offended, when I write that the rabbis are also partially responsible. Namely, those rabbis who only think about receiving their rabbinical salaries, what they receive for performing weddings, and for giving out many titles of hover. In contrast, they very carefully watch over the slaughtering and examining of animals. The slaughterers must diligently come before them for examination, so that they will receive their fees. However, they have no desire to examine those slaughterers and teachers who want to slaughter young children, or to say that a fund for the study of Torah [be established] or that officials be appointed to supervise how children are brought up and taught Torah and how they should serve God. These rabbis do not think about these things. I do not want to spend
much time with such rabbis in this world, much less in the world to come.

Secondly, I have found both in small and larger villages, and also in some cities, not only common people, but also wealthy people, who go further. They have their children taught how to pray, reading and writing, *humash* and the reading of the *haftorah*, so that they can review the weekly torah reading and recite the *haftorah* in the synagogue. I do not want to linger over this group, only to recommend that they read the above mentioned chapter in *Hovot ha-Levavot*, where they will find their title, [21Ab] “with the understanding of a donkey carrying a load of books.”[26] Who is responsible for what I found, heaven forbid, among some of these people and that conditions are not better? I can only relate this to what I said about the first group.

Third. I found a type in all places and among many people, who go even further. They say, the child won’t become a scholar. Let him study *Ein Ya’akov*. He studies *Ein Ya’akov* and can repeat in Yiddish what his teacher has taught him. I can judge very little about what type of book this holy work is. Undoubtedly, many important things are found in it, as one finds if one reads the author’s introduction. Every proper scholar will know *Midrash Tehillim*, chapter 104, which is mentioned in many books, especially in the *Adekat Yizhak*, gate 2. “Rabbi Simeon ben Yehozadak asked R. Samuel ben R. Nehemiah, since I have heard that you are a master of aggadah, how did God create the light.” Here it is clearly seen that great secrets of the Torah are found in the aggadah. The holy book *Ein Ya’akov* is composed entirely of *aggadot*. One also finds much in the commentaries that now are printed with it. However, one finds much more in other holy books, in the above mentioned *Akedat Yizhak*, in the holy book *Neveh Shalom*, in *Sefer Reshit Da’at*, and in the books of *Rabbenu* Moses Almosnino. There is also much in the books of the famous gaon Rabbi Ephraim, the author of *Sefer Olelat Ephraim* and in his other books, *Ir Gibborim* and *Siftei Da’at* [22a] which are currently readily available. In addition, *Kaftor va-Ferah*, which is entirely a commentary on *aggadot*, *Nefuzot Yehuda* and other similar books [are available]. One finds commentaries on the *aggadot* in these books, but not the terrible things which the schoolteachers, who do not know better, because of our many sins, teach to children and translate. I hope people will not be offended if, with a thousand pardons, I ask you as an ordinary man, out of love for my dear brothers, if one fulfills one’s obligation to God if one admits that a child who cannot learn more than *Ein Ya’akov* and furthermore, from a teacher who, himself, does not know

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more than the translation of the words according to their ordinary meaning, as his teacher taught him, and who considers all the stories in the whole *Ein Ya'akov* to be literally true, should be taught *Ein Ya'akov*.

I only ask this question, "The heart alone knows its bitterness" [Proverbs 14:10]. He who examines hearts knows my thoughts, because I was stirred to consider our condition in this lengthy exile. Because of our many sins, literally every day I had to hear, from important nobles and gentle scholars, how they mocked, derided and scorned our faith and our holy Torah. They flung in my teeth what we Jews have in our Talmud and what we Jews believe. When I refuted them according to my minimal abilities, they swore that these things were told to them by Jews, themselves. [22b] They sometimes even named the Jews. I had to hear such things, with pain and anguish, a thousand times, because of our many sins. I ask the great rabbis of the land and other scholars to consider if such a curriculum of study is correct. I ask them again, with a thousand pardons, not to take offense. God is my witness that I write this for the sake of heaven and out of love for my brothers. They should ask great scholars about the curriculum of studies for their children. Communal and district leaders should take steps to insure that our holy Torah and the teachings of our sages, and especially *aggadot*, which contain secrets of the Torah should not be, heaven forbid, mocked, scorned and derided.

Fourth. I have found people, both in cities and villages, who, for the sake of heaven, want their children to become scholars. They spend great sums for tuition and bring expensive teachers into their homes. The child very quickly acquires the alphabet, the prayers, and begins the study of the *humash*. Before he can even pray, the teacher says, the child is assimilating the *humash* very quickly. He can study very well and it is a sin to waste the time on *humash*. He will certainly become a scholar. He can study Bible by himself when he is an adult. He begins to study *Mishnah* with the child. When the child has learned several *mishnayot*, the teacher again says, as do other scholars, because of our many sins, it is a waste to spend the child’s time on *Mishnah*. He is very intelligent. One must begin studying Talmud with him. [23a] The child begins the study of Talmud and does very well. In short, he studies *halakhah* and *Tosafot*, begins to read Torah, and possesses the highest quality, namely arrogance. Everyone says that the child is becoming a great scholar. The child becomes *bar mitzvah*, preaches very well and continues his studies for several more years.

Everyone says that the youth learns so well that he has the potential to be a scholar and his father should send him to a yeshiva. This happens and the father spends large sums of money. The youth spends several years at yeshivas diligently studying *halakhah*, *Tosafot*, and his teacher’s
casuistry. Eventually, he imagines that he has no further need of the yeshiva. He can study the rest at home. In short, the youth acquires a great reputation and matches are proposed for him. His father writes that he should come home. He arrives home with the title of hover. If he is from a village, he gets up in the synagogue and preaches a sermon with elegant explanations that he has composed. If he is from a city, he gives a casuistic lecture. He acquires great honor in it.

The youth gets married. It sometimes happens in cities that such a young man is invited to preach in the synagogue after his wedding, since he has studied in a yeshiva. He stands with haughtiness and arrogance, with apologies to the holy ark with its Torah scrolls, and preaches falsehoods. First, the interpretations he presents are, because of our many sins, swindle and falsehood. Secondly, he says it in his own name. [23b] He never learned it in his life. The worst aspect of the sermon is that, because of our many sins, hundreds of children, even those in their mother’s womb, are cursed by the fact that pregnant and suckling women wish upon themselves that the child in their womb or at their breast should, God willing, become like him. God have mercy. It also occurs quite often that such a scholar, if not right under the wedding canopy, then immediately after such a sermon, receives rabbinic ordination. Thus, the scholar is completed.

God have mercy. According to public opinion, the pillar of Torah on which the world is supported, rests solidly on such types. When all this is past, the parents and in-laws begin to say, thank God, our child is a scholar, but “Excellent is the study of Torah together with worldly occupation.” [27] One must acquaint him with business. So the scholar becomes a businessman. He is a businessman just like he is a scholar. He only knows swindling and conniving. The swindle of business drives the other swindle out of his mind and this scholar does not know a single verse in the whole Torah, much less Mishnah, or the Shulhan Arukh, in order that he should know how to live like an proper Jew. He never even dreamed about ethical works. These types, even if, because of our many sins, they are successful in business, they are the worst and most corrupt people in this world and in the next. If they are unsuccessful in business, there is nothing left for such a scholar but to flee.

[24a] Dear brothers, I have spent much time on these scholars and their curriculum of study. I had to add this, because I have often thought about the sad and painful condition of our exile. I have experienced how, because of our many sins, the prosperity of business diminishes and with how much difficulty and bitterness we must search for our living at present. The majority of business, because of our many sins, consists of

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27M. Avot, 2:2.
swindle. I finally concluded after I had read many old books written after
the talmudic period, from almost a thousand years ago, the books of
Saadiah Gaon, the holy book Hovot ha-Levavot and the holy books of
Rabbenu Moses Maimonides, until approximately sixty or seventy years
ago, that these great sages only taught the plain truth. They only wrote
books of literal truth and ethics to repair their souls and the souls of
those who read their books. At that time, prosperity and business were
easy and simple and the abundance of wealth was maintained. Today,
however, because of our many sins, our holy Torah is unfortunately
turned into a swindle by many evil scholars. The truth is hard to find.
Similarly, God have mercy, our income and livelihood are difficult and
business is swindle and wealth is very unstable.

In contrast, among the Sephardim, the study curriculum is as God
desires, as the great sage Rabbi Sheftel writes in his book, Vave ha-
Amudim, chapter 5. Therefore, I believe that because of this the
abundance of wealth and business have permanence among the
Sephardim. I believe that [24b] many of my dear brothers will agree with
me since I am writing the truth. I do not want to write the truth about
who is responsible for this. Rather, let everyone decide and arrive at the
truth for themselves.

Fifth. There is another type of scholar, who is raised like the fourth
group. Their curriculum of study is identical to the previous group, until
the time of their marriage. After the wedding, however, they are far
better than the previous group. They do not intend, heaven forbid, to
take a wife, give her a ketubah and a divorce to the holy Torah.28 Rather,
he knows very well that he must set aside time for the study of Torah. He
also goes to older and greater scholars to seek their advice on what he
should study, for the sake of heaven. He is advised to study a page of
Talmud every day. In cities, people go so far as to establish societies for
the study of Talmud. They are called Shas society or Shas fund. There is
an established time every day when they study a page of Talmud
together. There is no doubt that the talmudic sages explained our oral
Torah sincerely and truthfully. The whole Torah is not contained only in
our dear Talmud. Rather, it is a great pharmacy where all remedies may
be found and all the wisdom to cure our body and soul. However,
everyone must know the remedies that are healthy for him, according to
his nature. He must take from the pharmacy that which is healthy for
him. If there are two sick people, one with stomach problems and the
[25a] other with a headache because of a head cold. If the one with the
stomach problems obtains spirits and ointments for head colds from the

28This expression is found in an earlier work, Igrot Shelomim. Cf., Assaf, Mekorot,
Vol. 4, p. 115 n. 3.
pharmacy and applies them to his head or washes his head with them or inhales them, his stomach will not get any better. When the one who has a headache because of a head cold, takes the stomach drops, his head cold will not disappear.

Dear brothers, I repeat again that I am only writing the truth which I have unfortunately seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears. It is certainly true that the rabbis of the land who, God with his holy will, caused to be rabbis, must be proficient not only in the four Turim but also in the Talmud so that they can explain the basis of every law and not, heaven forbid, to be mistaken in law or instruction, or err in a matter of halakhah. Similarly, heads of yeshivas and other teachers, who have students, or judges who are elected by the will of God, must certainly have this education, as do young men and other young scholars who aspire to these positions, for the sake of heaven. It is obvious and healthy since we need to have rabbis, judges and especially scholars of Torah who raise up students for the sake of heaven.

But I am writing to my dear brothers, my equals, who are businessmen and who have no intention or ability to become rabbis or even less to teach students, to tell them what are they obligated to study, for the sake of heaven, so that they can repair their soul. I spoke to these scholars who are members of Talmud study societies. I also stayed with them for several weeks in several communities. I swear, I heard several of them recite the grace after meals and others the daily prayers. They could not read Hebrew, but mangled the words. I saw and heard such scholars at night when they were very tired stay up, for the sake of heaven, until midnight studying their page of Talmud, and the next night spent three to four hours at the class. I thought about why they spent so much time in casuistic argument so that they almost came to blows with each other. I found, because of our many sins, that no pure, no impure, no kosher, no treif, no guilty, no innocent, no ritually suitable or unsuitable, no forbidden, no permitted, no law, much less ethics or strengthening of faith, or answering of heretics resulted from their casuistry. Because of our many sins, it was not worth that a scholar should spend a minute of his time, for the sake of heaven engaged in this.

At this opportunity, I discussed with several of those who were my good friends and asked them to tell me what kind of repair for their soul comes out of their studies. I examined which tractates they spent their time with and studied in the past three or four years. What laws did they learn from this, through which they could fulfill the commandments of our holy Torah? What kind of ethics for their soul? Could they in their relations with nobles and gentile scholars defend their faith and sanctify the name of God? Were they able to demonstrate the unitary
truth that we believe in one true God? They were silent and had no
answer to give me.

I had the book Havvat Yair brought to them and showed them what
the author writes in responsa 123 and 124, pages 115b-118. I asked them
if they would not do better if they studied the tractates relating to Tur
Oreḥ Hayyim and study in conjunction with it Shulḥan Arukh, Oreḥ
Hayyim. I told them that they could not do better than to study grammar
as much as possible. Thereby, they would be able to read Hebrew
properly and pray to God. I asked them further if they did not think that
it was very necessary that they read ethical books, in order to improve
their deeds, adding a recommendation for the holy book Hovot ha-
Levavot. Immediately, I read the introduction and showed them several
useful things in it. I also showed them that the famous sage R. Isaac Luria
ordered his students to study the Hovot ha-Levavot daily. The famous sage
Rabbi Isaiah writes similarly about the Hovot ha-Levavot in his book Shnei
Luḥot ha-Berit, at the beginning of the section, Bet Aaron. In addition, the
end of the section Asarah Hillulim is an extract from the book Hovot ha-
Levavot. Also, even Rabbenu Moses Maimonides ordered his son to read
the book Hovot ha-Levavot daily. In short, I convinced several, with the
help of God, to change their curriculum of study, [26b] in the manner
suggested by the very learned author of the Havvat Yair. They promised
with a handshake to study the book Hovot ha-Levavot diligently. They
kept their promise and thanked me ever after for this.

I cannot corrupt my pen and paper with some of the haughty and
arrogant answers that I received, but only report what several answered
me, for the sake of heaven, from the Talmud. “God has only the four ells
of halakhah in this world.” I asked several people to tell me what is the translation of the word, halakhah. However,
they did not know the correct answer. I finally showed them the
explanation of this talmudic passage in the book Neveḥ Shalom treatise
seven, chapters one and two. Thereby, I convinced them that they did not
understand this talmudic passage or aggadah better than any other.

I also found common people who quoted the passage, “Everyone
who reads Pereq Shirah every day is guaranteed a place in the world to
come.” They believed that if they only recite Pereq Shirah every day,
they have the world to come, and can continue doing all manner of evil.

29B. Shabbat, 98b.
30B. Niddah, 73a.
31This statement is found in Sefer Ikkarim, Book 3, chap. 1. I. Husik in his edition,
Vol. 3, p. 9 n 1, cites S. Baer, Siddur Avodat Israel (Roedelheim, 1868), p. 574 n, that
there is no such statement in Talmud or Midrash. He cites this passage in Sefer
Ikkarim as the earliest reference to this statement.
No, my dear brothers, Rabbi [Judah the Prince] and R. Eliezer did not understand it this way. Praise God, I gave a correct interpretation of this verse which is too lengthy to write here. It is also not my purpose. Whoever wants to know an explanation of this, can read the *Sefer Ikkarim*, Book three, chapter one. Thank God, my explanation agreed with this book for the most part.

The reason I have written so much about this type of scholar is that [27a] because of our many sins, the scholars who rely on this above quoted talmudic passage and believe that if they study one or more pages of Talmud everyday, and are certain of their share in the world to come are very numerous. They not only do all sorts of evil things, but also, because of our many sins, they cause the name of God to be desecrated among common people who say that scholars are among the most contemptible people, doing the worst deeds. I heard this with my own ears. They believe, because of our many sins, that all scholars are so. They do not respect scholars and are reluctant to hire them or to allow their children to study. I ask my dear brothers to recognize whether this does not cause us to bemoan our situation, that such scholars should support the Torah, the main pillar on which the world exists. Woe to us for we have sinned. How is our holy Torah diminished and scorned! How is the holy name of God desecrated! How is our faith put to shame and ridicule! What merit will support us, to redeem us from our painful exile?

What is most sorrowful, is that, because of our many sins, I found worthy people, who know and understand much better than I could tell you, how our holy Torah should be studied, but they tearfully lamented that because they are poor they must give lectures and have students. They would be considered ignoramuses and would lose their income if they did not participate in the swindle. Does not one have reason [27b] to cry loudly, oh woe? I may not write who is at fault here, but will allow every worthy and just person and those who study Torah for the sake of heaven to decide.

Sixth. I found a group of scholars who go even further and study the tractates of Talmud related to the *Shulhan Arukh*. But which sections, those related to *Hoshen Mishpat*. They reflect on the Talmudic passage, “He who wishes to become wise should occupy himself with the laws of monetary matters.” Many such people are to be found, because of our many sins. However, they do not understand what our sages meant when they said, “he who wishes to become wise should occupy himself with the laws of monetary matters.” Rather, they employ their wisdom and learning in order to give people advice in lawsuits and to acquire a

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32B.Baba Bathra, 175b.
reputation as great scholars. In addition, people should employ them as advocates. I do not want to spend much time on this group, since the great scholar, the author of the Havvat Yair, wrote enough about this group in the above mentioned chapters. I only wish to write about what I experienced and what I heard with my own ears.

Once, in a certain place, a wealthy man had a great dispute with several friends with whom he was in partnership. The dispute was over a substantial sum, several thousands. Just as this wealthy man was intending to have them arrested by the authorities, I visited this place and stayed with this wealthy man. The other people were overjoyed since they knew me. They were wealthy and honest people. They complained to me about the shameful things that the wealthy man wanted to do to them. The wealthy man also complained to me about the great sum of money owed him. In short, with the help of God, in several hours I was able to propose a compromise. At this opportunity, the partners, who had major disputes among themselves dissolved their partnership. As mentioned, I was present, thank God, and I drew up a new partnership agreement for three years. I did not, heaven forbid, take a penny for this since it is not my livelihood.

Later, the partners had a major lawsuit against each other and invited three arbitrators. The matter reached such a condition that the just partner called upon me [to testify] about what happened between them. I received a friendly letter asking me to testify. I did not, heaven forbid, want to transgress, “If he will not give information, etc.” [Leviticus 5:1], so I traveled to the place where the court was meeting and gave my testimony. One of the litigants, who had done an evil thing, brought an advocate, who, because of our many sins, had the title of judge in his community. This advocate so twisted the matter that even the court had great anguish. However, it seems that the representative sat over the Sefer Meirat Eynayim so diligently that one of the litigants opened the Sefer Meirat Eynayim and said, this is the thing from which these rogue scholars take all of their dirty tricks. “My soul was saddened to hear such things.” I could not eat anything that day, out of anguish. It goes so far, because of our many sins, that because of such scholars it is a popular proverb among ordinary people that our holy Torah would be quite good but the rascals and thieves took it over and twist it any way they want. “Woe to the ears that hear such things,” how our holy

33Responsa 123 and 124.
35Pesikta Rabbati, chap. “Judah”.
torah and true scholars are shamed and mocked. I know quite well who is responsible.

Seventh. There is a group who spent their time like the above mentioned fourth and fifth groups. They have other tricks. They examine the decisors (posekim) and memorize sections of all four parts of the Tur. Then, they deceive the public that they know all four parts of the Tur by heart. In the event that they cannot become rabbis because they have no money, they become spiritual advisors and teachers, or teachers of evil, for wealthy people. They decide what is forbidden and permitted, heaven forbid, even laws of menstrual purity. May God have mercy. Concerning this, I know too many examples to write about them. I have many reservations about it. Those who are responsible for this have to answer for it.

The eighth group go even further. They study diligently and write what they think are novellae on the Torah, part halakhic novellae and part commentary, and finally publish a book. They travel around with it or send it out to be sold. I do not want to disparage the good that is found in such books. However, I wish to write that I saw in the library of the great and famous sage Rabbi David Oppenheim, the Rabbi of Prague, a printed book, [29a] the name of which I forgot, because of our many sins, in which it says that eighty years ago, several great scholars of the land proposed a ban of excommunication that no new book should be printed, whether commentary on the Torah or halakhic work. We have enough, thank God, with our Talmud, Tosafot, Rabbi Asher, Alfasi, Maimonides, and many other commentators. In addition, there are the Turim and the later authorities (akhronim). I do not know who has any use for these new commentaries on the Torah or halakhic commentaries. The proper scholar derives little benefit from them and they are of no use to the common man. It is just like a wealthy man who is indulgent and generous and demonstrates his generosity only to other wealthy people, while letting poor people starve. God help us. Such scholars may be partly excused because, sadly, they do this for their benefit and need. On the other hand, there have been books printed lately that not only contain lies and falsehoods, but also contain, because of our many sins, vile insults and abuses. I would gladly name these books if I did not respect the great rabbis who gave their approbation to such books. I very much wonder how such sages could allow themselves to be deceived. How

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36 This is a pun on moreh hora'ah which is a rabbinic title and moreh ha-ra'ah, teachers of evil.

37 This is probably a reference to the ban on the publication of new books which was issued by the Council of the Four Lands in 1685. Cf., I. Halperin, “Haskamot mi-Vaad Arba Arazot be-Polin” Kiryat Sefer 11 (1934), p. 108f.
could they allow themselves to be shown a few pages by the author and believe that the whole book is good? The authors are then very expansive with the approbation and, because of our many sins, the public is deceived. In the meantime, I recommend that every scholar read what the famous sage rabbi Ephraim[29b] writes in the introduction to his book Olelot Ephraim, concerning the verse, “The making of many books is without limit” [Ecclesiastes 12:12]. This in itself delays the redemption. There is no end to our exile, because of our many sins. With the help of God, I will express my opinion further on, below.

The ninth group are scholars who spend their time in the yeshiva like the fifth and sixth group. However, as soon as they get married, they buy themselves a rabbinical position, with their parent’s money or with their own. They do not even have a trace of a beard, which is an impediment, because of our many sins, as is clearly stated in the Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, chapter 242, paragraph 13. The tragic examples are unfortunately so well known both in the lands of Poland and Germany, that my pen cannot write about it. It would be better to write lamentations about this. One of the most painful aspects is that these young rabbis, with their arrogance and haughtiness, deceive not only their compatriots who were blinded by their money and made them rabbis, but also good ordinary people. They know how to deceive rich people and even parnasim and leaders of communities and lands with their composed sermons and learned discourses. As a result, whoever is an eminent scholar, an upright and just person and studies the Torah for the sake of heaven, or a senior scholar who understands this misfortune cannot speak out. The rabbi arrogantly says that this is an old fashioned scholar, or makes him out to be an ignoramus. The prophet Isaiah has already cried woe over this, [30a] when he said in chapter 5, verse 20, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.” [trans.]

Here I cannot restrain myself from writing a commentary on a talmudic passage, that appears difficult to most people. I ask that it not be held against me or interpreted as arrogance. It is an old proverb that one may insert a bon mot into the shemoneh esreh. The Talmud says in Sukkah 29a, “On account of four things are the luminaries in eclipse.” Rashi38 explains: The moon and stars. On account of those who perpetrate forgeries; On account of those who give false witness; On account of those who rear sheep and goats in the land of Israel; And on account of those who cut down good trees.” This is translated, because of four things are the lights flogged, namely the moon and stars. This is the way Rashi translates it and so is it commonly understood. The four things are: First, because of the people who write false things or lies.

38 Ad. loc.
Secondly, because of the people who give false testimony. Third, because of those who raise small cattle in the land of Israel, that is animals such as goats who eat and destroy plants in fields and gardens. Fourth, those who chop down good fruit bearing trees, so that they cannot be used or benefit derived from them.

This passage appears difficult to understand for all scholars, that because of such things the moon and stars are flogged. Rashi himself writes, "I have not heard a reason for this." [39] [trans.] Indeed, [30b] Rabbi Samuel Edels [Maharsha] wishes to give an explanation of Rashi’s commentary. However, his lack of knowledge of astronomy, or the movements of the moon and stars, makes it even more difficult. What happens when there is a eclipse of the sun or the moon? Many common people think and believe that the sun or moon are, heaven forbid, flogged. Whoever has a little bit of understanding can explain that it is a natural process. Namely, when the moon crosses the path of the sun, and through this blocks the light of the sun we get an eclipse of the sun. Similarly, the moon and other stars, when one crosses the path of the other, one blocks the light of the other. This is called likah in Hebrew. Did Rashi who through his commentary on the sages of the Torah and Talmud gave us a complete light, mean something we do not understand? Or, is Rashi quite obvious, since prior to this it says in the gemara that the sun is lukah. The word “lights” according to the ordinary translation is translated as moon and stars.

However, the Akedat Yizhak in his introduction gives an explanation contrary to Rashi and brings the sage Algazi40 to help him. Every scholar can read this. He translates the words meorot lokin, the light of the intellect is flogged, so that one cannot find the truth, and gives an explanation that everyone can read at his convenience. I liked this commentary very much and in my time I could not [31a] understand this talmudic passage differently. I hope Rashi will pardon me a million pardons that I do not understand his explanation and that I follow the explanation of the Akedat Yizhak. Hopefully his merit will help me. I also translate meorot lokin that the light is struck for us, so that we, because of our many sins, have to walk in darkness. We cannot find the true light and truth in our holy Torah. Indeed, this is because of the four causes mentioned in the Talmud. Namely, first those who write false things or lies, these are the people who write commentaries of the type mentioned above, and allow them to be printed. Unfortunately, they contain many lies, swindles, and falsehoods.

39Ibid.
40This should be Al-Gazali.
Secondly, the people who give false testimony. These are, with a million pardons, the rabbis who allow themselves to be misled and give their approbation to such books. They testify that this book contains positive things and through this the public is misled. With God’s help, I will discuss later why I have to write such things.

Third. Those who raise small cattle that destroy plants in fields and gardens in the land of Israel. These are the young cattle, I mean those who raise the young rabbis and accept them as rabbis among Israel. Where they are accepted, they destroy everything and in the end will themselves be destroyed. I do not want to write much about this, because I am certain that, God have mercy, I will find thousands of witnesses who will agree with me that I have written the truth.

Fourth, are those who chop down the good fruit bearing trees, so that we cannot use or enjoy their good fruits. These are the good, worthy, pious, just, scholars and judges who only study the Torah of truth for the sake of heaven and gladly want to repair the world. They are, because of our many sins, chopped down through these evil young rabbis and other evil scholars as mentioned above. They degrade these worthy people among the common people, the wealthy and the communal leaders. We are thereby made blind to the true light of our holy Torah.

I again ask you not to be offended by my sharp writing, because I am writing nothing but the truth which I have seen and heard. Great need has driven me to write this. Especially, about the approbations that great rabbis continue to give to books, because I have found another group of scholars, who are called kabbalists. I must write beforehand that I am not worthy, heaven forbid, to discuss such scholars of truth, much less to write about this wisdom. I have no knowledge to adjudicate. I only wish to write about what, because of our many sins, occurs in our times. The whole public is familiar with the followers of Sabbetai Sevi, may they rot in hell. The holy community of Frankfurt am Main, may God establish it forever, did much to eradicate this obstacle, and “was moved by zealouslyness for the Lord, the Lord of hosts.”41 Why did this obstacle, [32a] because of our many sins, come into the world? He who knows the truth, would not disagree that it was because of the modern kabbalists. Indeed they are young men and some unmarried youths who have not studied Talmud and halakhic authorities, much less ethical works. Some are self taught, God have mercy on us, without a teacher.

Concerning this, I saw a kabbalistic book which is considered to be a light unto Israel. I do not want to name the author because several rabbis, known throughout the diaspora, whose souls are bound up in the bonds of eternal life, gave their approbation to this book. All of them called the

41A paraphrase of I Kings 19:10.
author an eminent and pious sage. He was supposed to be in reality pious and all his life acted piously and ascetically. Yet, I was shown and saw with my own eyes that in this book on pages 13 and 39a and 39b, Sabbetai Sevi is clearly called the Messiah. I knew several of these great sages, and to separate between living and dead, served some of them. The whole public is aware that these same scholars were the greatest persecutors of the evil believers in Sabbetai Sevi, in order to exterminate them. Were not these sages misled, to so easily give their approbation to this book? I do not want to write anymore, heaven forbid, about this author, much less about this true wisdom which I am not worthy to mention, much less to write about. I do not want to deceive but to gladly fulfill the verse, "Love your fellow as yourself."

Too many of these young kabbalists came to my attention to write about. [32b] [I want] to warn my dear brothers. Be careful of anyone whom you do not know who calls himself a kabbalist unless you are assured by great elders and students of the Torah from large communities that these are true kabbalists. Do not be misled by them, much less learn from them. Indeed, many world class scholars, especially the great and eminent sage Rabbi Isaiah, in his holy book, Shnei Luhot ha-Berit, treatise one, writes, as does his son the sage Rabbi Sheftel in his book Vavei ha-Amudim, the pillar of Torah, chapter five, and the true sage and physician Rabbi Joseph Candia, in his book, Mezaref le-Hokhmah, highly recommend that one is obligated to study this wisdom. But one must first know which prerequisites one must know and study, how old one must be, what kind of teacher does one need, and how one must behave while studying it. It is very difficult for a common man like myself, especially one engaged in business, but it is particularly difficult to find a proper teacher. Therefore, it is best for us common people to continue in our ordinary way, to conduct ourselves according to what is written in our Shulhan Arukh, read ethical works and to study other holy books, to become accustomed to good attributes and observe our commandments in order to repair our souls.

Everyone can read what the Havvat Yair writes on p. 94 about this science. A householder asked him what is the meaning of “For the sake of the unification of the Blessed One, etc.” He assured him that he himself [33a] does not know. This great sage is known as having been an eminent scholar. His knowledge of the science of kabbalah can be readily seen. Yet, as one reads in this responsum, he did not want to display his

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42I have not been able to identify the book referred to here.
43This indicates that some of the people he is referring to were still alive while others had already died.
44A Lurianic kabbalistic formula recited before performing a commandment.
knowledge to other people. One can see further from this responsum in the *Havvat Yair* what he told his best friend as an illustration. This responsum and what he cites in the name of the great sage, his father, from page 190 to 201b, should be read by every scholar. One finds the same thing among the early sages, who were great kabbalists, but did not want to appear so.

The same thing can be seen in the *Akedat Yizhak* gate 55, question 2, where he writes about kabbalah, "I am ignorant and do not know," as if he knows nothing about it. Yet, one can see in the same gate that he was well acquainted with kabbalah. I am writing about this at great length so that the ordinary person will have no need to take notice of or to say the "yehi razon" or "ribon" prayers which are printed nowadays with many holy [divine] names. Perhaps it would be better if he did not say them. The author of the Ikkarim writes much about this in Book 1, chapter 18, and Book 2 chapter 28, and adds much to our report. Whoever wishes to know more about this true science should read in the book *Neveh Shalom* treatise 5, chapter 5, what kind of holiness is contained in this wisdom, who should study it, how one should behave, and how one can, heaven forbid, be easily be led astray. Therefore, I again ask that every common man and at least younger scholars and of course unmarried youths should pay attention that they [33b] first know the required prerequisites, so that they act with holiness and not, heaven forbid, wind up on the wrong path.

So dear brothers, I have listed how our holy Torah is unfortunately mistreated by most people, and how, because of our many sins, the majority if not the entire public are misled. In the instance where there is an honest and upright scholar, who would gladly wish to lead us on the correct path, and could do so, he is silenced or even cut off completely. Therefore, our Torah is called or, a great torch, and our commandments are called ner, lamp, as is clear from the verse, "The commandment is a lamp, the teaching is a light" [Proverbs 6:23]. These commandments or lamps can be found in our holy Torah. The light of the or, the great torch, must be lit. When the holy torch is extinguished, or the foundation pillar on which the world is supposed to stand, is ruined, should we then wonder about the reason for the length of our exile or our tragic situation? Rather as King David, says in Psalms chapter 119, verse 36, "My eyes shed streams of water because men do not obey Your teachings." [trans.] We have much more reason to cry day and night over how we observe our holy Torah. We also have to thank and praise God, day and night, for being so merciful and slow to anger. He does not only leave us alive in this exile, but also keeps his holy [34a] promise, in his holy Torah, Leviticus 26:44, "Yet even then, etc." like a merciful father.
Chapter Fourteen
The Pillar of Divine Service

Dear brothers, the second foundation or pillar on which the world is supposed to stand is called divine service [avodah]. We must first know what divine service is before we examine how this foundation should be maintained. What is the translation of the word avodah? The root of the word avodah in our holy tongue is eved, that is, a servant. Avodah is translated by everyone as service. Therefore the service we render to God is a foundation on which the world stands. If all the people who ever existed, from the beginning until today were put together, they could not repay their obligation to God for the favor that He does for only one person. The question then is, how can we or with what should we serve God and fulfill the foundation of service? We are especially obligated in this since God himself has called us servants, Leviticus 25:55, “For it is to me that the Israelites are servants: They are my servants.” We are also often commanded in his holy Torah to serve Him. We have no other way of serving God than with our prayer, as is clearly stated in our holy Torah, and as we recite in the shema morning and night. [34b] “To love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart” [Deuteronomy 11:13]. [trans.] Also the verse in Exodus 23 verse 25, “You shall serve the Lord your God.” [trans.] These verses are understood by all scholars as meaning that “service (avodah) is prayer.” Therefore, we support the foundation of avodah with our prayers.

There are indeed some scholars who wish to translate the word avodah as sacrifices. We are also reproached by many of those who are not of our religion. They say that since we can no longer offer sacrifices, we have no more service of God through which we can acquire our share in the world to come. Thank God, I was able to change their minds. Maimonides very thoroughly explains the reason for the sacrifices. He writes how God once commanded us to offer sacrifices and that the verses “To serve Him with your whole heart” [Deuteronomy 11:13] and “Serve the Lord your God” [Exodus 23:25] mean nothing other than prayer. This can be clearly demonstrated from the prophets. I Samuel chapter 15, verse 22, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the Lord’s command? Surely obedience is better than sacrifice, compliance than the fat of rams.” [trans.] The prophet Jeremiah says in chapter 7, verse 22, “For when I freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice.” [35a] [trans.] King David clearly says, “True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit”

45B. Ta’anit, 2b.
[Psalms 51:19]. [trans.] Thus, it has been clearly shown that God is not well served with sacrifices. "To serve Him with your whole heart" [Deuteronomy 11:13] cannot be translated as anything other than prayer.

Listen all my dear brothers and sisters. Help me examine how our worship, i.e. prayer, which we are highly obligated to serve God and in addition is a foundation on which the world exists, is maintained by us. The question is, should we first examine what we pray or how we pray? My opinion is to first examine how we recite our prayers. Here, because of our many sins, I will find twenty thousand witnesses as to how people who do not have a synagogue or who recite their prayers at home, pray. In addition, how prayers are recited in literally all synagogues. I do not want to write much about people who pray at home. I only wish to mention that I saw a book written by a well known priest in Prague, or by one of his students, in German [35b] and Yiddish on the side. He writes about how Jews recite their prayers in their homes. When somebody comes to them to do business, how they speak to him, what words they use, part in Hebrew, and how they tell their wives or servants what to do. Some stand in the window when they pray and pay attention to which passers by have business. They call to him or they tell their wives or servants in Hebrew to call them or what they should do. Some even go into the street in their phylacteries. Some, heaven forbid, go into the stable in the midst of their prayers and in their phylacteries. Indeed, this was not written by a Jew, yet it is true. On occasion, because of our many sins, I have seen and heard the same myself. Many thousands of witnesses, because of our many sins, can be found who have seen and heard the same thing.

Unfortunately, I did not find much good to write. I want to write even less about how our worship, our prayers, are conducted in our synagogues. Only what I, because of our many sins, heard many hundreds of times from gentile nobles and scholars, about what they often saw in many communities when they visited our synagogues. They confronted me with what goes on in our synagogues and how we carry out the divine service with the greatest ridicule. One person sits scratching his crotch and mumbles at the same time. The other rests with one hand on his prayer stand, vigorously scratching his head, [36a] and also mumbles. The third grabs his prayer stand with both hands, rocks it, and mumbles while looking around. The fourth takes some snuff and asks the others if they would like some. Five or more people come over and take a pinch while continuing to mumble. Fifth, some come to the synagogue not thinking about mumbling, but begin to gossip and joke.

46 Probably a reference to Franciscus Haslbauer S.J., Gruendlicher Bericht von dem Christenthum (Prague, 1720-1722).
with their neighbors. They argue with each other until a shouting match breaks out. Then they return to gossiping, joking, or arguing. Sixth, there are many who pray earnestly. However, each prays with such disorganized loud screaming that it is impossible to pray with devotion since each confuses the other. There is too much to write about what they say of the behavior of youths and children and those who run around the synagogue and what kind of business they carry on. The only question is whether or not they told me the truth. Were I to testify before the Great Court, I would have to admit that not only is it true, but I have often seen and heard this, because of our many sins, in all places. Some even decide to spend their time in the synagogue inciting people against one another. The result is not only arguments but even fist fights break out in the synagogue. I have no doubt [36b] that, because of our many sins, many thousands will testify that this is all too true.

I do not yet want to ask about how we recite our prayers. Rather, I ask, can there be, because of our many sins, a greater public desecration of the divine name? We are supposed to be called a holy people. Our synagogue is called the house of God. Does not the prophecy of Jeremiah chapter seven, verses 10 and 11, refer to the way we behave in the synagogue? “And they come and stand before me in this house which bears my name and say, We are safe? – To do all these abhorrent things! Do you consider this house which bears My name to be a den of thieves? As for me, I have been watching declares the Lord.” [trans.]

Dear brothers, when we consider how we, because of our many sins, recite our prayers, do we not have more reasons than Ezra the scribe to say, “O my God, I am too ashamed and mortified to lift my face to You” [Ezra 9:6]. [trans.] Let us examine if we would behave thusly when we are called before a king, a minister, a nobleman, or before someone from whom we want something. Would we behave thusly [37a] in their homes or in their presence? How do we behave in the house of God where we congregate for the same purpose, to differentiate millions of times, to plead before God? In contrast, let us see when we come to an inn or similar house, and a gentile eats, how he says his prayer with awe and fear. Those who have not eaten join him in prayer. I have not seen, but have been told, how services are conducted with awe in their churches. It is enough that for my part I have written only what I have personally seen and heard, because of our many sins, how our prayers are recited. I leave it to each person to examine if I have written the truth or falsehood. In addition, to decide if we do not have more reason every hour and minute to say as Ezra did, “O my God, I am too ashamed and mortified to lift my face to You” [Ezra 9:6]. Why does it not occur to us, woe to us, we have sinned. We do not know how to be ashamed. As Jeremiah and Zephaniah said: Jeremiah 6:15, “They have done abhorrent things – yet
they do not feel shame, and they cannot be made to blush.” [trans.]
Zephaniah 3:5, “The wrongdoer knows no shame.” [trans.] Are we, unfortunately, so far fallen that we do not know to be ashamed before God.

Thus, it is no wonder, because of our many sins, how we serve Him, when we examine further what we worship or what we ask in prayer. For my part it is no wonder [37b] how we worship God in His house. One would wish that every community or land would undertake an investigation, whether there are three people out of a thousand who know what they are praying. I do not want to write about women or girls, but men. Dear brothers and sisters, when somebody talks and does not know what he is saying, how can he have intent, or awe, when the heart does not know what the mouth is saying. Indeed, there are many who are of the opinion that as long as one prays in Hebrew, his prayers are acceptable even if he does not know what he is saying. They encourage common people to believe this. However, I would suggest to everyone, whether they be scholars or even someone who only has the common sense given him by God, that they recognize the ancient proverb quoted by many scholars, “Prayer without intent (kavannah) is like a body without a soul.”[47] [trans.] This is a living thing, but not a person. The prophecy of Isaiah 29:13 is even clearer about this, “My Lord said: Because that people has approached me with its mouth and honored me with its lips, but has kept its heart from me, and its worship of me has been a commandment of men learned by rote.” [trans.]

Here again, I must praise the Sephardim or Portuguese and how they recite their prayers and serve God in an orderly manner or with kavvanah in their synagogues. [38a] The reason is that they know what they worship. They understand what they are saying and praying. One can examine the Sephardim or Portuguese and see if there are even three that have not studied Torah, Prophets and Writings. At a minimum, they understand Hebrew and know what they pray. One should not suspect me, heaven forbid, of being more a friend of the Sephardim than of my dear brother Ashkenazim. Why is it that I love the Sephardim and their methods of study and prayer? My sole purpose is to fulfill out of love for my dear brother Ashkenazim, the verse “Love your fellow as yourself,” and to consider the reasons for our tragically long exile and sad situation. My aim is particularly to learn how the prosperity of business and wealth daily diminishes among us Ashkenazim, while among the Sephardim, thank God, it has durability.

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[47]A. Hyman, Ožar, p. 551 cites the Shnei Luhot ha-Berit as the source of this statement.
I am also not writing this off the top of my head. Rather, because of what I have found in many holy books, especially what the sage Rabbi Sheftel writes in his book, *Vave ha-Amudim*, pillar of Torah, chapter 5 and pillar of worship, chapter 11. This book is widely available in all places. Everyone can read, or have read to them, how this pious sage came to Amsterdam and the order of study he found among the *Sephardim*, and how he also decrees that this order of study is not found among us *Ashkenazim*. He asks all the leading scholars to get together so that such an order of study will be instituted among us, without any change. The author of the book *Siftei Yeshaynim*, [38b] page 8, writes extensively about the order of study he found among the *Sephardim*. He also implores that this order of study be instituted among us *Ashkenazim*. Asking alone does not help, because of our many sins. One must wonder that this pious sage Rabbi Sheftel writes in the pillar of worship, chapter 10 that one hundred years ago, in the holy community of Frankfurt, literally all holy societies studied the meaning of the prayers for the whole year so that they should understand what they were praying to God. No doubt this custom still exists in that holy community. One must wonder that there are so many scholars and important, upright, God fearing people in this holy community who would gladly fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself,” that they do not fulfill it and influence other communities and villages to observe this custom. All teachers should teach their children along with *humash*, the translation of the prayers that they recite every day, so that they may understand what they pray. It would be very deplorable if this good custom were no longer in use in that holy community. All the old customs come back into fashion, and this old good custom which is nicest, best, and most suitable for our souls is not reinstituted. It is no wonder, because of our many sins, that we remain in our lengthy exile and do not prosper.

It is even more of a wonder that ordinary people, both men, [39a] women and girls are forbidden from praying in Yiddish, so that they will be understand what they are praying and pray with proper *kavvanah* in the way that is pleasing to God. These scholars give a reason from the Talmud, “He who prays in Aramaic is not helped.”48 They gave the common people to understand that the angels do not understand Yiddish. However, I write in Yiddish that these scholars do not understand the Talmud, and insult and demean God who knows all of man’s thoughts and examines their hearts. There are so many verses in our holy Torah that refer to this that I cannot write them all. We pray to God, as Maimonides writes in his fifth article of faith and all scholars concur, “To him alone, it is right to pray, and that it is not right to pray to

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48A paraphrase of B. *Shabbat*, 12b.
any being besides Him.” [trans.] How can we forbid prayer in Yiddish and say, heaven forbid, that it is not understood? Here again I must praise the Sephardim or Portuguese who allow their wives or common men who do not understand Hebrew to pray in Spanish or Portuguese. They also printed prayerbooks so they could pray what they understand. The meaning of this Talmudic passage is found in many books, particularly in the book Asarah Ma’amorot Eim Kol Hai, chapter 31, which the Kol Yehuda⁴⁹ explains. The pious sage Rabbi Sheftel, in the above mentioned chapter, pillar of worship, names many books and sages who forbid praying in any language except those one understands. He cites the verse [39b] in Isaiah 29:13, “With their mouth and lips they honor, Me and their heart is far from Me.”

Dear brothers, I believe everyone will agree with me that when we consider our order of prayer and how we pray, because of our many sins, the length of our exile and our poor situation in all things are no wonder. Here I must agree with our Talmudic sages when they say that the world is supported only by the Torah. If we studied the Torah properly, and if we first studied the Torah of Moses that God himself gave and his prophets and in the language Moses and the prophets spoke, that is, Hebrew, and if every proper Jew would understood this, he would also understand what he is praying and without any doubt our order of prayer would also be different. Our tragic situation and lengthy exile would also change. God is merciful and hears everyone’s prayer. Here I do not need any great proof from the Torah. Rather, it says in Ashrei, which everyone recites three times every day, “The Lord is good to all and his mercy is upon all His works” [Psalms 145:9]. [trans.] “The Lord is near to all who call Him, to all who call Him with sincerity” [Psalms 145:18]. [trans.] “He fulfills the wishes of those who fear Him. He hears their cry and delivers them” [Psalms 145:19]. [trans.] [40a] This is sufficient proof and familiar to everyone. As the common proverb has it, I am an expert in it like I am in Ashrei. He knows how to translate this one chapter like he knows the whole Torah. I have no need to further examine the order of prayer or worship. I only wanted to show that the situation of our prayer is similar to that of our holy Torah. All ethical books are full of this. I would only wish that these scholars would read what is prayer, in the book Neveh Shalom, treatise two, chapter 1, and in the Sefer Ikkarim, Book four, from chapter 16 to chapter 23.

⁴⁹This should be Yad Yehuda.
Chapter Fifteen
Gemilut Hasadim

With the help of God, we will continue our examination of the third foundation on which the world stands, that is gemilut hasadim. In order to write the truth about this, I spent years searching all over and could not find an understanding of what gemilut hasadim or gemilut hesed is or what the words mean. I finally asked several great scholars and several important and pious people, to tell me what is gemilut hasadim. They laughed at me and said, one should do good. However, I asked: good is called tov in Hebrew. Hesed is translated as gnad [grace]. They said that one should show gnad to everyone.

I further asked them if we poor sinful people can say that we possess gnad. Rather, [40b] King David says in Psalms chapter 62, verse 13, “And faithfulness (Hesed) is yours, O Lord.” This is translated, to you God is gnad. In addition, in the thirteen attributes, one of God’s attributes is called rav hesed. Jeremiah chapter 9, verse 23, says, “For I the Lord act with Hesed.” Translation, I am the Lord who does gnad. They gave me explanations that I cannot write because, in truth, I am ashamed to write them.

I often heard from nobles, when we asked them for gnad, the response that gnad is with God. We sinful people have no gnad to give out. I again asked my scholars and good pious Jews, what is the meaning of the word gemilut. They gave me the truthful explanation that gemilut is translated as “requite.” I asked them further to explain what “requite” means. Unfortunately they did not truly understand the translation, until I told them. “Requite” is when I have received or benefited from someone, that I “requite” this in every way possible. Indeed, they wanted to engage in casuistic arguments. However, I proved my point with many verses from our holy Torah, many of which they were not acquainted with or did not remember. First, the story of Barzilai the Gileadite who did a good deed for King David. King David wanted to take him home. Barzilai said to King David, II Samuel chapter 19, verse 37, “Why should your majesty requite me with this repayment?” [trans.] Further, Jeremiah chapter 51, verse 56, “For the Lord is a God of requital.” [trans.] Further, Joel 4:4, “Are you requiting me.” [trans.] Further, Proverbs, 19:17, “He who is generous to the poor makes a loan to the Lord; He will requite him his due.” [trans.] In brief, I showed them so many verses, that I was finally forced to show them a verse in the holy Torah of Moses. Deuteronomy 32:6, “Do you thus requite the Lord, O

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50 The Blitz and Witzenhausen Yiddish translations of the Bible also translated hesed as gnad.
51 Exodus 34:6-7.
dull and witless people?” [trans.] Thus, it has been clearly demonstrated that *gemilut hesed* means none other than, I have to requite the good that has been done to me.

I then asked them, *gemilut hesed* is for poor and rich. What kind of *hesed* have I received from a poor person that I am required to requite him? How can I repay an extremely wealthy person for his *hesed*? They admitted to me that they had not thought about this so extensively. I must continue to write how far I searched to know the meaning of *gemilut hesed*. I asked several poor people, since our sages say that “*gemilut hesed* is both to rich and poor.”52 The poor, however, did not have anything to tell me that there is such a thing as *gemilut hesed*.

I finally asked wealthy people and some young magnates who were learned. [41b] They told me that they had not read anything about this. However, I told them that all the ethical works write a great deal about this, and I was willing to show it to them. They laughed at me. It does not mean *gemilut hesed* at all. Rather, there were initials G"H. The Gimel stood for *ga'awah* (arrogance) and the Het stood for *hutzpah* (insolence). The printer had made a mistake and thought it meant *gemilut hasadim*. This explanation was so pleasing to people that it is believed, because of our many sins, in all places. Thousands of witnesses can attest, because of our many sins, to the arrogance and insolence. There are unfortunately at present evil examples of great controversies which were engendered by great arrogance or insolence. According to my opinion, this is the greatest reason for the length of our exile. Indeed, whoever sees the great insolence which exists in the world at present, has a great consolation in our exile, that this is a sign of the Messiah’s coming, since our sages say “With the footsteps of the Messiah, insolence will increase.”53 [trans.] On the other hand, the arrogance is so great, because of our many sins, that it is impossible for the Messiah to come. I wish to refer briefly to all ethical works, those that are printed both in Hebrew and Yiddish, that arrogance, because of our many sins, is the greatest vice in the world. King Solomon, who was the greatest sage that ever existed, says quite briefly in Proverbs 16, verse 5, “Every haughty person is an abomination to the Lord.” [trans.] Our sages say [42a] it even more briefly, “Everyone who is arrogant is a fool.”54 [trans.]

Dear brothers, how can there be a more wretched person in the world than he who is unworthy before God, and is considered a fool by our sages. Therefore, I do not want to spend much time on this, because it is not my purpose. Also, because of our many sins, I am a filthy sinner

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52 Tosefta Peah 4:19.
53 M. Sotah, 9:15.
54 I have not found the source of this statement.
and am not in a position to give a rebuke. Rather, I had to write only that I could not find any explanation or translation of gemilut hasadim among rich and poor, and hardly from any living person, whether rich or poor. However, our sages said that "Gemilut hasadim is practiced towards the poor, the rich, the living and the dead."⁵⁵ [trans.] So I looked for an explanation among the dead, namely, in my old holy books which were written many hundreds of years ago by the greatest sages of the land, whose souls are bound in the bonds of eternal life, may their merit protect us. Here I found sufficient explanations. Indeed, King David gives a sufficient explanation in Psalms chapter 62, verse 13, "And Hesed is yours O Lord." To you O Lord is gnad. Chapter 33, verse 5, "The earth is full of the Lord’s faithful care." The verse is translated, the whole earth is full of God’s gnad.

The question then is, what kind of gnad do we people have. Because of our many sins, I must again mention what I heard from many nobles, whom I visited and asked them for gnad. They answered me that gnad is with God and we poor sinful people have no gnad. Rather, we are required [42b] to serve all people, and they reminded me of the above mentioned verse. I found many explanations of the verse, "And Hesed is yours, O Lord, to reward each man according to his deeds" [Psalms 62:13], in Hovot ha-Levavot, Sha’ar ha-Bitaĥon, chapter 4, section 6. This book is, thank God, at present readily available in Yiddish and everyone who is like me can read it. In addition to the Akedat Yizhak, gate 14, there is a treatise entitled Hasdei Adonai which contains twenty-six explanations of this verse that every learned person can read at his convenience. Sefer Ikkarim, Book 3, chapter 5, gives an explanation of Jeremiah chapter 9, verse 22, "Let not the rich man glory in his riches, etc." I will write about the translation and explanation of this verse later, God willing.

I only wish to mention here that, thank God, I finally found through these holy books, a truthful explanation of the translation of gemilut hesed and what it is. Particularly, what the famous scholar R. Eliezer Ashkenazi writes in his book, Ma’ase Adonai, on the verse, "And Hesed is yours, O Lord, to reward each man according to his deeds" [Psalms 62:13]. But first, we must recognize that everything that we poor sinful people have in this world, or benefit from God, we have not earned, and much less can we repay it. Rather, God gives it to us out of pure hesed. All people in the world will admit and recognize this. Therefore, the explanation of gemilut hesed is that everyone receives and enjoys hesed from God. We must repay this hesed to other people who have not received this hesed from God. It is therefore correct when our sages say that gemilut hesed is

⁵⁵Tosefta Peah 4:19.
[43a] given to rich and poor. Otherwise it is hard to understand how an ordinary person can do gemilut hesed for a rich person? However this is correct. There often occurs that a rich man, whether at home or on the road, misses, or does not have something which is very important, but cannot be obtained for money. Often it is only a pipeful of tobacco or a pinch of snuff. Someone else has this through God’s hesed. He must repay this hesed and assist the rich man with this. Now we know what gemilut hesed is, or means.

Dear brothers and sisters, gemilut hesed is the third foundation on which the world stands. We will examine how this is practiced and maintained. From my perspective, I have found, because of our many sins, that gemilut hesed is practiced by very few people and in few communities. However, I have found many people who translate the word hesed differently, as shame [shand]. They also demonstrate this from the Torah, Leviticus 20, verse 17, “He sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a shame [Hesed].” This hesed is correctly translated as shame. They are not satisfied with this type of shame, but very energetically endeavor to bring shame and damage upon their friends. Not only do they spread malicious gossip, but they shame their friend to his face. This is not enough, because of our many sins. Instead of doing acts of hesed to others the hesed that God, in his great mercy and lovingkindness, does to them, they requite it in this way. It is a shame before God, [43b] and before the whole world. They endeavor to encroach on their friend’s boundaries in order to cause their friend damage, even though they derive no benefit from it. All this is not enough. They denigrate their friends before nobles and even inform on them. I have heard so much from many nobles, because of our many sins, that this is certainly a shame. The prophets, in Jeremiah 6:15 and Zephaniah 3:5 said their prophecies about the above mentioned things. They are not embarrassed and do not know their shame. The unjust know no shame.

I do not want to bring up how others who do not practice this shameful hesed, practice the proper gemilut hesed, since as I mentioned above, because of our many sins, I cannot nor do I want to reprove others. I know all too well, “Improve yourself and then improve others.”56 I have much to improve within myself, because of our many sins, and have much need of a preacher of rebuke for myself. My whole purpose is only to gladly fulfill, “Love your fellow as yourself,” as I have often mentioned.

I have found no other means than to remind my dear brothers and sisters of the sad conditions of our lengthy exile and to examine its

56B. Baba Mezia, 107b.
causes. With the help of God, this will help my dear brothers find a means to be redeemed from our distressing exile. I cannot leave out what the famous sage, Rabbi Ephraim writes in the introduction to his book, Olelot Ephraim. [44a] This sage and worthy in Israel very strongly deplored the length of our exile. He writes that three groups are responsible for this. First are the very wealthy who have enough money and goods to satisfy everything their heart desires. Second are those who require nothing from the world but gluttony and drink. They do not think about God, much less about exile. Third are our rabbis and leaders who, because of our many sins, are not united. They are jealous of each other and that is why they never come together in unity, to examine and improve [this situation]. I hesitate to write what the famous sage Rabbi Joseph Jabez writes about this in his book Ma'amah ha-Ahdut, chapter 3.

However, I must also write what the above mentioned Rabbi Ephraim says in the introduction to his book Siftei Da'at, where he also considers the length of our exile. I wish that every scholar would read this introduction. However, he writes that he found in a book in which a friend had added a note that those people who do not think about the length of our exile are like a drunkard who sits in his house drinking, while the house is burning down around him, heaven forbid. The drunkard feels nothing, singing and shouting like a drunkard until he is finally burnt. So too, the majority of people in our exile are like drunkards, because of our many sins. It is burning around them. Unfortunately, many of our fellows must put up with it, but they do not notice anything. They go on [44b] in their drunkenness, in their arrogance, and in the desires of their hearts, until, heaven forbid, they become corrupted.

So, dear brothers, this author wrote his book in the year 5340 [1580], that is 169 years ago, and he already writes how he found in a book that someone had written his friend that he considers the community to be drunk, but it has unfortunately helped very little. So may I be allowed to write my dear friends, out of love, and to remind them that we are at present, not only drunk, but as the saying goes, totally blind drunk. Because of our many sins, we fulfill what the prophet Isaiah 44:18 says, "They do not know nor do they have judgment: Their eyes are besmeared and they see not; And their hearts so that they do not understand." [trans.] We see, because of our many sins, so many examples, literally in all communities, besides other places, that, because of our many sins, not only whole houses, but whole families are being, heaven forbid, uprooted. The children and grandchildren of people who were worth, not one hundred thousand, but literally millions, are wandering beggars, because of our many sins. I do not wish to name them, out of respect for both the living and the dead. People will have to
agree with me, not only in the largest holy communities like Frankfurt, Fuerth, Mainz, Mannheim, Hamburg, Berlin, Halberstadt, but also in other large places, Vienna, Hannover, etc. In every place, because of our many sins, one can find living examples.

Dear brothers and sisters, should we not think about the length of our exile and sad condition, at least once. Should it be said, God have mercy, about us in this generation that we are blind, like King Solomon says in Proverbs 4:19, “The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what will make them stumble.” [trans.] Or should we be sighted, as Rashi has it, “The wicked saw it, but took no moral lesson or example from it.”57 I ask you out of brotherly love not to rely on your great wealth, your influence, or your wisdom. Some think that their wisdom is so great that they will foresee everything sufficiently early. Some think that their wealth is so great that they will have enough for as long as they live, and some think that they are so influential that they do not have to worry. See what the prophet Jeremiah writes, chapter 9, verses 22 and 23. “Thus said the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; Let not the strong man glory in his strength; Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But only in this should one glory: In his earnest devotion to Me. For I the Lord act with kindness, justice and equity in the world; For in these I delight – declares the Lord.” The translation of this verse is easy enough to understand.

The author of the Ikkarim, Book three, chapter five, gives a truthful explanation of the verse which I will summarize in Yiddish. “Thus says the Lord. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom” and assume that the wisdom is his, that he has this from himself and he can preserve it for himself. “Let not the strong man glory in his strength,” and boast that his strength is from himself, and that he created it himself and can preserve it for himself. “Let not the rich man glory in his riches,” and not boast that wealth is his and that he created it and he will preserve it for himself. “But only in this should one glory: In his earnest devotion to Me” [Jeremiah 9:23]. If someone wishes to boast, let him boast that he knows and understands that I am the Lord and understands that I am the one who created and gave everything. “[I] act with kindness, justice and equity in the world” [Jeremiah 9:23]. He is the one who does hesed and what He gives is out of pure hesed.

We cannot give him anything in return for this. He does justice freely for which we cannot give him anything. We should also do thusly. The wise man, the strong one and the wealthy one should know God and that He gives everything freely with hesed. Let the wise man use the wisdom given him by God to give good advice and teachings freely to others with

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57Rashi on Proverbs 4:19.
hesed. Not like some wise men who utilize their wisdom to deceive other people. They often incite people against each other, which results in great controversy. The strong person should use the influence freely given him by God not to cause others to fall, but to freely help others with hesed in order that no harm or injustice come to them. The rich man should use the wealth freely given him by God, not only [46a] for his own needs, but should freely give charity with hesed. The verse continues, "For in these I delight — declares the Lord" [Jeremiah 9:23]. [trans.]

From this verse and its commentary, we have clearly demonstrated above, what is gemilut hesed, and what is the holy will and desire of God. Namely, He gives us everything freely out of hesed. We should also freely share everything that we enjoy through His hesed. These two verses have sufficiently demonstrated the meaning of gemilut hesed, the way God wishes to have it. It is to be wished that every person would keep just these two verses in his heart and in his mind and thoughts. It is my view that we have sufficiently examined how gemilut hesed is thought of and maintained by us. When we consider this and how our Torah and worship are preserved and observed, the length of our exile and our sad state are no wonder. I wanted to remind my dear brothers of this, with a heartfelt plea, out of great love and to fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself,” in a small way.

Dear brothers and sisters, I do not want to leave you in pain over the length of our exile, with my memoir. I will gladly go to great lengths to fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself," in order to find a way to be redeemed from our lengthy exile. If I could only find a few brothers or colleagues [46b] who might be able to fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself," and through this, with God’s help, assist our brothers, in general, to fulfill this verse. I have great hope for this, with the help of God, and his manifold mercy and hesed.

I must first bring up another major principle from our Torah. It consists of five words. Namely, “You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God” [Deuteronomy 18:13]. I would like to assure my dear brothers that everything I have written until now and that which I will continue to write, with the help of God, has no other intention than “You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God” and “Love your fellow as yourself.” I am not writing this, heaven forbid, as I have often mentioned above, “to make a spade from it,”58 to make money. Thank God, I do not need it. I give this work to my dear brothers and sisters as a completely free gift. I do not demand money for it, heaven forbid. I do it even less “to attain the crown of honor”59 from it. Thank God, I have

58M. Avot 4:5.
never in my life looked for honor or credit. It is best known to God that I
am writing this only for the sake of heaven.

Therefore I am assured that in His great mercy and hesed, he will help
me awaken more hearts through my writings who will support me and
help me further to fulfill my final purpose. This is the primary reason
that I wrote my Libes Briv in Yiddish, so that every honest Jew will be
able to read it. I am not in a position to write even one percent [47a] of
what is written in old holy books that are printed in Hebrew which the
ordinary person cannot read. This is why dust and mold remain on many
holy books. However, the rabbis, communal leaders and other scholars
who have at least read the Shnei Luhot ha-Berit and Vavei ha-Amudim are
not concerned with the order of study and worship and even more so
how we might finally be redeemed from our lengthy exile. I do not want
to give my own reason for this, but will be satisfied with the reason given
by the famous sage Rabbi Ephraim in the above mentioned introduction
to his book Olelot Ephraim. He wrote about the rabbis and leaders of the
generation and gave a reason why, because of our many sins, our lengthy
exile goes on in this way.

It is well known to me that we are called a holy people and, thank
God, “The people of Israel are holy.”60 I know, thank God, common
people so to speak, who, sadly out of financial need, are not scholars
because they could not afford to study in their youth. Afterwards,
however, they became wealthy, thank God, and even communal leaders.
Such honest and God fearing people have so much inner fear of God that
I cannot give sufficient praise and thanks to God. They see very well and
are willing to spend money to better our deplorable situation, both in
Torah and in worship of God. Yet they cannot begin to apply themselves
before some rabbis or scholars tell them that they do not understand. It is
an old proverb that one paves the street with fools. Therefore I want to
pave the street for my dear friends and hope [47b] that, with God’s help,
they as wise men will find the right way and will recognize what is
pleasing to God, and will fulfill the verse of the prophet Hosea chapter
14, verse 10, “He who is wise will consider these words, he who is
prudent will take note of them. For the paths of the Lord are just; The
righteous will walk on them, etc.” [trans.]

So my dear brothers, my opinion and guidance again goes first to
maintain our holy Torah and worship or prayer. It should be the concern
of the many rabbis and sages of Israel, faithful, God fearing, communal
leaders, scholars who study for the sake of heaven and generous wealthy
people that, at a minimum, every ordinary person living wherever
should be able to have his child taught the prayers and humash. At the

60This phrase occurs numerous times in the Talmud. Cf., Hyman, Ozar, p. 287.
very least, the teacher should teach the humash in such a way that the child knows and understands what he is learning and at least knows what is our holy written Torah. This can happen very easily if only the teacher would first read the text to the child before he studies it with him. That is, just the simple translation, in order that the child should understand what he is learning, or should learn. I assure you that it will be easier for the teacher and the child. The teacher would not find it much trouble to translate the words. The child will assimilate it more easily when he understands the words that he should translate.

Dear brothers, do not think that because a fool is writing this, that he is paving your street. Our sages say "No one is as wise as the one with experience" or to translate as the common proverb has it, an experienced fool is smarter than an inexperienced sage. I assure you that I have tried this and have given this instruction to many teachers who found it to be true. They blessed me when the child knows so much humash. It is very easy when one learns the meaning of the words. The child then also understands what he is praying. Not only is our holy written Torah strengthened, but I am assured that our worship will also take on another appearance. I hope, with the help of God, that in all holy communities or other places that God fearing and upright people and true scholars who until now did not have the heart to do so, because they found no help will come forth and assist us, with the help of God.

However, the old custom must not be forgotten. In the community of Frankfurt am Main, may it be preserved, householders who did not have the opportunity to study in their youth, formed themselves into societies for the study of Torah. Those who were able, hired a teacher for their homes who at a minimum taught them to understand the meaning of the prayers. If it could be added that the teachers also teach the children Hebrew grammar, it would be something that could not be improved upon. I hope to God that upright people will be found who know how very important and useful this is, and in addition, will help. The famous grammarian, R. Zalman Hanau, left us adequate grammar books which are easy to study, with the help of God.

Here I must interject a small addition for my dear sisters, the daughters of Israel. Namely, to respond to why they are also not taught humash, the Prophets and Writings when young so that they will, at a minimum, understand Hebrew, which is called our holy mother language by all nations. It will not be difficult for them to learn and they will at least know what they are praying to God. I know quite well that many scholars, in all places, will dispute what this ignoramus has written here. He did not know the Talmudic passage, "Whoever teaches his

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61Hyman, Ozar, p. 42 cites Akedat Yizhak, gate 14 as a source.
daughter Torah, it is as if he taught her tiflus.” These scholars will not become angry when I write that, thank God, I know quite well the mishnah in tractate Sotah, 20a, and the Talmudic discussion of it, on which Rashi bases himself, page 21b. However, these presumptuous scholars do not know the translation of the word tiflus. I know this from experience. I asked many conceited scholars, who rely heavily on this talmudic passage, that no [49a] girl or woman should study humash or TaNaKH, to tell me what the root of the word tiflus is in Hebrew, or how it is translated? They could not tell me the root, much less tell me the translation.

One honest and upright Jew sadly wanted to demonstrate the translation from the verse in Job, chapter 1, verse 22, “For all that, Job did not sin nor did he give tiflah to God.” However, I showed him the commentary of Ibn Ezra on the word tiflah.62 “Like insignificant, the matter was that nothing came out of his mouth that had no reason.” [trans.] I also showed him that the root of tiflus is TaFeL. In comparison, I immediately showed him the verse in Job 6:6, “Can what is tasteless be eaten without salt,” where the word indisputably means none other than a thing that has no taste. Indeed, there is a verse in Jeremiah, chapter 23, verse 13, “In the prophets of Samaria, I saw tiflah.” Also Job 24:13, “And God does not regard it as a tiflah.” Both of these verses would show it if tiflah had another meaning. Radak, in his commentary on the verse in Jeremiah explains it as, “Something bad that has no taste.” [trans.] Concerning the verse in Job, Rabbag explains the word tiflah as, “Something that has no taste.” [trans.] Therefore, from these two verses it can also be understood that the word tiflah means something that has no taste. In comparison, Ezekiel 13, verse 10, “Daubing with plaster,” verse 11, “Say to the daubers of plaster,” [49b] verse 15 “Those who daubed it with plaster.” All the commentaries, Radak, Abrabanel, and even the Targum, explain it as a building built with bad bricks, without straw, or with bad mortar. They particularly call it, something that has no permanence. Indeed, the only explanation that Rashi gives is, false words. In comparison, Ezekiel 22:28, “Her prophets daub the walls for them with plaster.” Rashi gives the same explanation. It is a thing that is not fully or properly constructed and has no permanence. Lamentations 2, verse 14, “Your seers prophesied to you, delusion and tafel.” Rashi clearly states, things that have no taste, and adds false words. Thus, everyone who no longer understands the term can clearly see what Rashi meant. Therefore I have not only demonstrated, with clear verses from our holy Torah that the term tafel can only be translated as something that has no taste or permanence, but this is even more clear from our

62Ibn Ezra on Job 1:22.
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dear Talmud. Indeed there is a clear mishnah in tractate Niddah, 62a, or in the Mishnah [Niddah], chapter 9, mishnah 7, "tafel spittle." Rashi in the Talmud, and Bartenura all explain tafel, as tasteless, something that has no taste.

Thank God, this evidence caused many scholars to agree with me that the statement in the Mishnah or Gemara which says, "He who teaches his daughter Torah, it is as if he taught her tiflus," can only be translated as something that has no taste or permanence. This is because a woman is a weaker creature who does not have the strength of a man. I must also add that the Gemara\textsuperscript{63} brings the verse "I, wisdom live with prudence" [Proverbs 8:12]. It was widely neglected \textsuperscript{50a} because R. Eliezer forbade it. In comparison, one must know that the word Torah does not only mean the written Torah. Rather, it is particularly the oral Torah that is meant. It would be too lengthy to demonstrate it here. It is enough that I have demonstrated the meaning of the word tafel from our holy Torah and Prophets. Whoever can admit to the truth will agree with me that I am correct. Finally, Ben Azzai clearly states in this mishnah,\textsuperscript{64} "One is required to teach one's daughter Torah." [trans.] It would be better if women would study the Oral Torah [Talmud] and through this would provide for many men. It is greatly to be regretted that such evil scholars do not allow daughters of Israel to study the written Torah and through this learn their holy mother language, Hebrew. In contrast, they allow daughters of Israel to learn foreign languages, French and Italian, and through this gentiles visit them. Because of our many sins, this is more worrisome. Better that they should study our holy language through humash and prophets as children with a honest and upright teacher. I do not want to write too much about this, because it is not my place.

Praise God, whose lovingkindness has not departed from me. I cannot thank and praise God enough that when I was ready to write this, I found a great helper who agrees with my position. The great rabbi and sage, Rabbi Jacob, rabbi of the community of Emden, son of the famous sage Hakham Zevi, also strongly laments this in his prayerbook, in Sha'ar Shalekhet Halon ha-Mizri, [50b] page 76, and Sha'ar Shalekhet Halon ha-Mizri, page 78b. Every scholar can read this.

I added this interjection about women because I know that the souls of the daughters of Israel come from God, just like those of the sons of Israel. Though they are not obligated in many time bound commandments, they are still obligated in other commandments and are prohibited from transgressing the negative commandments. I must add two clear verses to this profusion. Exodus 19, verse 4, "Thus shall you

\textsuperscript{63}B. Sotah, 21b.
\textsuperscript{64}M. Sotah, 3:3; B. Sotah, 20a.
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speak to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel.” Rashi interprets this, as do all other sages, “The house of Jacob, these are the women.” Targum Jonathan says, “Thus shall you say to the women of the house of Jacob.” It is clear that women are also commanded by the Torah. Deuteronomy 31, verses 11-12, “When all Israel will come, etc. You shall read this Torah before all Israel, gather the people, men and women, etc. That they may hear and learn and revere the Lord, your God and to observe every word of this Torah.” [trans.] Thus it is clear to see from our written Torah that our women should study and observe these teachings.

The Akedat Yizḥak and Abrabanel both have the same commentary. Women should listen in order to revere God and to refrain from transgressing negative commandments, in order that their observance should be like that of men. This is why it says, “To revere the Lord your God and to observe faithfully” [Deuteronomy 31:12]. [51a] “Take care lest you forget” [Deuteronomy 8:11], means none other than negative commandments. Thus, both of these great sages write that women are equally required to revere God and to observe the prohibitions of the negative commandments, just like men. At a minimum, I believe that women endure as much, if not more, and have as much reason to pray to God, to praise and thank Him, as do men, and ought to know what they are praying. I assure you that many pious women lamented, with bitter tears, that they stand in the synagogue and pray with the community, but they do not know what they are praying. They hear the cantor reading from the Torah scroll, but they do not know what he is reading. The women of other nations know our holy written Torah better than do our own women. One allows the women to read the Ze’enah u-Reenah or the Yiddish humash, which contain much midrashic and aggadic material. This is the same as teaching Ein Ya’akov to ignoramuses. They think that what the Yiddish translation contains is the pure Torah of Moses. I assure you, it would be more desirable if the daughters of Israel studied the written Torah.

I cannot write about the desecrations of God’s name that I have experienced. I must write just this, because of our many sins. One woman said that the prophet Jeremiah was, heaven forbid, descended from a prostitute. She wanted to wager and show me that it was in our holy Torah. She got her Yiddish humash and, because of our many sins, clearly showed me in the haftorah of shemot or the haftorah of matot, “The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah” [Jeremiah 1:1].65 I cannot write

65This is based on the comments of Rashi to Jeremiah 1:1, which says that Jeremiah is descended from Rahab the zonah, mentioned in Joshua 2:1. The normal translation of zonah is harlot. However, Rashi in his commentary to
more, because of our many sins. Everyone can [51b] read it. If it were not the Sabbath, I would have thrown this Yiddish humash into the fire, out of anger. In any event, whenever I see a Yiddish humash, I cross out this passage. Would it not be better if our women understood the written Torah? At the very least, women and ordinary men who were not able to study in their youth, should read the so called Yiddish Bible which R. Yekutiel translated into Yiddish, instead of the Ze’enah u-Reenah. I have written this for the distinguished women, in order that they will also help motivate their dear husbands to endeavor to improve our order of study and worship, and to shorten our lengthy exile.

I want to write more of my insignificant and unworthy opinions about our order of education, with the help of God. When the child has already studied the written Torah, as discussed above, and his father is in a position to give him some more education, but not in a position to let him become a proper scholar, I believe it is much better that he is taught Mishnah, instead of Ein Ya’akov. The child can assimilate it as easily as Ein Ya’akov and it will be much more useful. I have already discussed the teaching of Ein Ya’akov previously. In particular, when the child studies the tractates of the Mishnah which belong to the Shulhan Arukh, Oreh Hayyim, such as Berakhot, Shabbat, and other similar ones, the child will learn many laws and will be able to learn [52a] Shulhan Arukh, Oreh Hayyim very easily in his youth or in any event when he is an adult. At the very least he will know how an honest Jew is supposed to live. Finally, it will be so much more useful to him. He might even be able to read a useful Hebrew book. At a minimum, he will be able to read the Yiddish ethical works, for his spiritual development, which presently, thank God, are widely printed in Yiddish, such as Menorat ha-Maor, Hovot ha-Levavot, Shevet Musar, Hakirat ha-Lev, Simhat ha-Nefesh, Lev Tov, and others like them.

I must mention that if a common man, and even more so a woman, wishes to read the holy book Hovot ha-Levavot, they should not read the Sha’ar ha-yihud, because the way it is printed in the Yiddish edition is not understandable. Only a scholar would be able to understand it. Before discussing what else is necessary, I must first mention what King David said in Psalms 119:30, “I have chosen the path of faith.” Maimonides has made known his thirteen articles of faith in order that my dear brothers might earnestly undertake the path of our faith and in order that every Jew know what he should believe. The thirteen articles of faith are printed in all prayerbooks. They are also included in Yigdal. Many

Joshua 2:1 follows the translation of Targum Jonathan which translates zonah as innkeeper. This became the accepted understanding of this passage in Rabbinic literature.
thousands say Ani Ma’amin and sing Yigdal, but they do not know what they are saying or what they are singing. R. Abraham Jagel published his book, Lekah Tov, which has been printed in good Yiddish many times, so that everyone can understand it. [52b] The printer, R. Israel Jessnitz also printed it in a prayerbook.66 It had an effect on some people, but the majority have no desire to see it. God may have mercy, that I saw more than twenty years ago that Professor Hardt of Helmstadt67 printed the book Lekah Tov in Yiddish and German,68 so that everyone can see what are the Jewish principles of faith. Several years ago, the pietist69 Professor Waehner of Goettingen also printed it,70 to show our true faith. Because of our many sins, it remains untouched among us. Thousands of Jews do not know what they believe. As a result of this, I had to hear much desecration of God’s name and scorn from many nobles and gentile scholars concerning our faith and lifestyle. Should God be accused? I hope that my dear brothers will take this to heart and at least teach their children the thirteen principles, which are printed in Yiddish in all prayerbooks. They should also see that every child learns the Lekah Tov by heart in Yiddish. Thereby, they will at least know what they are supposed to believe.

When the child has studied this, as I have described, and has the possibility, with the help of God, to study further and become a scholar, then there is certainly nothing better than to continue with the study of Talmud and halakhic commentaries. It would be very good if he has a keen scholar as a teacher who can sharpen his intellect. It is to be wished that he first study those tractates which belong to Shulhan Arukh, Oreḥ Hayyim, and afterwards [53a] those which belong to Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, in order to fulfill, “To atone for himself and his household” [Leviticus 16:6].

I want to relate further what the sage, the author of Havvat Yair, writes in detail in his responsa number 123, about when the child becomes a youth and, with the help of God, is in a position to attend a yeshiva. I find myself in no position to give my opinion, much less to insert myself among the giants. Many great sages have written against the study of hillukim. Here I must again write that there is no wise man

66I have found no evidence for the existence of such an edition. Rivkind, “Der Mehaber”, p. 307 n. 5 came to the same conclusion.
68Helmstadt, 1704.
69Wetzlar uses the term ha-hasid.
70There is an anonymously printed edition of the Lekah Tov, Goettingen, 1742. It is reasonable to assume that this is the edition referred to by Wetzlar. G.A. Waehner was the author of Antiquitates Ebraeorum de Israeliticae (Goettingen, 1743).
like one who has experience or as an experienced fool. If I had not served my teacher and master, Rabbi Abraham Broda of Prague for four years and studied his hillukim quite well, I do not believe I would have been able to understand the holy books that I studied afterwards. I must bring this up in honor of my master and teacher, the above mentioned sage to the delight of his soul. First, his lifestyle was that during the whole week he ate nothing that came from a living being. Second, he did indeed teach hillukim, but only in the beginning of the semester, in the summer until after Shavuot, in the winter until Hanukkah. Afterwards, one had to study Talmud or halakhic works, to fill one’s belly. Every Sabbath between minha and ma’ariv, he would interpret a text with casuistry, to sharpen the students. He often said, at the same time, that he believed the explanation to be false. He only gave the explanation to sharpen the students.

Third, his personal supervision of [53b] of his students, not only if they were studying well. He examined them in small groups. Rather, he quite often assembled the students and lectured on ethics and morals. He also had people who would go around and inquire about the students’ behavior. Fourth, his love for his students. Every student who desired to study was like the apple of his eye. Fifth, everything he did was for the sake of heaven. This can be demonstrated by the fact that not only did he not take money from an ordinary student, much less from a poor one, but maintained several hundred students who did not have funds out of his own pocket. Many thousands of students, may God protect them, in all communities and countries, can testify that this is completely true. I can affirm with stringent oaths that he did not take a penny from me during the four years that I studied with him in Prague. When I departed, I shed many tears that I could not repay him. He asked if I had sufficient funds for the trip home and wanted to force money on me. In this way his teachings, thank God, were successful. Many thousands can testify to this. I believe that the order of study was not central when the head of the yeshiva behaved in such a manner. In previous times, one was what he said, or what someone else said about him.

In my time, the same order of study was continued in the holy community of Prague by the famous sage, the Rabbi of the community, Rabbi David Oppenheim, and the sage Rabbi Elijah, author of Eliyahu Zuta. [54a] Nobody derived benefit from a student. Rather, the Rabbi of the community, mentioned above, distributed hundreds to poor students. Such an order also existed in my time, in the holy community of Frankfur am Main, in the days of the great and famous sage, Rabbi Samuel, the son of R. Hayyim Isaiah71 and the great scholar, Rabbi

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71I was unable to identify him.
Samuel Shotten. I write my opinion again, not heaven forfend, to enter among the giants whose souls are bound up in the bonds of eternal life, but only as an experienced fool. So long as a youth studies in a yeshiva, the study of hillukim at the beginning of the semester cannot hurt him.

I continue, however, further, with the help of God. When we come home from the yeshiva, in peace and health, and become householders, what should we study in order to repair our souls and acquire life in the world to come? Indeed, we must have rabbis, heads of yeshivas, judges, and teachers to teach students, as mentioned above. It is obvious that those who aspire to positions as rabbis and judges, and to earn a respectable living from this, must obviously study Talmud, Tur and all the later commentaries. The rabbis must also study hillukim in order to strengthen the Torah and teach students. I am not in a position, heaven forbid, to prescribe a personal order of study for them which is for the sake of heaven. Rather, my goal is to fulfill, "Love your fellow as yourself." "Your fellow," specifically my fellows who are householders, who pursue commerce and do not want to be, or much less can be, rabbis or judges. They are also required to set aside time for Torah study. [54b]

What are they obligated to study in order to repair their soul? Indeed, everything that one studies for the sake of heaven is quite good, but one should learn from the example of King David who asked God, "Guide me in your true way and teach me, for you are God my deliverer" [Psalms 25:5], "Lead me in the path of your commandments" [Psalms 119:35], "Turn my heart to your decrees" [Psalms 119:36], "Let my heart be undivided in reverence for your name" [Psalms 86:11], "Open my eyes that I may perceive the wonders of your teachings" [Psalms 119:18].

One should also ask God to show the true path to his Torah and commandments and in particular to reverence for God. The most necessary thing for a householder to know is Shulhan Arukh, Oreh Hayyim and the Talmudic tractates which belong to it. A householder who lives in a community where he cannot consult a rabbi or scholar when a question arises, must also know Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, in order that no failure occur in his house. Because of our many sins, instances occurred to me, that were it not for God's help and if I had not studied Yoreh Deah, evil scholars would have fed me non-kosher foods several times. Also the contrary, they declared things non-kosher that were kosher. I can cite many examples of this. I would like to advise every householder to be attentive and not to decide what is permitted or forbidden, much less, heaven forbid, menstrual purity, where it is not necessary. I can boast that, thank God, in my life I have not even decided

72Cf., M. Horovitz, Frankfurter Rabbinen (repr. Hildesheim, 1972), index, s.v., Samuel Hakohen Schotten.
as simple a case as an egg that fell into kotah.\textsuperscript{73} If a householder knows enough to live as a kosher Jew and sets aside a time for Torah study, for the sake of Heaven, and asks God as King David asked God, then I am certain that God will help him [55a] and show him the true path which is good for his soul, in commandments, worship, and reverence for God.

I do not find it necessary to recommend reverence for God, because everyone knows the verses in the Torah of Moses. “And now O Israel what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: To revere your God” [Deuteronomy 10:12]. “You must revere your God” [Deuteronomy 10:20]: “You shall fear your God: I am the Lord” [Leviticus 19:14], “If you fail to observe faithfully all the terms of this teaching that are written in this book, to reverence this honored and awesome name, the Lord your God” [Deuteronomy 28:58]. King David said, “Serve the Lord in awe” [Psalms 2:11]; King Solomon said, “God has brought to pass that men revere Him” [Ecclesiastes 3:14]. “The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God” [Ecclesiastes 12:13].

Whoever wishes to know the fundamental meaning of reverence for God should read Ikkarim, Book 3, chapters 31 and 32. I assure him that he will be completely satisfied. It is clear in all holy books and especially in our beloved Talmud which says “to consider whether we come to serve [God] out of love or out of fear.”\textsuperscript{74} Fear alone helps very little, when we perform commandments or give charity, as many people do, because they are afraid of death or divine punishment. Or, if they perform commandments or give charity because they will receive a reward. This too is not the correct way. As our sages write in tractate Avodah Zarah and Pirke Avot, “Do not be like servants who serve the Master in the expectation of a reward.”\textsuperscript{75} Rather, it must happen out of love for God, and love of God must be pure and honest.

If someone would want to ask the question, how can this happen naturally, that I can [55b] purely and honestly love someone whom I am supposed to fear greatly, and indeed do fear? The answer is too lengthy for me to write. Rather, everyone should read or have read to them, the above mentioned chapters 31 and 32 in Ikkarim, Book 3, and further until the end of the treatise. They will find an answer that will fully satisfy them, particularly concerning the verse, “Serve the Lord in awe, and tremble in fright” [Psalms 2:11]. I only wish to write that which is true, that everything we do should be out of pure love of God, as is often mentioned in our holy Torah. We say this in the Shema every day, morning and night. “You shall love your God” [Deuteronomy 6:5] and

\textsuperscript{73}A metaphor for an obvious matter, cf., B. Erubin 62b; B. Ketubot 60b.
\textsuperscript{74}B. Megillah, 25b.
\textsuperscript{75}M. Avot, 1:3; B. Avodah Zarah, 19a.
"To love the Lord your God and serve Him with your whole heart and soul" [Deuteronomy 11:13].

Dear brothers, here someone will again ask me a question. How is it possible to love someone I do not know and whose essence I cannot know? Here I must answer that it is indeed true that as poor sinful people we cannot know His essence. Even the holy angels do not know his habitation and say, "His glory has no place." However, we find in our holy Torah, Deuteronomy 4:39, and we say it every day, morning and night, in Oleinu le-Shabbe'ah, "Know therefore this day and keep in mind that the Lord alone is God in heaven above and on earth below." King David commanded his beloved son, King Solomon, I Chronicles 28, verse 9, "And you my son Solomon, know the God of your father and serve Him with single mind and fervent heart." [56a] In Jeremiah 9:13 God says, "Understand and know me, for I am God." From this it can be seen that we should understand or know Him. It cannot occur in any other place but the prophet Isaiah who says in chapter 40, verse 26, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens and see who created these." When one sees and contemplates the great vault of the sky, the great light – the sun, the moon and so many stars which have moved in one order for five thousand – five hundred and nine years, must this not have been made by a great omnipotent and eternal God. The love of God must be awakened when one contemplates how all the creatures of the earth, even the smallest of creatures, were created with omnipotence and wisdom, and with what great lovingkindness all creatures are maintained and nurtured.

Because of our many sins, the majority of people fulfill Isaiah 5:12, "There was lyre, etc., but they never gave a thought to the plan of God, and take note of what He is designing." They do not recognize God's works in order to know Him through them, much less to consider what kind of eternal, omnipotent, gracious Lord He is. At the same time, He is an eternal, omnipotent, gracious and compassionate Father. What is more, they do not even want to know themselves, that they are lonely weak creatures and poor sinful people. In contrast, the great omnipotent, eternal, gracious and merciful Father continually and with hesed [56b] supports us with His divine providence and shows us great compassion. Since they do not contemplate this, because of our many sins, they cannot know, much less love God. Some would dearly love to know God through His works and love him with a pure heart. The verse in Isaiah chapter 44, verse 18, is, because of our many sins, fulfilled through them. "They are blind and cannot find the true path." [trans.]

Listen all my dear brothers. I am prepared in every instant with the greatest joy to allow myself to be slaughtered and burned as a sacrifice for His one true name, out of the great, truthful, and highly responsible
love that I have for God. Yes, even to allow myself to be hacked into thousands of pieces for Your love, since my ultimate purpose is to fulfill, “You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God” [Deuteronomy 18:13]. “Love your fellow as yourself.” I want to advise you with a pure heart, before all else, to diligently study the book Hovot ha-Levavot. You will be able to learn in Sha’ar ha-yihud that God is the one true and omnipotent God and Lord. In the Sha’ar ha-behinah you will know for yourselves what kind of miserably weak creatures we are. At the same time, that God is a merciful Lord, full of hesed and the hesed and lovingkindness that he shows us. The whole book will show you a path and will be a cure [57a] for your soul. Finally, the conclusion of Sha’ar ahavat adonai will help you to the proper love of God. Do not think that I, as a poor sinful worm, recommend this book to you. The divine kabbalist, R. Isaac Luria told his disciples and Maimonides commanded his son to read this holy book daily. I have also mentioned previously that the great sage, the author of Shnei Luhot ha-Berit, often recommended this book. There is a summary of this book at the end of his Asarah hillulim. All the old holy books always call this book, “the holy book.” I am certain that when you will have read this book several times, you will thank me profusely, and the merit will protect me and all of Israel. I ask you to read in it as long as you live. I assure you that I have read and studied it more than fifty times and every time found something new in it, as the author, Rabbenu Bahya himself recommends.

However, to return again to the path of the pillar of Torah. I am certain that if a scholar will have diligently read the above mentioned holy book Hovot ha-Levavot, in the way it says in our holy Torah, “In your mouth and in your heart, to observe it” [Deuteronomy 30:14], and study it with care as the author often recommends in his book, particularly in Sha’ar ha-bitahon, his lifestyle will be set right. And if he will further ask God as King David asked, [57b] “Open my eyes that I may perceive the wonders of your teaching” [Psalms 119:18], “Guide me in your true way” [Psalms 25:2], that God will open his eyes and lead him in the true path that he should follow.

I find it necessary to recommend one more book to my dear brothers, according to my meager understanding, because, as mentioned above, King David said, “I have chosen the way of faithfulness” [Psalms 119:30]. God, himself, also says in Hosea 2, verse 22, “And I will espouse you with faithfulness, then you shall be devoted to the Lord.” As this prophet says in chapter 6, [verse 1] “Come, let us turn back to the Lord, etc.” In verse 3, “Let us pursue obedience to the Lord, and we shall become obedient.” Every Jew is required to be strong in his faith. Our sages say,
in particular, in *Pirke Avot*, "Know what to answer a heretic." Thus, it is not enough for a scholar to study the thirteen articles of faith as they are printed in the prayerbook, but the way Maimonides wrote them in [his commentary] on the *Mishnah*, "All of Israel have a share in the world to come." Afterwards, he should study the *Sefer Ikkarim* most diligently. Here my dear brothers must not become angry when I recommend that they put aside their arrogance. Whoever cannot get through the *Sha’ar ha-yihud* in *Hovot ha-Levavot*, or even in the *Sefer Ikkarim* which has passages that are very difficult to understand, should acquire a teacher who will teach him. If he cannot get a teacher, he should get a few friends, so that they can help each other. The principle is that when it is for the sake of heaven God will help. As our sages say, [58a] "When someone wishes to purify himself, he is helped." Thank God, whose *hesed* has not left us, there are scholars in all communities who know these and other similar holy books. I have, thank God, definite information that these books are studied by groups in a number of holy communities.

A certain scholar and householder from the holy community of Frankfurt am Main assured me that he saw [a copy of] the *Sefer Ikkarim* in that community which contained the signature of the famous communal leader Zalman Trum, who was known as the wealthiest person of his day. In the book was inscribed that this book had been studied many times in his daily study group. I am therefore certain that whoever studies this book once with diligence will thank me all their life. Many scholars have already thanked me, praise God, and swore to me that they found things there that they did not previously know at all and through this, thank God, got the desire to study other similar holy books. They thanked and praised God that He "opened their eyes and showed them the wonders of his holy Torah," not only to repair their souls to the supernal light. Rather, through this they understood many verses, talmudic passages, and *midrashim*, which they could not understand previously, or give a correct interpretation.

However, if there are to be found scholars who would think that I want to lead them on a wrong path, heaven forbid, and, because of our many sins, consider these books secondary works, I first want to write that I recommend them so highly for the reason that King David [58b]

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76 *M. Avot*, 2:19.
77 *M. Sanhedrin*, 10:1. Maimonides, in his commentary devotes a paragraph or two to each article of faith, while in the prayerbook, the articles are listed in single sentences without commentary or explanation.
78 *B. Shabbat* 104a; *B. Yoma*, 38b.
79 I was not able to find any information on him in the standard histories of Frankfurt Jewry.
80 A paraphrase of Psalms 119:18.
says, ‘I have chosen the path of faith [Psalms 119:30].’ Not only should every scholar be strengthened in his faith, but he should know how to defend our faith and our holy Torah in all circumstances and against all faiths. In addition, he should be a spiritual guide, to [help others] serve God wholeheartedly, and only out of love for God. Through this, the pillar of Torah will be strengthened.

Indeed, the great sage, the author of the Havvat Yair, responsum 156, page 115b, writes about those who study the books Akedah, Ikkarim, and the Kuzari, ‘those generations who stayed away from these studies did well.’ He only writes this about youths. ‘I have heard that they study this in their youth.’ It is indeed good that they should first study to ‘fill their bellies’ with Talmud and Codes in the way that the sage, the above mentioned author, writes in this responsum. However, a householder who, with the help of God, has already completed these studies cannot study anything better, for the sake of heaven.

I only wish to refer to the approbations of the greatest scholars of the land when this book was printed with the commentaries, Shorashim and Anafim. In particular, the brief comment of the famous pietist and sage Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, author of the Shnei Luḥot ha-Berit, who wrote ‘I have sealed the truth on a true thing with the truth of the Torah with fundamental principles.’ This sage and pietist called this book, ‘a true thing with the truth of Torah.’ I believe it is not necessary to further recommend to you the study of this book, which is useful for every scholar. Everyone can read the other approbations and the introduction by the author of Shorashim and Anafim.

I want to recommend one more thing [59a] that the great sage, Rabbi Isaac, writes in his introduction to the three books, Ma’amor ha-Aḥdut, Yesod ha-Emunah, and Or ha-Hayyim, which were authored by the famous sage and pietist, Rabbi Joseph Javetz. Namely, our Torah is called a tree, as King Solomon said, ‘It is a tree of life to those who cling to it’ [Proverbs 3:18]. A tree consists of roots which lie in the ground and out of the ground grow branches, twigs and leaves. If a leaf, twig or branch falls from a tree or is broken off, the tree remains standing and one can enjoy its fruits. However, when the root rots or is destroyed, the whole tree and its fruits are destroyed. So too is the tree of our holy Torah. The principles of faith are the roots of the tree. The commandments are the branches, twigs and leaves. When someone, heaven forbid, damages a twig or leaf or even breaks off a branch from the positive or negative commandments, he can still enjoy the fruits of the world to come, through other commandments. The Talmud in Hullin says, ‘a heretic in

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81 Sefer Ikkarim, Venice, 1618.
one thing is not a heretic in the whole Torah."\(^{82}\) There are many commentaries on the mishnah, "All of Israel have a share in the world to come."\(^{83}\) Also, Ikkarim Book 3, chapter 29, writes a commentary on the talmudic passage, "God wanted to reward Israel so He increased Torah and commandments for them."\(^{84}\) If someone cannot observe some commandments and properly observes others, he can still have his share in the world to come through these commandments. In contrast, whoever, heaven forbid, damages the roots, the principles [59b] of faith, he is called, heaven forbid, one who denies the fundamentals.

Dear brothers, who wants to put himself in such danger, heaven forbid, to be a denier of the fundamentals, and not to take time or make the effort to read these useful books mentioned earlier, that is Ma'amur ha-Ahdut, Sefer Yesod ha-Emunah and Sefer Or ha-Hayyim left to us by the famous sage and pietist Rabbi Joseph Jabez. I hope, with the help of God, that whoever will read these books for the sake of heaven, will have a repair for his soul. He will thank God for "opening his eyes" and will be further "worthy to see the wonders of our holy Torah"\(^{85}\) and other holy books.

Since the sage, the author of the Havvat Yair, recommends the Sefer Akedah, I must tell you, my dear brothers, what happened to me with this author. It would be much too extensive to describe my life's journey and how God helped me to the study of these holy books. I only want to write that after my marriage I diligently studied the Talmud and Codes that every householder needs to know for several years. Thanks to God, I always reviewed the laws for every holiday and continue to do so. At the same time I also wanted to study ethical works and other holy books in order to repair my soul. God, in his great mercy and lovingkindness, helped me to learn the whole of the holy book, Hovot ha-Levavot. I later acquired the Sefer Ikkarim on a journey. [I also acquired] the holy book Neveh Shalom and Sefer Reshit Da'at and eleven books by the great and wise sage, Rabbi Isaac Abrabanel, [60a] and more similar books. Indeed, I heard many scholars, some of whom called these books tekuna books, some, philosophical books and others, secondary works. I did not pay much attention to them because I found that these scholars did not know how to translate the word tekhuna. I found that the term philosophy is a Greek word, lovers of wisdom. The only reason they are considered secondary works is, because of our many sins, many scholars do not understand them.

\(^{82}\)B. Hullin, 5a.  
\(^{83}\)M. Sanhedrin, 10:1.  
\(^{84}\)M. Makkot, 3:16.  
\(^{85}\)A paraphrase of Psalms 119:18.
Finally, I acquired the book Ḥazut Kashe which was authored by the famous sage Rabbi Isaac, the author of the Akedat Yizḥak. He writes in treatise 5, pages 8b and 9a, that one should stay away from philosophy in such a manner, that I literally became faint and literally tore my garments as a sign of mourning, that I had spent my time with such books, and in particular the Sefer More Nebukhim. I had also previously taught my children, may God protect them eternally, the Sefer Ḥovot ha-Levavot, as was mentioned in this book. May God protect us, I wrote and warned my children to stay away from all such books, because I knew what kind of sage and truthful scholar the author of the Akedah was, even though I did not have his book, Akedat Yizḥak.

Not long afterwards, God led me to Hamburg [60b] and a scholar who was a honest and upright person, may his soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life, came to see me and brought a book to sell me, a commentary on Job called Meir Iyov. When I opened the book to look at the title page, I saw it said, “Sefer Meir Iyov by the complete scholar Rabbi Meir, son of the divine philosopher R. Isaac Arama, author of the Akedah.” I was aghast. I thought that it was impossible that the Sefer Ḥazut Kashe could have been written by the sage, the author of the Akedah, because he had forbidden the study of philosophy and his son signs himself, the son of the philosopher. However, I discovered that the same person is the author of the Ḥazut Kashe. I was very confused until two months later when, as if it was sent from heaven, I was able to purchase the Sefer Akedat Yizḥak. I discovered that this book is pure divine philosophy covering the whole Torah, from the first word to the last, and the five scrolls. If I were to praise this book, my pen would go too far. However, I am assured that, thank God, there are scholars in all communities who have studied this book and will agree with me. In honor of the author, I want to write an ethical story, with the help of God, from this book at the end of my work.

My ultimate purpose is only that I finally discovered the difference between divine philosophy and Greek philosophy which did not believe that there is a creator of heaven and earth. This Greek philosophy, which does not believe [61a] that there is a creator of heaven and earth is discarded by other nations and is called heathen philosophy. I hope that whoever has studied these holy books has found the truth. Here I must highly recommend that every scholar who has the possibility should study the Sefer Emunot ve-Deot of Rabbenu Saadiah Gaon. I would also highly recommend Rabbenu Bahya, and his holy book Ḥovot ha-Levavot. I also have cause and obligation to recommend the More Nebukhim of our master, teacher and Rabbi, the great sage and true scholar, Maimonides. I do not find it necessary [to recommend] his Sefer Yad ha-Hazakah and his commentary on the Mishnah with the introductions, particularly his
commentary on Pirke Avot with his introduction, Shemone Peraqim, since they are sufficiently well known. I would wish that every scholar would own and read the Sefer Hasagot of the sage and scholar Rabbi Moshe Alashkar. He will then find how this sage, Rabbi Moses Alashkar, repaid those who wrote against the More Nebukhim.

At this opportunity, I correctly understood the whole of Psalm 19 which had previously been difficult for me to understand. King David a"h said, “The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaims his handiwork” [Psalms 19:2]. [trans.] “Day to day makes utterance, night to night speaks out” [Psalms 19:3]. One day tells another and one night tells or proclaims knowledge to the other. “There is no utterance, there are no words, whose sound goes unheard” [Psalms 19:4]. [61b] [trans.] “Their measuring cord extends over the whole earth and their words to the ends of the world” [Psalms 19:5]. [trans.] Afterwards, King David says, “The teaching of the Lord is perfect, renewing life; the decrees of the Lord are enduring, making the simple wise. The precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing the heart; The instruction of the Lord is lucid, making the eyes light up. The fear of the Lord is pure, abiding forever; The judgments of the Lord are true, righteous altogether. More desirable than gold, than much fine gold; Sweeter than honey, than drippings of the comb” [Psalms 19:8-11]. [trans.] And so through the whole Psalm.

Dear brothers, it would be too extensive to write a word by word commentary on this whole Psalm. There are already many truthful commentaries printed in the Sefer Ikkarim, some in Book 1, chapter 5, some in Book 3, chapter 3, in Sefer Akedat Yizhak gate 49 and other places. However, it is particularly important and useful to read Sefer Neveh Shalom, treatise 8, chapter 6, and also the fourth sermon, “a remembrance of creation,” in Sefer Nefuzot Yehudah. I will only briefly write my opinion about the cohesion of this chapter which is useful for my purpose. [62a] I only wish to ask. King David said, “The heavens declare the glory of God” [Psalms 19:2], [trans.], and so forth. One day tells the next, one night tells or proclaims knowledge to the other. There is no utterance or words and its voice is not heard. How is it transmitted, when one tells the other and no voice is heard, and their speech goes to the end of the world? Indeed, Maimonides writes in his More, part 2, chapter 5, that the spheres are living intelligences. Who has ever heard the heaven tell, or the day talk or the night say. Therefore, one cannot give any other interpretation but that of the author of the Ikkarim, who writes in Book 3, chapter 1, “he who recites Pereq Shirah every day is assured of his share in the world to come.”86 This does not mean that if someone babbles and sings Pereq Shirah he has acquired the world to come. Rather, one must

86 Sefer Ikkarim Book 3, chap. 1.
contemplate each creature that God has made. This is what one finds when one says it. However, I said that R. Eliezer said, "he who occupies himself," one must occupy himself with *Perek Shirah* and contemplate everything. Through this, one can have the world to come. Every scholar can read this chapter with pride.

I only want to add to my interpretation of how this sage interpreted the verse, "The heavens declare the glory of God" [Psalms 19:2]. When one contemplates the movements of the heavens, one can learn about God's glory, just as if they would say or tell us. So too, it is with all creatures. [62b] One can learn about God's glory, wisdom, and omnipotence, particularly when one contemplates the whole world and the order of day and night. This is divine philosophy, to know and study God’s wisdom and abilities. Not only in the time of King David, but before and after it there were great scholars, such as Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. They attained a very high level of understanding, as is possible to read in their many books. However, these scholars did not have any Torah and denied the God of heaven and earth, or that there is a creator of heaven and earth. Therefore, King David warned us about this wisdom and wrote immediately afterwards, "The teaching of the Lord is perfect, renewing life; The decrees of the Lord are enduring, making the simple wise. The precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing the heart; The instruction of the Lord is lucid, making the eyes light up. The fear of the Lord is pure, abiding forever; The judgments of the Lord are true, righteous altogether" [Psalms 19:8-10]. [trans.]

In contrast, whoever does not observe God's Torah, commandments, precepts, instructions and judgments and does not fear God, his soul is corrupted and blind. All of his wisdom is false and has no basis. In contrast, one must also [63a] contemplate the verses that King David previously said about how one must contemplate the glory, wisdom and powers of God. Similarly, as mentioned previously, all scholars who do not have our holy Torah, commandments, and fear of God are blind, full of falsehoods and are false teachers. Thus, when we want to study our holy Torah, we must properly recognize God, love and fear him, and want to serve him from the heart. We must also know theology. Not every scholar or soul is qualified to study the wisdom of Kabbalah. At present, because of our many sins, we are missing true scholars of this subject. I have no doubt that if someone will first study the *Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot* and *Sefer Ikkarim* or at least the *Sefer Akedat Yizhak*, he will understand not only many verses in our holy Torah, but whole chapters in the Prophets and Writings, many Talmudic passages, *midrashim* and *aggadot*, that he did not previously understand. In particular, he will come to know, with the help of God, many theological concepts. I have
no doubt that many scholars who will study these books will agree with me and they will thank me.

I must again write that nobody is as wise as one who has experience. As an experienced fool, I can best testify how much these two holy books, namely *Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot* and *Sefer Ikkarim*, with the help of God, [63b] helped me and enlightened my eyes in the Torah of truth. However, listen my dear brothers, I write this only for His sake and to fulfill, "Love your fellow as yourself," and not, heaven forbid, to lead them on a wrong path. Therefore, I obligate myself here for the sum of five hundred ducats. This writing should be as valid as a promissory note prepared by a major court, with reliable and upright witnesses. Rather, I want to pledge or guarantee that if a community or holy society of ten householders will have studied these books and regret it and not agree with me that they were led on the just and proper path, may the five hundred ducats be forfeit. They should be given as charity to the poor of the land of Israel and of the community where these books were studied. Since it would be too difficult for me to travel everywhere, to all communities, and it would be too difficult to travel to every learned scholar, I therefore wish to obligate myself that they should come at my expense to the holy community of Frankfurt am Main or the holy communities of Hamburg and Halberstadt which are close to me. Who is just can be decided by arbitrators. I wish to name in advance three arbitrators who are famous and recognized sages, may God lengthen their days in office. I did not have the privilege of seeing two of them, much [64a] less to know them. Those who think that, heaven forbid, I did not lead them on the proper path, can easily send someone to one of these communities and take as many arbitrators as they want. If, heaven forbid, I will be found to be wrong, I will immediately pay the fine of five hundred ducats and their expenses.

Dear brothers, I hope that out of these writings in which I recommend these books so highly, nobody will be able to assume other than that I wrote this for His sake and to fulfill, "Love your fellow as yourself." I have found some evil people who put these books alongside many other books by great sages from the time of Saadia Gaon, which were written by great sages. In particular, the books of the sage Maimonides and other holy books by several sages and famous pietists who were not careful with their flames. They did not understand these books and called them not only secondary books but also excluded books, heaven forbid. There is much to write about this, but, because of our many sins, I do not have the time. When I occasionally have a free day, I would be busy with worldly needs and also partly charitable acts. I wasted ten days to four weeks. As a result, because of our many sins, I do not have the time that I would dearly love to sanctify in public His
great name and his Torah of truth and the honor of the teachings of many famous sages who taught the Torah of truth, for the sake of heaven. They wrote in order to repair their own soul and those of others, as every [64b] honest Jew is obligated to maintain. I trust in God that when our order of study, as previously mentioned, as well as these holy books will be studied diligently in all communities, there will be found students of Torah who will sanctify His great name and His holy Torah. All of these holy books will be maintained and the pillar of Torah will have a sturdy foundation. Our order of worship, that is prayer, will be much improved, and our acts of lovingkindness will be done with truth. With the help of God and his great mercy we will be set free and redeemed through this from our exile.

Chapter Sixteen

I must mention two things that will improve our worship services. First, the rabbis, communal leaders or synagogue wardens, all those who have authority in the synagogue, should insure that order is maintained. The great tumult and confusing loud prayer that everyone, from children to adults, engages in is, because of our many sins, not only a desecration of God’s name for the gentiles who come to our synagogues, but this commotion confuses anyone who wishes to pray with proper kavanah. The cantor also often becomes confused in his prayers, not only because of the ordinary screaming of those who want to compete with the cantor, but there are those who come in the middle of the prayers and begin to pray from the beginning with such loud screaming that their neighbors and other people [65a] cannot continue with their own prayers.

Secondly, it is indisputably certain that our sages said, “worship is prayer.”87 Since the destruction of the Temple and we cannot offer sacrifices anymore, may God have mercy, our prayers or divine worship have taken the place of the sacrifices. When one considers what is the translation of the word tefillah, it is “asking.” Our whole order of prayer is none other than we ask Him for what we desire from Him. So dear brothers, let us take an example. When we receive everything good from a human king or person all our lives, we are correctly obligated to serve him. Is this service when I ask him that he should continue to help me and when we cannot serve him? Are we not at the very least obligated to praise and thank him? So dear brothers, let us consider what kind of merciful, compassionate and long suffering God, The Blessed One, King of Kings is, what kind of acts of lovingkindness He does for us from the moment we are born, how He nourishes us, and the compassion and

87A paraphrase of B. Ta’anit, 2a.
lovingkindness He shows us from our childhood and so long as we are in this world. If there were as many writers as people since the creation of the world had hair on their [65b] heads, they could not write it all. Much less so can I, a poor sinful worm, write about this. How can we repay this obligation? Even if all the people since Adam until the present were all alive, they could not repay God for the lovingkindness that He does for one person. Beyond this, not only can we not serve Him, but we continue to sin everyday and not observe His commandments. Is this service when we ask Him to help us and do good for us in the future? Our sages indeed said, “prayer is worship.” Prayer of the type described above, is a very exalted thing as demonstrated by many holy books. It takes the place of sacrifices. We must consider that God called his Temple a house of prayer. Isaiah 56, verse 7, “And let them rejoice in my house of prayer, their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be welcome on my altar; my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

The question is, did one do anything in the house of prayer beyond offering sacrifices? What did the Levites do? Why did they have musical instruments? For no other reason than to sing songs and play on their instruments. How many choristers with musical instruments were there? I only want to mention one verse, I Chronicles, chapter 25, verse 7, “There were 288 who taught how to sing to God, the Lord.” [trans.] This is how it was done in the Temple which God called a house [66a] of prayer. Along with the sacrifices, God was worshipped with song. The question is, with what songs do we worship God alongside our prayers which are supposed to be the substitute for the sacrifices? Some want to answer that we fulfill this with the pesukei de-zimra and halleluyah. However, one must know that there is a difference between hallel and zimra or shir. We have enough songs in Psalms. We have the Shir ha-Yihud, which is divided into sections for every day of the week, and was compiled by R. Samuel he-Hasid and R. Judah he-Hasid.

They are great songs and praises to God. May God have mercy on the way they are sung. They are not sung but mumbled. The cantor does not say what the congregation is saying, and the congregation does not say what the cantor says. Who is responsible? The ordinary person unfortunately does not understand what he should sing or say. It is beneath the dignity of our scholars and some rabbis, to recite Psalms, much less the Shir ha-Yihud with the cantor in the synagogue. They think little of God. They do not think about who Moses was, how God did the miracles for him and all of Israel and helped them through the sea. How did Moses our teacher and the Israelites thank God for this? They said shira. “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord, Etc.” [Exodus 15:1]. What did King David do to worship and praise God? He wrote songs and praises. What did King Solomon do? We find in I Kings
chapter 5, verse 12, “His songs numbered [66b] one thousand and five.” [trans.] In addition, the Song of Songs which is holy of holies. What did the prophetess Deborah do when God helped her? She sang a song, Judges 5:1, “And Deborah sang.” “I will sing to the Lord, will hymn the Lord, the God of Israel” [Judges 5:3]. The prophet Isaiah says not only in 5:1, “Let me sing for my beloved,” but he also assures us in his prophecy in chapter 26:1, “In that day this song shall be sung.” In the messianic age, songs will also be sung. In comparison, the last mishnah of Tamid says, “we will sing a song in the future, in the day that will be completely Sabbath and rest for eternal life.”88 We recite this every Sabbath and festival in Ein ke-Elohenu.

We also find in the Talmud that songs and praises are pleasing to God, as the Talmud says in Berakhot [7b] “who was Ruth that she was worthy that David, who sang songs and praises to God, was descended from her.” So too, God forbid, it says in the tokheha, Deuteronomy 28:47 “Because you would not serve the Lord your God in joy and gladness.” [trans.] Concerning this, the Talmud says in Erakhin 11b, “what is the meaning of worship with joy and gladness of heart, this is song.” [trans.] Thus, it is clear to see that God in the tokhehah is angry because they do not worship him with song. Should not such scholars be ashamed before God and fear [67a] when they will read these verses and Talmudic passages. I hope to God that they will be ashamed when an ordinary man or woman will read this whole passage to them when they see a scholar who does not recite the Shir ha-Yihud and remind them how they fool God. For they say everyday in Yishtabbah, “for to you our God and God of our fathers, song and praise are pleasant.”89 God desires song and praise, and yet they do not want to recite it.

It is to be wondered that scholars in particular do not want to recite the Shir ha-Yihud. On the day of the giving of the Torah, on Shavuot, we interrupt the Torah reading and recite Akdamut, because it is a great song and praise to God. Why do they not want to recite the Shir ha-Yihud? There is no need to interrupt their prayers. In addition, Akdamut is in Aramaic while the Shir ha-Yihud is in Hebrew, and contains more truthful songs and praises. Which author was a finer person, the one who wrote Akdamut or the Shir ha-Yihud? I do not want, heaven forbid, to insert myself between two great mountains. I would very much like to find a learned scholar who could give me a reason why he does not want to recite the Shir ha-Yihud. I do not know the reason, thus I will not write about this.

89A phrase from the Yishtabbah prayer, found in the prayerbook.
Dear brothers, I know very well that, because of our many sins, I am a poor, sinful and ignorant worm. I would gladly not have undertaken to write about this, particularly since the *Shir ha-Yihud* is [67b] recited by very few scholars. In many communities it is not recited at all. Thank God, as long as I have been a householder, I have recited it diligently and caused that my community recites it slowly, word for word. Yet I did not have the heart to say anything about this publicly, much less to write about it. However, God provided me with an assistant or helper, may God lengthen his days, the true scholar and sage who was rabbi in Emden, Rabbi Jacob, may his light shine, son of the famous sage *Hakham Zevi*, who in his prayerbook, which I just acquired this year, gives a public halakhic ruling, which every scholar can read, from page 175b to 178. Because I am concerned that this prayerbook has not been widely distributed, and also for the common man who does not understand the holy books so well, which though they have been long in print remain closed to him. Therefore I will write the reason that the scholars wish to know, in Yiddish. I hope that the merit of the author of the *Shir ha-Yihud* which he authored for the sake of His great name, will support me and it will be a repair for my soul.

The reason that some communities and also some scholars do not recite the *Shir ha-Yihud* is to be seen in the *Levush ha-Tekhelet*, section 133. The great sage Rabbi Solomon Luria abrogated this in all the communities where he was rabbi. The *Levush* writes that he does not want to give the reason. The *Levush* also writes, however, [68a] that not all communities followed this ruling. The *Levush* also wonders that these communities recited the *Shir ha-Kavod, Anim Zemirot*, which the sage Rabbi Solomon Luria (Maharshal) did not abrogate. This is why some communities and scholars do not recite the *Shir ha-Yihud*. However, he does not give the reason and many scholars do not know the reason. Whoever wishes to know the reason should look in the Responsa of our teacher and master, the famous and great sage, Rabbi Moses Isserles, responsum 126, where he will find the reason. Heaven forbid, I poor sinner do not want to insert myself among the giants. However, as the sage Rabbi Samuel Judah [Katzenellenbogen] writes in this responsum, "the matter seemed bad to me, etc." It must have disappointed him very much that people did not want to recite this.

Now, as mentioned, the sage Rabbi Jacob [Emden], may God lengthen his days, has issued a halakhic ruling that it should be recited. Therefore, I may write that the reason is because of one stanza of six words. According to my opinion, sages and rabbis would have done better to change six words if the author had, heaven forbid, made a mistake, instead of completely abrogating such songs that we are obligated to recite everyday. One could object if it were kabbalistic or
difficult to understand. However, I assure you that whoever understands the Sha’ar ha-yihud in Hovot ha-Levavot will easily understand the whole Shir ha-Yihud. We have, thank God, many scholars and worthy people who after they have studied Hovot ha-Levavot agreed with me. [68b] Indeed, upright people asked me that they did not understand the words, “kol ha-nirim ve-ha-niskalim ve-ha-madaim be-eser kelulim, ve-sheva kamayot, ve-sheish nidot, ve-shalosh gezerot, le-itot u-midot,” in the Shir ha-Yihud for the fifth day [Thursday]. In particular however, the words “sheva kamayot, ve-sheish nidot, ve-shalosh gezerot.” Indeed, in many prayerbooks which have commentaries, the kamiot are given more than one explanation. In some, they are explained kabbalistically, and some think that the word kamiot is a Greek word.

I gave some people an explanation according to my own poor understanding and they liked it. I will write it out of love for my dear brothers and not, heaven forbid, to portray myself as one who can give explanations, but only to show that the author of these songs wrote them in pure Hebrew. Indeed, if much of it can be understood kabbalistically, it can similarly be understood in simple Hebrew. Just as the whole Torah is called a tree, as mentioned above. A tree has its roots hidden in the earth and we cannot see it or easily reach it. The tree itself, with branches, leaves and fruits is above ground, and God lets the sun shine on it so that we can see it and derive benefit from it. So too, our holy Torah consists of two explanations. One of them is secret and hidden just like the roots of the tree which we do not see and is difficult to reach. The second explanation is called revealed and, thank God, is like [69a] the tree with branches, leaves and fruit which freely stands out of the earth and God lets the sun shine on it, in order that we should be able to see well and utilize it to the best of our abilities.

This is the meaning of words ha-nirim ve-ha-niskalim. Ha-nirim is translated, those things which we can see with our eyes and is on the earth. Ve-ha-niskalim is translated, those things that we cannot see with our eyes and are not physical. They are purely intellectual and must be contemplated with the mind. Ve-ha-madaim be-eser kelulim is translated, those things that we know or are familiar with through ten primary principles, the ten primary sources that one finds in everything that exists in this world and can be contemplated. Indeed, this can be read in some prayerbooks and in Yiddish in Hovot ha-Levavot, Sha’ar ha-yihud, chapter 7. Scholars, however, can read it in Sefer Ruah Hen, chapter 10, which at present, thank God, is readily available.

I find it necessary to quote it here in Yiddish, but I would ask the scholars who study Torah for the sake of heaven, and upright people to

read what the Akedat Yizhak writes in the third section (sha'ar) concerning the passage, “the world was created with ten statements.”\textsuperscript{91} The sage, Rabbi Moses Albelda writes about this in his book Olat Tamid, with regard to the ten commandments, pages 176 and 177. In addition, what the above mentioned rabbi of Emden, the sage Rabbi Jacob, may he enlighten the world, writes in the introduction to his new prayerbook, page 27b. I may not quote it here, but only write the ordinary translation [69b] of what are the ten principles. Namely, the essence of a thing and nine accidental things that come to a thing or that it has. They are, 1 – how large, 2 – how it looks, 3 – something that cannot exist alone, but must be associated with something else. For example, when I say someone is a master. He cannot be a master if he does not have someone else who is his servant. He cannot be called a master if he does not have a servant who so names him. Or if I say this is a servant, he must necessarily have a master. 4 – when he is. When is he born or when he came to a place. 5 – where he is. 6 – what kind of condition is he in. Is he standing, sitting, or lying down, etc. 7 – knowing that which is not part of his body. Rather, what belongs to him or what he bought – houses, clothes, gardens and similar desirable things. 8 – the things he works or makes. 9 – a thing that is worked or made. The author of the Shir Ha-Yihud gives as the great song and praise of God, that we cannot give Him enough titles. We also cannot comprehend Him, as he explicitly said previously. We cannot comprehend Him as He is, or what to compare Him to, etc. So he says further that from these ten primary sources which we know [70a] about Him we also cannot say. First, we do not know His essence or character, and concerning the other nine principles which are accidental we can and should say even less concerning God.

Further, the words sheva kamayot are pure Hebrew. Sheva is translated seven and the root of the word kamayot is kamah, how. However, here one must know that the word kamah in Hebrew, or how, can be said seven ways. 1 – how long. 2 – how wide. 3 – how high. 4 – how far from east. 5 – how far from west. 6 – how far from south. 7 – how far from north. More how’s about one thing cannot be said in Hebrew. Therefore, all these seven how’s cannot be said about God. I believe that this explanation of sheva kamiot can be understood by everyone in its simple meaning without kabbalah. If someone would want to ask, one can say how one more way, namely how does he appear, black or white. Therefore it must be mentioned that in Hebrew this is not called kamah. Rather, it is eich and eich belongs to this statement, as can be seen in all books and commentaries.

\textsuperscript{91}M. Avot 4:29.
The words *sheish nidot* are pure Hebrew. *Sheish* is six and the root of *nidot* is *nad*, and it means movement from one place to another, as it says in Genesis 4:12, “You shall be a ceaseless wanderer on earth.” Rashi says, “you have no permission to live in one place.”92 The Targum says, “you will be a wanderer in the land.”93 Psalms 11:1, “How can you say to me, take to the hills like a bird.” Proverbs 27:8, “Like a sparrow wandering from its nest is a man [70b] who wanders from his home.” This can only be translated as moving or wandering from one place to the other. Let us consider how many ways a thing can naturally move or wander from one place to another. One will not find more than six ways, up and down and in the four directions. Therefore, six *nidot* or the six natural movements should not be said about God.

Further, and *shalosh gezerot, ve-itot, u-midot* is also pure simple Hebrew. *Shalosh* means three. *Gezerot* is translated as command. There are three primary commands from God for the whole world and everything that is in the world. This is *have*, something has become that previously was not. *Ve-nifsad*, and must again disappear. Thus, everything must become what it is according to God’s command, even if it does not desire to. It must remain, according to God’s command, as long as it is His holy will, even if it no longer desires to remain. It must again disappear, according to God’s command, even if it no longer desires to disappear. I believe that this explanation is correct. Indeed, our sages in Pirke Avot count “against your will” five times. Namely, “against your will were you formed, against your will were you born, against your will you live, against your will you die, against your will in the future you will give an account before the King of Kings, the Blessed One.”94 Here we must understand that to give an account can only be said about one person. “Against your will were you born” can only be said about one living being. The other three are primary commands which apply to the whole world and especially to all creatures [71a] or things that grow. There are plants or inanimate objects in the world which only God created. It can also be said, as mentioned above, “against your will were you formed.” It is only through God’s command that they were created. It is only on God’s command that they remain or live as long as it is His holy will. They die or disappear according to God’s command.

*Shalosh itot* is also simple, as all commentaries explain it. Three times, the past, the future and the present time. *Shalosh midot* are also as their simple explanation, three types of measure. Namely that which is

92 Rashi on Genesis 4:12.
93 Targum Onkelos on Genesis 4:12.
94 M. Avot 4:29.
measured with *ailin* or dry weight with which one measures grain, wheat and similar things, and wet measure with which oil, wine, beer and similar things are measured. It says further especially, "concerning God one cannot say one thing out of all these, because He created them all." [trans.] Thus, this can all be understood in a simple way without kabbalistic explanations. Be assured that the whole *Shir ha-Yihud* can be understood in this way, when simple people will learn the meaning of their daily prayers as well as the *Shir ha-Yihud*. If they cannot easily obtain a teacher, they should first read the *Shir ha-Yihud* for the first day, in Yiddish translation. I hope to God that they will acquire the desire to read further in Yiddish or to learn the meaning of the words from a teacher. I am certain that our order of worship, [71b] that is prayer, will be conducted differently, when the ordinary person will understand the meaning of the words that he prays to God or sings to praise His holy name. The *Shir ha-Yihud* will be said better and more easily, word for word, and it will be a significant aid to our redemption.

I ask you my dear brothers, for God’s sake, do not suspect me, heaven forbid, that I have troubled you, or written too much about the *Shir ha-Yihud*. Rather, be assured that I have written so much about this because the *Shir ha-Yihud* is called “for the sake of the true unity of His great and blessed name.” I am prepared every instant to allow myself to be sacrificed as Isaac was sacrificed on the altar, for the sake of His great name, and similarly to fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself.” I wrote this as a supplement because it is my hope that the order of worship in our synagogues will be improved through this. I hope to God that when our order of study and order of worship will be instituted, as mentioned above, even *gemilut hesed* will be changed through this. I find it necessary to mention this at the end for the improvement of our *gemilut hesed*. As mentioned above, I am only writing my own poor understanding in the hope that we will finally be redeemed from our lengthy exile, and to encourage my equals, my brothers, to help me fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself.” They should have the image of the verse before their eyes, “You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God” [Deuteronomy 18:13]. However, along with it, “Fear no man” [Deuteronomy 1:17]. You should not fear any person in the world, and only [72a] act with truth for the sake of His name.

Therefore, I must also cite the following for the sake of God and in order to fulfill, “Love your fellow as yourself.” Namely, I have sufficiently examined the reasons for our lengthy exile according to my poor insignificant opinion, how the three things on which the world exists, our Torah, our worship, our *gemilut hasadim* are observed by us. The ordinary person has no responsibility for those things which relate to Torah and worship, because these things must be learned. In contrast,
gemilut ḥesed literally consists of natural human love and there is no doubt that we are human, because God himself so named us. Ezekiel 34, verse 31 “For you, my flock, flock that I tend are men; and I, your shepherd, am your God – declares the Lord God.” He not only calls us people but we are called a holy people. We are not only called a holy people, but we are God’s servants. We are also called God’s children. The verses are so well known that I do not need to cite them.

However, I have often had to battle with great anguish. How is it that we as people, because of our many sins, a holy people, servants and children of God, go against our human nature with regard to gemilut ḥesed? Because of our many sins, it is better observed by all other nations than by us. Similarly, our sages themselves say concerning the verse, “Sin is a reproach to any people” [Proverbs 14:34], there is no gemilut ḥesed found among us as people.95 Rather, because of our many sins, one literally finds more love for one another among wild animals, cattle, and fowl [72b] than among us people, in such a consideration of our human nature. As mentioned above, God not only called us people, but as previously mentioned, we are called a holy people, God’s children and God’s servants.

I found in the same verse in Ezekiel 34:31 that we have another name, namely God’s sheep, “You are my sheep” [trans.]. Concerning this, my question becomes even stronger, for there is nothing more pious than sheep. When one wishes to call someone truly pious, one says that he is as pious as a sheep. We too are called God’s sheep. How is it then that, because of our many sins, we are so angry with one another. Concerning this, I remembered what the prophet Isaiah said chapter 53, verse 6, “We all went astray like sheep, each going his own way.” This prophecy, because of our many sins, has been fulfilled in us. We have gone astray like the sheep, each going his own way. The question then is, when the sheep go astray and each runs his own way, who is responsible? Nobody can say other than that the shepherd is at fault. We are truly called God’s sheep and, because of our many sins, go astray. Thus, naturally, because of our many sins, nobody is responsible other than our shepherds. The question is, who are our shepherds? Who should guard us and watch over us? I would rather not write it because I am afraid that I will make enemies.

However, I have the verse before me, “You shall be wholehearted with the Lord, your God” and similarly, “Do not fear any man.” [73a] I do not want to write falsehoods since my whole purpose is “Love your fellow as yourself.” I must write the truth out of love for God and love

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95The primary rabbinic exegesis of this verse is in Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, 2.5. However, none of the interpretations say this.
for my brothers. I cannot name any others as our shepherds than our communal leaders and our rabbis. Less offense can be taken when one considers that we as people are called God’s people, God’s servants, God’s sheep and God’s children. There is nothing missing in our nature but good shepherds to lead us. Our shepherds do not even need a long shepherd’s crook to lead us, but only their mouths to lead us with words of musar. If the verse, “Sin is a reproach to any people” [Proverbs 14:34], has the meaning that, because of our many sins, the love of hesed is more fashionable among all the nations than among us, it is because at least every Sunday or on their holidays they hear musar from their preachers. When their preachers experience that an evil thing happens in their community, they protect nobody and preach publicly about it. Because of our many sins, God have mercy, we are not watched over by our shepherds as people, not even as sheep. Rather, we are raised like wild cattle and predatory animals. I believe that if they did not have fear of the government, or fear of the nobility, each would take from the other with violence. Rather, worse than wild animals, each would try to devour the other. Who is responsible? Truly, nobody but the shepherds. Our sages say, “Leave it to Israel, they are holy.”96 Israel is called holy. Because of our many sins, they [73b] are not being led.

However, remember for blessing the righteous sage, Rabbi Abraham,97 the rabbi of Amsterdam, who previously had been the rabbi of Halberstadt for many years. I heard with my own ears and it is still known to many people in this community, may God preserve them, that he gave a class on musar every evening after the evening prayers and maintained his community in good condition. One hears similar things, thank God, about many other great sages of the land, may God protect them and lengthen their days. Indeed, the householders have their societies and have a class everyday. When they hear about an occurrence in their community that is not proper, they get up in the middle of the year, during the week, preach and strongly rebuke the community. They fulfill, “You should be wholehearted with the Lord, your God” [Deuteronomy 18:17]. “You shall fear no man” [Deuteronomy 1:17]. They watch over their flocks and defer to no person, be he wealthy or a communal leader.

In contrast, because of our many sins, there are many rabbis who have nothing to do. They have no responsibility for a yeshiva, nor acting

96 A paraphrase of B. Pesahim 66a. “Leave it to Israel, if they are not prophets, they are the children of prophets. My thanks to Dr. Ze’ev Gries for bringing this source to my attention.
97 B. Auerbach, Geschichte der Israelitischen Gemeinde Halberstadt (Halberstadt, 1866), p. 63. He was the son of the Court Jew Liebmann Jost. Cf., S. Stern Court Jew, p. 184.
as a judge, nor communal responsibilities. They do nothing but preach on Shabbat Shuvah and Shabbat ha-Gadol, only to show off their learning and intellectual acuity. The rest of the year, however, their work is to obtain their rabbinical fees, which they charge for conducting weddings, testing ritual slaughterers and examiners to give them authorization to slaughter. They extract even more from wealthy people through flattery and syncopancy. I have often explained the reason why all rabbis have the title N’Y. This is an abbreviation for Ner Yisrael (light of Israel), our light who should lead us on the correct path to life in the world to come. One must understand that every light, whether it is from oil, tallow or wax should provide light for us. They draw the oil, tallow or wax to themselves and [74a] they consume it. Through this we have a benefit, that we can see well by the light. In contrast, there is often a bad light, which draws to itself the oil, tallow, or wax and consumes it, but burns very dimly and one has no benefit from it, and one must sit in the dark. So too are our rabbis.

There are true sages, some of them I have had the honor to know personally, and some only by reputation, who cannot live in certain communities. They must receive their rabbinical salary in an orderly manner, and have all of their needs met. In return, they light the way to life in the world to come for us. Everyone who is called an Israelite should benefit such rabbis beyond their salaries, each according to his means. Our talmudic sages write enough about the rewards of benefiting a scholar. In contrast, because of our many sins, we have rabbis who are like a candle that only consumes the wax, oil or tallow, as described above, and burns darkly. They only want to extract the fat from us for themselves. They do not lead us at all to the life in the world to come. I do not want to undertake to write what I cannot prove. The prophet Ezekiel in chapter 34, where we are called God’s sheep will provide me what to write. “The word of the Lord came to me: O mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to them: To the shepherds: Thus says the Lord: Ah, you shepherds who have been tending yourselves! Is it not the flock [74b] that the shepherds ought to tend? You partake of the fat, you clothe yourself with the wool, and you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not tend the flock. Etc.” [Ezekiel 34:1-3]. [trans.] Everyone can read the rest of the chapter, how harshly God threatens to punish the shepherds, particularly verses 8-10. The Prophet Jeremiah says the same thing in chapter 23, verse 1, “Ah, shepherds who let the flock of my pasture stray and scatter – declares the Lord. Assuredly, thus said the Lord, The God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who should tend my people: It is you who let my flock scatter and go astray. You gave no thought to them, but I am going to give
thought to you, for your wicked acts – declares the Lord” [Jeremiah 23:1-2]. [trans.]

God says the same thing through the prophet Zechariah 11, verse 17, “Oh, the worthless shepherd who abandons his flock! Let a sword descend upon his arm and upon his right eye! His arm shall shrivel up; His right eye shall go blind!” [trans.] [75a] Rashi and the Targum explain, “A sword on his arm and his right eye” as, the shepherd has the sword in his hand to slaughter the best sheep and his right eye gazes on the fat sheep or the wealthy, in order to rob them. That is why his right arm will shrivel up and his right eye will be blind.

Nobody can be offended when I write what God said about the shepherds through his prophets. There may be some communal leaders that may be offended that I call them shepherds. I must excuse myself and say that I did not write this out of my own head, but when it says in Ezekiel 34:2, “O mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel,” Rashi interprets it “concerning the communal leaders of Israel.”98 The Targum understands it not only here as “communal leaders of Israel,” but everywhere where it says “shepherds,” he translates it as “communal leaders.” All communal leaders who are offended by this can read it and see for themselves. So too, Zechariah 11, verse 17, “O, the worthless shepherd.” The Targum translates it as “woe to the foolish communal leaders.” [trans.] They are such foolish communal leaders or shepherds that they allow themselves to be led astray by other evil shepherds and to hire such evil shepherds, partly through flattery and partly allow themselves to be blinded by money. However, it is desirable that the communal leaders as shepherds should be concerned that the rabbis or shepherds that they hire [75b] should properly guard their sheep.

In those places that have no societies, or few of them, or have no scholars who can give classes for the householders, it is the responsibility of the communal leaders, when they hire a rabbi, to explicitly demand this of him. Particularly in those places where the rabbi has little to do, he should give a class in musar every evening in the synagogue, just as was done by the sage Rabbi Abraham, rabbi of the holy communities of Halberstadt and Amsterdam. If the rabbi does not have time every evening, then at a minimum, he should be required to do this every Sabbath or during the week. When the rabbi travels around in the surrounding area to certify slaughterers and examiners, or to conduct weddings, he should also oversee the orders of study, worship and gemilut hesed and rebuke his flock, and lead them in the correct path, as the prophet Ezekiel [chapter] 34 proposes. He should strengthen those he

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98Rashi on Ezekiel 34:2.
99Targum Jonathan.
finds weak, heal those he, heaven forbid, finds sick, and mend those he finds broken, bring back those pushed away, and search for the lost.

Because of our many sins, there are national communal leaders and shepherds, as already mentioned above, [who cover their eyes] and not only do not see the rabbis or shepherds through their fingers, but behave in a manner similar to the shepherds. Like those the prophet Ezekiel called shepherds, they only seek to extract the fat from the ordinary person. I again ask that my sharp writing not offend anyone. I have often assured you that it is only out of love and “Love your fellow as yourself” [76a] that I am writing primarily for my equals. Therefore this is addressed particularly to my equals, to fulfill, “Love your fellows as yourself.” Namely, because of our many sins, I am fouled by sin and worthless. My equals who are also not useful, who are called communal leaders or even rabbis should think about the harsh punishments God has prepared for the shepherds. They should improve themselves and properly tend their sheep and lead them to Torah, worship, and gemilut hasadim. I hope that because of this, or through its merit, God will help me, with His help, improve myself and we will finally be redeemed from our exile. I must write out of love for my brothers who are more pious and better than I, poor sinner, more reasons why I wrote so much about the shepherds. This happened because it was my desire not only to examine the reasons for our lengthy exile, but also to write the truth.

I do not want to leave my dear brothers mired in this great anguish, but rather want to find a means by which we can be redeemed from our exile. Thus, I not only have a means here, but want to show a great hope for our exile. Namely, there really are such shepherds, as mentioned above, because of our many sins, and I know them. If I would be asked by true sages about this, I would name them, and, because of our many sins, prove it with hundreds of witnesses. In addition, the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah through whom [76b] God warned such shepherds to punish them. Similarly, afterwards he promised us the true shepherd, our true redeemer. Similarly, everyone can read chapter 23 in Jeremiah, Ezekiel 34, and Zechariah 11 and the following chapter. There is nothing to doubt in it. However, our sages said that “the Son of David will not come until the generation is completely evil or completely good.” 100 I hope that not only all the sages and rabbis of the land, all the communal leaders, but everyone who can strengthen and exert himself should do what little he can, publicly write and help clean out the evil shepherds or improve them, in order that the order of Torah study, worship, and gemilut hasadim will be improved in the way that it is pleasing to God. Because of this merit, we should live to see the

100B. Sanhedrin, 98b.
prophecy fulfilled, “In that day there shall be one Lord with one name. [Zechariah 14:9]”

Since I promised to write a moralistic tale from the Sefer Akedat Yizḥak, I would like to cite it here. Indeed, this book is written in a very elevated style and parts are difficult to understand. The author of the Akedah cites this at length in gate 101, in his commentary on “See, I set before you this day life and prosperity” [Deuteronomy 30:15]. I wish to cite it as briefly as possible and to the best of my abilities.

There was once a king of a tremendously large country. In this land, nobody [could become] a noble, [77a] an advisor or high officer, much less a king, [before] his good deeds, character and knowledge of all branches of wisdom were carefully examined. All nobles, advisors, and important people were created in this manner. This king had three sons whom he loved very much. He called them and explained to them the rules of the land when they became adults. Nobody can become important or receive high office unless he has significant good deeds and a knowledge of all branches of wisdom. They must travel in the world, learn all branches of wisdom to the extent possible and become accustomed to good deeds, until he writes them to come home. They had no choice, even if they did not want to leave their land because they had no desire for greatness or an important position. All three had to travel to foreign lands.

They traveled a great distance over land and water. In the distance they saw a mighty castle with buildings and gardens. They had seen nothing like it in their lives. They were very eager to come to this castle and gardens. When they arrived at the gate, there was a guard, a very old man. They asked him if they could go and see the garden. The guard said to them. You can go in and see everything and eat [77b] and drink what you want. However, I tell you that you cannot remain here forever. When you will be ordered to, you will have to leave. They went further and there was another guard who was covered with boils from head to foot. He told them that they could enjoy everything, but could not take anything with them when they left. Further along there was a third guard. He was a large powerful man and was so handsome that they had never seen anyone like him. This guard told them that they could enjoy everything but should not eat any unhealthy fruit. They should only eat that which is good and healthy if they want to be handsome.

The three brothers joyfully entered the castle and gardens. They were so full of herbs, flowers, fruit trees, all kinds of animal life, waters to drink everywhere, containing all kinds of fish, all sorts of pearls and diamonds, gold and silver, that they wandered around for fourteen days and were not satiated. Each one contemplated something different and in their contemplation of the castle and gardens they separated, each to
contemplate a different thing. One of them was only attracted to the lovely fruits and good food and drink. He did not think about, much less enjoy anything else. He devours and drinks so much good food and drink [78a] that he becomes so fat that he literally could not walk anymore.

The second one thinks about nothing other than silver, gold, diamonds and pearls. He is not concerned with any other creature or food and drink. Rather, he gathers so much gold, silver and precious stones that he literally cannot carry it. He eats and drinks what comes to hand. He only thinks about what he can gather and drag along.

The third one, however, does nothing but contemplate every flower, every fruit, every bird, every animal in its wondrously beautiful nature. Everything according to its wondrous species, all manner of fish, and the arrangement of buildings, gardens, lakes, and streams. In the course of this he eats and drinks all the healthy and good foods and drinks in an orderly manner. He is careful not to eat or drink the unhealthy, as the guard had told him. Through this, he becomes very healthy and handsome. However, he often walks around in anguish wanting to know the lord who arranged this with such wisdom, so that he can ask him about all that his intellect cannot comprehend. This drives him on continually. Every time he contemplates great, beautiful and wondrous things, he again endeavors to find the lord, or a person who can show him the way. As he contemplates everything, he finds some very rare and precious pearls and diamonds. He reminds himself not to take them, [78b] yet he takes these pearls and diamonds. In any event, he can hide them in his mouth and take them with him. As each one is busily engaged in his activities, a messenger arrives with the command that they should come home again. The one who did nothing but eat and drink gluttonously was in great anguish that he had to leave behind all the good food and drinks. He could not take them with him.

The second one has even more anguish because he cannot take along all the silver, gold, and precious stones. He gathers together a load that he literally could not leave with.

The third one, however, is very happy that he has seen and contemplated so much. He has eaten and drunk in an orderly manner and was taking along one of the most beautiful pearls and precious stones, which he had wisely hidden in his mouth. Thus, he could empty all of his pockets and clothes. He had taken nothing. However, he has anguish and still seeks to see the lord or master of this great and wondrous work. When they left the garden, the first one who had done nothing but eat and drink gluttonously left the garden in peace. As soon as he came into another atmosphere and no longer had the good food and drink, he immediately collapsed and died like an animal. The other
one, who did nothing but gather silver, gold, pearls and precious stones [79a] and carried such a heavy load that he could barely carry it, as soon as he wanted to leave the garden, the guards beat him from head to foot until he was a mass of wounds. He had to leave behind the whole load that he had gathered. The third one, however, emptied all of his pockets and bundles and showed that he had taken nothing and left the garden with joy and honor.

Both of them traveled home and arrived before the gate of the castle. When the guards saw the one covered with wounds and filth, they laughed and asked him what he wanted. Crying and whimpering, he told them that he was born in the castle and the king had sent him away and now had called him back home. When the watchmen heard this, they laughed even more and had some youths throw him on the garbage heap. When the other one came with a royal appearance, and identified himself to the watch with great wisdom, he was immediately taken to the king with great honor.

When the king asked him what he had seen and what he had accomplished, he told the king at length everything he had seen and contemplated. He also brought the beautiful pearls and precious stones to the king. He complained to the king that he had not been able to see the lord or master who had made these beautiful things. The king rejoiced very much when he heard this. He sat him near himself [79b] and talked much about the lord or master who made all this.

Making innumerable distinctions, we are born into God's kingdom through his hesed. Indeed, the soul and body do not gladly enter this world. Therefore, all children cry when they enter this world. The soul is told that it cannot attain no higher virtue in the supernal light, if it does not earn it through its work in the person through Torah, commandments and good deeds. The soul is then sent into this world into the body of man. Just like into a garden with all kings of herbs, trees, fruits, animals and birds, all types of waters, drinks, fish, silver, gold, pearls, diamonds and all types of lovely buildings, as mentioned above. However, it is told that it cannot remain in the body and the garden, which is this world, but must leave again, as we find in Genesis 3:19, “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” It is also told that it can take nothing with it, as mentioned above, “For naked came I out of my mother’s womb and naked shall I return” [Job 1:21]. [trans.] Third, it is told not to partake of any unhealthy things if it wishes to appear handsome. It should not be deceived by the imaginary beauty of this world. Rather, it should be very careful concerning what is good and healthy and what is truly good, as we mentioned. [80a] As Moses, our Teacher a”h says in our holy Torah, “See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity” [Deuteronomy 30:15]. It later says, “Choose life” [Deuteronomy 30:19].
When we people come into the world, we look around a mighty, beautiful garden with great joy, as mentioned above. We rejoice in the garden and much good is done for us until after the bar mitzvah or eighteen to twenty. Then, we people divide into three types of people like the above mentioned three brothers. Many people do nothing in the world but eat and drink gluttonously, whore around, and follow the desires of their heart. They become so fat that they almost cannot walk. They do not want to think about anything else. Second, there are many people who do not want to think. They ask for little food and drink. They eat and drink what comes to hand. They only think about gathering silver, gold, pearls and precious stones. Day and night are equal to them. They search the whole garden and would gladly gather all the silver, gold, pearls and precious stones and accumulate such a load that they can barely walk.

Third, there is a type of person who, because of our many sins, is very rare. They only go around and contemplate the great wonder and beauty of creation and awesomely beautiful buildings. As the prophet says, “Lift high your eyes and see: Who created these?” [Isaiah 40:26]. They eat and drink what is good and healthy, in order to maintain their life. [80b] They do not allow themselves to be misled by the imaginary beauties of the foolish world and everything in it. They remind themselves that they will again have to leave the garden and will not be able to take anything with them, because it is forbidden. Yet, they can take along a few rare beautiful pearls and precious stones that they do not have to put into their sack or pockets, but can deposit on themselves with wisdom. Namely, that which they need for themselves in the world [to come]. They can take with them all the acts of charity and lovingkindness that they have done. They contemplate everything with great pleasure and joy. Yet, they have great anguish that they cannot meet the lord who organized everything or the great master who made everything so beautiful, and ask about the great wonders that they cannot understand. As Moses our Teacher a”h, the teacher of all prophets, himself desired and asked, “Pray let me know your ways” [Exodus 33:13], “Oh, let me behold your presence!” [Exodus 33:18].

Each of these three types of people goes along on his way until once, a messenger, i.e. the angel of death, comes and says that the king wants them to leave and come back home. The first is horribly frightened that he has to leave the garden, or this world, and leave behind and not take with him all the good food, drink and their heart’s desires. The second one even more so, since he thinks that he can drag along everything that he has assembled, but not everything that is in the garden, or this world. The third, however, leaves with joy because he lived in the manner [81a] that the guards had commanded him, through our holy Torah and
commandments. He is, however, troubled and looks around everywhere, to know the lord or master. The first one leaves the garden taking nothing along with him, but when he comes into another atmosphere and no long has the food, drink, and heart’s delights, he collapses like a beast. Concerning this, King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3:18-19, “So I decided, as regards men, to dissociate them [from] the divine beings and to face the fact that they are beasts. For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have the same fate: As the one dies so dies the other, etc.” And further in verse 20, “Both go to the same place; Both came from dust and both return to dust.” Everyone can read these verses in Yiddish or Hebrew, with whatever commentaries he wishes.

The second one, however, who in his acquisitiveness wanted to take everything along, as soon as he wants to leave the garden, he is immediately horribly beaten, heaven forbid, by the guards and must leave everything behind:

The third one, however, who are the scholars or similar honest people who maintained what they were commanded, leave the garden with joy and honor. They take precious stones and pearls with them that they had hidden in their mouths. These are the Torah, songs and praises which they repaired and they take along similar things that are hidden on them, mitzvot, charitable acts and acts of lovingkindness.

When these two come to the gate of the world to come, the angels look at the rich man who was so horribly beaten. They ask what he wants. He cries and says [81b] that this was once his home and the King of Kings, God, had sent him away to the other world and now has called him back. The angels laugh at him and have the youths come, these are the avenging angels, who throw him into the dungeon. When the other one comes, who is healthy from Torah and mitzvot and shines from good deeds, they ask him who is he? He tells them how the King of Kings, God, sent him into the other world and has called him back. He tells about everything he repaired and contemplated. He shows them his precious stones and pearls, charity and acts of lovingkindness. At the same time, he tells them of his anguish that he had not been able to meet the lord or master. He is brought in and received with the greatest honor. He is led before the King of Kings, the Holy Blessed One, and he enjoys the pleasure in the light of [eternal] life.

Dear brothers, I had brought this parable in Yiddish to the best of my ability. Everyone can mirror himself in it. The scholars can read this story themselves in the Sefer Akedat Yizhak, along with the following story and the other four gates. I hope, with the help of God, they will have the desire to study this whole book from beginning to end: