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עֵקֶב Eikev

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25

Second Temple

Guides

Responsa

והיה | עקב תשמעו את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם
ושמרו יהוה אלהיך לך את־הברית ואת־החוסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך:

ואהבך וברכך והרבך וברך פרי־בטןך ופרי־אדמתך הגנך
ותירשך ויצהרך שגראלפיך ועשתרת צאנך על האדמה
אשר־נשבע לאבותיך לתת לך:

ברוך תהיה מכל־העמים לא־יהיה בך עקר ועקרה ובבהמתך:

והסיר יהוה ממך כל־חלי וכל־מדוי מצלים הרעים אשר ידעת לא
ישימם בך ונתנם בכל־שנאיך:

ואכלת את־כל־העמים אשר יהוה אלהיך נתן לך לא־תחוס עינך
עליהם ולא תעבד את־אלהיהם כי־מוקש הוא לך:

כי תאמר בלבבך רבים הגוים האלה ממני איכה אוכל להורישם:

לא תירא מהם זכר תזכר את אשר־עשה יהוה אלהיך לפרעה
ולכל־מצרים:

המלכות הגדלות אשר־ראו עיניך והאותות והמופתים והיד החרוקה
והזרע הנטויה אשר הוצאך יהוה אלהיך כוֹי־עשה יהוה
אלהיך לכל־העמים אשר־אתה ירא מפניהם:

וגם את־הצרעה ישלח יהוה אלהיך בם עד־אבד הנשארים
והנסתרים מפניך:

לא תערז מפניהם כי־יהוה אלהיך בקרבך אל גדול ונורא:

ונשל יהוה אלהיך את־הגוים האל מפניך מעט מעט לא תוכל
כלתם מהר פִּרְתִּיבָה עליך חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה:

12 And if you do obey these rules and observe them carefully, your God יהוה will maintain faithfully for you the covenant made on oath with your fathers:

13 [God] will favor you and bless you and multiply you—blessing your issue from the womb and your produce from the soil, your new grain and wine and oil, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock, in the land sworn to your fathers to be assigned to you.

14 You shall be blessed above all other peoples: there shall be no sterile male or female among you or among your livestock.

15 יהוה will ward off from you all sickness; [God] will not bring upon you any of the dreadful diseases of Egypt, about which you know, but will inflict them upon all your enemies.

16 You shall destroy all the peoples that your God יהוה delivers to you, showing them no pity. And you shall not worship their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

17 Should you say to yourselves, “These nations are more numerous than we; how can we dispossess them?”

18 You need have no fear of them. You have but to bear in mind what your God יהוה did to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians:

19 the wondrous acts that you saw with your own eyes, the signs and the portents, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm by which your God יהוה liberated you. Thus will your God יהוה do to all the peoples you now fear.

20 Your God יהוה will also send a plague (plague Others “hornet”; meaning of Heb. ir’ah uncertain. Cf. Exod. 23.28.) against them, until those who are left in hiding perish before you.

21 Do not stand in dread of them, for your God יהוה is in your midst, a great and awesome God.

22 Your God יהוה will dislodge those peoples before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them at once, else the wild beasts would multiply to your hurt.

23 Your God יהוה will deliver them up to you, throwing them into utter panic until they are wiped out.

24 [God] will deliver their kings into your hand, and you shall obliterate their name from under the heavens; no one shall stand up to you, until you have wiped them out.

25 You shall consign the images of their gods to the fire; you shall not covet the silver and gold on them and keep it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared thereby; for that is abhorrent to your God יהוה.

26 You must not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be proscribed like it; you must reject it as abominable and abhorrent, for it is proscribed.

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah, Introduction to Perek III 1 | The carvings of their gods shall you burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, or take it to thee, lest thou be snared with it: for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thy house, lest thou become accursed like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing. (Deuteronomy 7:25-26)

Responsa | Teshuvot Min HaShamayim 17:2 | They responded: Even though non-Jewish wine is forbidden by a rabbinic decree, the Torah is more stringent with issues of idolatry than with any other prohibition, as it is written (Deuteronomy 7:26): "Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, etc." Any person who is strict with a decree ordained by the sages will have merit on the Day of Judgement. It is also written (Kohelet 7:27): "See, this I have found, said Kohelet, one to one to find an account." They explained to me that every decree ordained by the sages is exactly equivalent, 'one to one,' to the core biblical commandment. Why did they make these decrees? 'To find an account,' large and full of merit when coming before the Great King on the Day of Judgement. This is the meaning of 'one to one,' the equivalence of decrees to observing commandments, 'to find an account' of merit. All this they responded to me in truth.

Responsa | Teshuvot Min HaShamayim 70:2 | They responded: the commandments around chametz were the first given to the children of Israel; they were accepted with love and warmth and joy, and they were guarded strictly down to the most minute details. You can see that the Torah was stringent to the level of prohibiting even seeing and owning it (Exodus 12:19 and Exodus 13:7). This is not the case for any other prohibition except for idolatry, where it is written "Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house" (Deuteronomy 7:26). All who increase their meticulous observance shall have the days and years of their life increased too.

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1 You shall faithfully observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today, that you may thrive and increase and be able to possess the land that יהוה promised on oath to your fathers.

2 Remember the long way that your God יהוה has made you travel in the wilderness these past forty years, in order to test you by hardships to learn what was in your hearts: whether you would keep the divine commandments or not.

Second Temple | On Mating with the Preliminary Studies 30:3 | [170] Is it not, then, with legitimate pride that the prophet-word called Moses says, as we shall find, “Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee in the wilderness, that He might afflict thee and prove thee and the thoughts in thy heart might be tested, whether thou wilt keep His commandments or not, and He afflicted thee and made thee weak by famine and fed thee with manna which thy fathers knew not, that He might proclaim to thee that not alone on bread shall man live, but on every word that goeth forth through the mouth of God” (Deut. 8:2).

- וַיַּעֲנֵךְ וַיַּרְעֵבְךָ וַיֹּאכַלְךָ אֶת־הַמָּן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתָּ וְלֹא יָדָעוּן
 אֲבֹתֶיךָ לְמַעַן הוֹדִיעְךָ כִּי לֹא עַל־הַלֶּחֶם לִבְדּוֹ יַחֲיֶה הָאָדָם כִּי
 עַל־כָּל־מוֹצָא פִי־יְהוָה יַחֲיֶה הָאָדָם:
- 3 [God] subjected you to the hardship of hunger and then gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever known, in order to teach you that a human being does not live on bread alone, but that one may live on anything that יהוה decrees.

Second Temple | Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis, Book III 61:1 | [174] He says in Deuteronomy also: “And He afflicted thee and made thee weak by hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that He might proclaim to thee, that not on bread alone shall man live, but on every word that goeth forth through the mouth of God” (Deut. 8:3). This afflicting is propitiation; for on the tenth day also by afflicting our souls He makes propitiation (Lev. 16:30). For when we are being deprived of pleasant things, we think we are being afflicted, but in reality thereby we have God propitious to us.

Second Temple | Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis, Book III, Introduction 44 | Contrast of the “Bread out of Heaven,” “the day’s portion for the day,” like dew—prolific as coriander-seed—like hoar-frost, called “What is it?” (Deut. 8:3).

- שְׂמַלְתְּךָ לֹא בָלְתָה מְעַלְיָךְ וְרַגְלְךָ לֹא בָצְקָה זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה:
- 4 The clothes upon you did not wear out, nor did your feet swell these forty years.
- וַיִּדְעַתָּ עַם־לִבְבְּךָ כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יִסָּר אִישׁ אֶת־בְּנוֹ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 מִיִּסְרָה:
- 5 Bear in mind that your God יהוה disciplines you just as a householder (householder See the first note at 1.31.) disciplines his son. (as a householder disciplines his son See the second note at 1.31.)

Second Temple | On Dreams, Book I 40:7 | [237] For it is something to be thankful for if they can be taught self-control by the terror held over them by these means. Broadly speaking the lines taken throughout the Law are these two only, one that which keeps truth in view and so provides the thought “God is not as man” (Num. 23:19), the other that which keeps in view the ways of thinking of the duller folk, of whom it is said “the Lord God will chasten thee, as if a man should chasten his son” (Deut. 8:5).

Second Temple | On the Unchangeableness of God 11:5 | [54] But while the former is warranted by grounds of surest truth, the latter is introduced for the instruction of the many. And therefore also it is said of Him “like a man He shall train His son” (Deut. 8:5). And thus it is for training and admonition, not because God’s nature is such, that these words are used.

Second Temple | The Midrash of Philo 3:22:6 | It is quite true that God never feels either uncertainty or envy; nevertheless he often employs ambiguous things and expressions, assenting to them as a man might do; for, as I have said before, the supreme providence is of a twofold nature, sometimes being God, and not acting in any respect as a man; but, on some occasions, as a man instructs his son, so likewise should the Lord God give warning to you. Therefore the first of these circumstances belongs to his sovereign power, and the second to his disciplinary, and to the first introduction to instruction, so as to insinuate into mans heart a voluntary inclination, since that expression, “lest perchance,” is not to be taken as a proof of any hesitation on the part of God, but in relation to man, who, by his nature, is prone to hesitation, and is a denunciation of the inclinations which exist in him. For when any appearance of anything whatever occurs to any man, immediately there arises within him an impulse towards that which appears, being caused by that very thing which appears. And from this arises the second hesitating kind of uncertainty, distracting the mind in various directions, as to whether the thing is fit to be accepted, or acquired, or not. And very likely present circumstances have a respect to that second feeling; for, in truth, the Divinity is incapable of any cunning, or malevolence, or wickedness: it is absolutely impossible that God should either envy the immortality or any other good fortune belonging to any being. And we can bring the most undeniable proof of this; for it was not in consequence

of any one's entreaties that he created the world; but, being a merciful benefactor, rendering an essence previously untamed and unregulated, and liable to suffering, gentle and pleasant, he did so by a vast harmony of blessings, and a regulated arrangement of them, like a chorus; and he being himself the only sure being, planted the tree of life by his own luminous character. Moreover, he was not influenced by the mediation or exhortation of any other being in communicating incorruptibility to man. But while man existed as the purest intellect, displaying no appearance either of work or of any evil discourse, he was certain to have a fitting guide, to lead him in the paths of piety, which is undoubted and genuine immortality. But from the time when he began to be converted to depravity, wishing for the things which belong to mortal life, he wandered from immortality; for it is not fitting that craft and wickedness should be rendered immortal, and moreover it would be useless to the subject; since the longer the life is which is granted to the wicked and depraved man, the more miserable is he than others, so that his immortality becomes a grave misfortune to him.

Second Temple | The Midrash of Philo 8:21:2 | The reasons alleged appear to indicate a change of purpose, which is an affection not usual nor akin to the divine virtue; for the dispositions of mankind are variable and inconstant, so that all affairs among them are altogether uncertain; but with God nothing is uncertain, nothing incomprehensible, for he is a being of mighty and consistent determination; how then, when reasons of the same kind are present to him, because he was forsooth aware from the very beginning that the mind of man was deliberately inclined to wallow in wickedness from his youth on, could he have originally intended to destroy the human race by a flood; and yet afterwards say, that he did not intend to destroy it any more, when the same evils still exist in the mind? But we must think that every kind of expression of this sort is, by law, connected with learning and the utility of instruction rather than with the nature of truth, since there are, as it were, two kinds which occur in the whole course of the law; in the first place, as it is said, "Not as a man;" and in the second place, as it is said, "As a man," the one God is believed to instruct his son. That first expression relates to the actual truth; for, in real fact, God is not as a man, nor again, as the sun, nor as the heaven, nor as the world, which is perceptible by the outward senses, but as God, if it is justifiable to assert that also; since that most happy and blessed being will not endure similitude, or comparison, or enigmatical description; nay, rather he surpasses even blessedness and felicity itself, and whatever can be imagined as better than and preferable to them. But the second expression relates to instruction and direction, I mean the express words, "As a man," in order that it may be observed, that he is willing to impress us beings, born of the earth, lest perchance we should unceasingly incur his anger and his chastisement by our implacable hostility to him, without any peace; for it is sufficient for him to be roused and embittered against us once, and once to exact vengeance against sinners; but to inflict punishment over and over again for the same thing is the conduct of a savage and ferocious disposition: since, says he, "when I shall inflict deserved retribution, as is possible, on every one, I will cause a burning recollection of my design to be preserved." Therefore behold, the sacred historian has excellently expressed himself, saying, "That God observed in his mind," for his mind and disposition rejoice in a superior degree of constancy; but our wills are found to be inconsistent and vacillating, on which account we cannot be properly said to observe and think with our minds, since it is by the thoughts that the passage of the mind is allowed to take place, but the human intellect is unable to be extended over everything, since it is incapable of penetrating all things in a perfect and suitable manner. But that expression, "I will not proceed any more to curse the earth," is used with great propriety, for it is not becoming to add more curses to what has already been done, because the evils that have been inflicted are already complete; because, although they are in some sense imperfect, inasmuch as the Father is kind and merciful, and most humane, still he is rather inclined to alleviate the evil than to add to men's misery. But that is as it were the same thing, according to a common proverb, to wash a brick, or to draw water properly, and wholly to eradicate wickedness, with all its deeply imprinted tokens from the mind of man; for if it is implanted in it at first, it does not exist accidentally, but is engraven deeply on it and clings to it. But since the mind is a potential and principal part of the soul, he introduces that word "diligently;" but that which has been weighed with diligence and care is exquisite thought, examined more certainly than certainty itself. But this diligence does not tend to any one evil, but as is plain, to mischief, and to all mischief; nor does it exist in a perfunctory manner; but man is devoted to it from his youth, not only in a manner, but from his very cradle, as if he were in some degree united to, and nourished, and bred up with sin. But yet God says, "I will not any more smite all flesh;" giving notice that he will not, at any future time, destroy every portion of mankind altogether, but only single individuals, in ever such great numbers, who perpetrate unspeakable wickednesses; for he does not leave wickedness unpunished, nor does he grant it liberty or impunity, but indulging his care for the human race on account of his original design, he of necessity fixes destruction as a punishment for sinners.

- 6 Therefore keep the commandments of your God יהוה: walk in God's ways and show reverence.
 7 For your God יהוה is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill;
 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey;
 9 a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper.
 10 When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to your God יהוה for the good land given to you.
- ושמרת את מצוות יהוה אלהיך ללכת בדרכיו וליראה אתו:
 כי יהוה אלהיך מביאך אל ארץ טובה ארץ נחלי מים עינת ותהמת
 יצאים בבקעה ובהר:
 ארץ חטה ושעלה ונפן ותאנה ורמון ארץ זית שמן ודבש:
 ארץ אשר לא במסכנת תאכליבה לחם לא תחסר כל בה ארץ אשר
 אבניה ברזל ומהרריה תחצב נחשת:
 ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את יהוה אלהיך על הארץ הטובה אשר
 נתן לך:
 השמר לך פן תשכח את יהוה אלהיך לבלתי שמר מצותיו
 ומשפטי וחקתיו אשר אנכי מצוך היום:
 פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טבים תבנה וישבת:
 ובקרך וצאנך ירבז וקסר וזהב ירבה לך וכל אשר לך
 ירבה:
 ורם לבבך ושכחת את יהוה אלהיך המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית
 עבדים:

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, Introduction to Perek VII 1 | For the Lord your God is bringing you to a good land: a land with brooks of water, fountains and depths, springing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, vines and fig-trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, you will lack nothing in it, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you will dig copper. You will eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord, your God, for the good land He has given you. (Deuteronomy 8:7–10)

Second Temple | Against Flaccus 11:6 | [91] This last in itself showed clearly the simplicity of the life led by people who discarded the expensive habits and luxury which naturally breed that satiety, whose child is the wanton insolence which is the source of all evils.

Second Temple | Book of Jubilees 1:10 | And do thou write for thyself all these words which I declare unto thee this day, for I know their rebellion and their stiff neck, before I bring them into the land of which I sware to their fathers, to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob, saying: "Unto your seed will I give a land flowing with milk and honey

Second Temple | On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by him and by his Brother Cain 14:1 | [55] To each of these the sacred pages have their counterword. To the first, with whom memory is dead and oblivion strong and living, the scripture says: "When thou hast eaten and art filled, and hast built fair houses and dwelt in them, and thy sheep and oxen are increased, and thy silver and gold and all that thou hast is multiplied, take heed lest thou be uplifted in thy heart and forget the Lord thy God" (Deut. 8:12–14). When then wilt thou not forget God? Only when thou dost not forget thyself. For if thou rememberest thine own nothingness in all things, thou wilt also remember the transcendence of God in all things.

15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its seraph (seraph Cf. Isa. 14.29; 30.6. Others “fiery”; exact meaning of Heb. saraph uncertain. Cf. Num. 21.6–8.) serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it, who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock;

Second Temple | Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis, Book II 21:3 | [84] For the prophet says: “Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, where there was biting serpent and scorpion and drought, where there was no water, who brought out a spring of water for thee from the hard rock, who fed thee with manna in the wilderness, which thy fathers knew not” (Deut. 8:15 f.). You see that it is not only when attracted by the passions of Egypt that the soul falls in with the serpents, but when it is in a wilderness too it is bitten by pleasure, that subtle and snake-like passion. And pleasure’s mode of action has received a most appropriate name, for it is here called a biting.

Second Temple | On Dreams, Book II 32:8 | [222] For I am He “Who brought the fountain of water from out the steep rock,” as it says elsewhere (Deut. 8:15). And Moses too gives his testimony to the unchangeableness of the deity when he says “they saw the place where the God of Israel stood” (Ex. 24:10), for by the standing or establishment he indicates his immutability.

16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your ancestors had never known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end—

17 and you say to yourselves, “My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.”

Second Temple | On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by him and by his Brother Cain 14:2 | [56] But him that believes himself to be the cause of the good things which befall him the scripture recalls to wisdom thus: “Say not ‘my strength or the might of my hand hath gotten me all this power,’ but thou shalt keep ever in remembrance the Lord thy God who gave thee strength to get power” (Deut. 8:17 f.).

18 Remember that it is your God הוה who gives you the power to get wealth, in fulfillment of the covenant made on oath with your fathers, as is still the case.

Second Temple | On Husbandry 39:4 | [172] Moreover in his Exhortations the lawgiver charges those who have obtained large possession of good things not to inscribe themselves in their hearts as authors of their wealth, but “to remember God Who giveth strength to acquire power” (Deut. 8:18).

19 If you do forget your God הוה and follow other gods to serve them or bow down to them, I warn you this day that you shall certainly perish;

20 like the nations that הוה will cause to perish before you, so shall you perish—because you did not heed your God הוה.

9

1 Hear, O Israel! You are about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and more populous than you: great cities with walls sky-high;

עם־גִּדּוֹל וְרָם בְּנֵי עַנְקִיטִים אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה יֹדַעַת וְאַתָּה שְׂמַעַת מִי יִתְיַצֵּב לִפְנֵי בְנֵי עַנְקִי:

וַיֵּדַעַת הַיּוֹם כִּי יֵהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוֹאֵהֶעֱבֹר לִפְנֶיךָ אֵשׁ אֹכֶלֶת הוּא יִשְׁמִידֶם וְהוּא יִכְנִיעֶם לִפְנֶיךָ וְהוֹרֵשְׁתָּם וְהָאֲבֹדֹתָם מִהָרָאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה לָךְ:

אֶל־תֹּאמַר בְּלִבְבְּךָ בַּהֲדָף יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אַתָּם | מִלִּפְנֵיךָ לֵאמֹר בְּצִדְקָתִי הִבִּיאֲנִי יְהוָה לְרִשְׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבְרִשְׁעָת הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה יְהוָה מוֹרִישָׁם מִפְּנֶיךָ:

לֹא בְצִדְקָתְךָ וּבִישׁוֹר לִבְבְּךָ אַתָּה בָּא לְרִשְׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי בְרִשְׁעָת הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מוֹרִישָׁם מִפְּנֶיךָ וּלְמַעַן הַקִּים אֶת־הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב:

Second Temple | On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by him and by his Brother Cain 14:3 | [57] The third, he, that is, who thinks himself worthy of the possession and enjoyment of good, may learn a better lesson from the oracle which says “Not for thy righteousness nor for the holiness of thy heart dost thou go into the land to inhabit it,” but first “because of the iniquity of these nations,” since God visited their wickedness with destruction, and next “that he might establish the covenant which he swore to our fathers” (Deut. 9:5). Now the covenant of God is an allegory of His gifts of grace, and it may not be that any of His gifts should be imperfect. Thus, all the bounty of the Uncreated must be perfect and complete. But amongst all existing things the one that is complete is virtue and virtuous actions.

וַיֵּדַעַת כִּי לֹא בְצִדְקָתְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ כִּי עִם־קִשְׁוֹתֶיךָ אַתָּה:

זָכֹר אֶל־תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הִקְצַפְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמִּדְבָּר לְמַדְבָּר לְמַדְבָּר אֲשֶׁר־צִאֲתָ | מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד־בְּאֶמְקֶם עַד־הַמִּקְוֹם הַזֶּה מִמֵּרִים הָיִיתָ עִם־יְהוָה:

וּבְחֹרֵב הִקְצַפְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּתְאַנֶּף יְהוָה בְּכֶם לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶתְכֶם:

בְּעָלְתִי הַהָרָה לְקַחַת לְוִיחַת הָאֲבִנִּים לְוִיחַת הַבְּלִית אֲשֶׁר־כָּרַת יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם וְאֲשֶׁב בְּהָר אֲרִבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה לָחֶם לֹא אָכַלְתִּי וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתִיתִי:

וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אֵלַי אֶת־שְׁנֵי לְוִיחַת הָאֲבִנִּים כְּתוּבִים בְּאֶצְבָּע אֱלֹהִים וְעָלִיהֶם כְּכִל־הַבְּלִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם בְּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא:

2 a people great and tall, the Anakites, of whom you have knowledge; for you have heard it said, “Who can stand up to the children of Anak?”

3 Know then this day that none other than your God הוּא is crossing at your head, a devouring fire; it is [God] who will wipe them out—subduing them before you, that you may quickly dispossess and destroy them, as הוּא promised you.

4 And when your God הוּא has thrust them from your path, say not to yourselves, “הוּא has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues”; it is rather because of the wickedness of those nations that הוּא is dispossessing them before you.

5 It is not because of your virtues and your rectitude that you will be able to possess their country; but it is because of their wickedness that your God הוּא is dispossessing those nations before you, and in order to fulfill the oath that הוּא made to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

6 Know, then, that it is not for any virtue of yours that your God הוּא is giving you this good land to possess; for you are a stiffnecked people.

7 Remember, never forget, how you provoked your God הוּא to anger in the wilderness: from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you reached this place, you have continued defiant toward הוּא.

8 At Horeb you so provoked הוּא that הוּא was angry enough with you to have destroyed you.

9 I had ascended the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the Tablets of the Covenant that הוּא had made with you, and I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, eating no bread and drinking no water.

10 And הוּא gave me the two tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God, with the exact words that הוּא had addressed to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the Assembly.

Responsa | Musafia Teshuvot HaGeonim 95:3 | The measurement for halla is certainly 43 1/5 egg-bulks, as is explicitly stated in the passage in the chapter “Keitzad Mishtatfin” in Eruvin (83a): “When R. Dimi came....” From that passage, we see that halla is 43 1/5 eggs. For this reason, the Torah gave us measurements in the bulks of eggs and fruits: these rabbinic matters (“divrei sofrim”) were given on Mount Sinai, as it is written (Devarim 9:10): “and upon them were all the matters...”—and eggs and fruit are found everywhere. It is open and revealed before the Creator of the world that Israel would be scattered among the nations, and the weights and measures from the time of Moshe, and those that were added during the age of the Sages of Eretz Yisrael, would not be preserved. Measurements vary across time and location. In each generation, sages would establish new measures, as it stated explicitly in several places. With regard to halla as well, we find that they would calculate measurements in every age, as in the case of Bonius’s gift to R. Yehuda Ha-Nasi. Similarly, (Pesahim 109a), R. Yitzhak [speaks of] the xestes used to measure brine in Sepphoris, and the old “tamnia” of which R. Yohanan speaks is 25% larger than the present one. And Rav (Pesahim 48a) used the Melugnite kav for Passover measurements. All of these measurements have changed, though they are of relatively recent provenance—and certainly those of the earlier generations, whose size we do not know at all, have.

- 11 וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה נָתַן יְהוָה אֵלַי אֶת־שְׁנֵי לְחֹת הָאֲבָנִים לְחֹת הַבְּרִית: At the end of those forty days and forty nights, הוהי gave me the two tablets of stone, the Tablets of the Covenant.
- 12 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי קוּם רַד מִהָר מִזֶּה כִּי שָׁחַת עַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאת מִמִּצְרַיִם סָרוּ מִדֶּרֶךְ מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָם עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מִסַּכָּה: And הוהי said to me, “Hurry, go down from here at once, for the people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted wickedly; they have been quick to stray from the path that I enjoined upon them; they have made themselves a molten image.”
- 13 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי לֹא־מֶרַח רְאִיתִי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עַם־קָשָׁה־עֲרָף הוּא: הוהי further said to me, “I see that this is a stiffnecked people.
- 14 הֲרַף מִלְּנִי וְאַשְׁמִילֵם וְאַמְחָה אֶת־שְׁמֵם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָם לְגוֹי־עֶצְוֹם וְרַב מִמֶּנּוּ: Let Me alone and I will destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven, and I will make you a nation far more numerous than they.”
- 15 וָאֲפֹן נָאֲרָל מִן־הָהָר וְהָהָר בָּעַר בָּאֵשׁ וּשְׁנֵי לְוַחַת הַבְּרִית עַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי: I started down the mountain, a mountain ablaze with fire, the two Tablets of the Covenant in my two hands.
- 16 וַאֲרָא וְהִנֵּה חָטֵאתֶם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם עֲשִׂיתֶם לָכֶם עֹגֶל מִסַּכָּה סֶרֶתָם מִדֶּרֶךְ מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם: I saw how you had sinned against your God הוהי: you had made yourselves a molten calf; you had been quick to stray from the path that הוהי had enjoined upon you.
- 17 וָאֲתַפְּשָׁל בְּשֵׁנֵי הַלְּחָת וְאַשְׁלַחֵם מֵעַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי וְאַשְׁבִּרֵם לְעֵינֵיכֶם: Thereupon I gripped the two tablets and flung them away with both my hands, smashing them before your eyes.
- 18 וָאֲתַנְפַּל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כְּרֹאשְׁנָה אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַלְתִּי וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתִיתִי עַל כִּלְי־חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר חָטֵאתֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרָע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לַהֲכַעִיסוֹ: I threw myself down before הוהי —eating no bread and drinking no water forty days and forty nights, as before—because of the great wrong you had committed, doing what displeased and vexed הוהי.
- 19 כִּי יִגְרַתִּי מִפְּנֵי הָאֵף וְהַחֲמָה אֲשֶׁר קִצַּף יְהוָה עָלֵיכֶם לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶתְכֶם וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֵלַי גַּם בַּפֶּעַם הַהוּא: For I was in dread of the fierce anger against you which moved הוהי to wipe you out. And that time, too, הוהי gave heed to me.—
- 20 וּבְאַהֲרֹן הַתַּאֲנָף יְהוָה מְאֹד לְהַשְׁמִידוֹ וָאֲתַפְּלַל גַּם־בְּעַד אַהֲרֹן בְּעַת הַהוּא: Moreover, הוהי was angry enough with Aaron to have destroyed him; so I also interceded for Aaron at that time.—

- וְאֶת־חַטָּאתְכֶם אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתֶם אֶת־הַעֲגֹל לְחֹתְרִי נֶאֱשָׂרָהּ אֹתוֹ | בָּאֵשׁ
נֶאֱכַת אֹתוֹ טָחוֹן הֵיטֵב עַד אֲשֶׁר־דֵּק לְעָפָר נֶאֱשָׁלָה אֶת־עָפָרוֹ אֶל־הַנָּחַל
הַיָּרֵד מִן־הָהָר:
- וּבְתַבְעֵרָה וּבְמִסָּה וּבִקְבֵרַת הַתָּאוֹה מִקְצָפִים הָיִיתֶם אֶת־יְהוָה:
- וּבְשָׁלַח יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם מִקְדֵּשׁ בְּרִנֵּל לֵאמֹר עֲלוּ וּרְשׁוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
נָתַתִּי לָכֶם וְנִתְמַרְוּ אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלֹא הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם לוֹ וְלֹא
שָׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹלוֹ:
- מִמָּרִים הָיִיתֶם עִם־יְהוָה מִיּוֹם דַּעַתִּי אֶתְכֶם:
- וְאֶתְנַפֵּל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶת אַרְבָּעִים הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־אַרְבָּעִים הַלַּיְלָה אֲשֶׁר
הִתְנַפַּלְתִּי כִּי־אָמַר יְהוָה לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶתְכֶם:
- וְאֶתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה וְאָמַרְתִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲלֹת־שָׁחַת עָמָךְ וְנִחַלְתָּךְ
אֲשֶׁר פָּדִיתָ בְּגִדְלֶךָ אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצָאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה:
- זָכֹר לְעַבְדֶּיךָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיֶּקֶב אֲלִיתָּפֹן אֱלֹהֵי הָעָם הַזֶּה
וְאֶל־יִרְשָׁעוֹ וְאֶל־חַטָּאתוֹ:
- פֶּן־יֹאמְרוּ הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָנוּ מִשָּׁם מִבְּלִי יְהוָה לְהַבְיֵאֵם
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּר לָהֶם וּמִשְׁנֵאתָ אוֹתָם הוֹצִיאָם לְהַמָּתֵם בַּמִּדְבָּר:
- וְהֵם עָמְךָ וְנִחַלְתָּךְ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ בְּכַחֲךָ הַגָּדֹל וּבְזִרְעֶךָ הַנְּטוּיָה:
- 21 As for that sinful thing you had made, the calf, I took it and put it to the fire; I broke it to bits and ground it thoroughly until it was fine as dust, and I threw its dust into the brook that comes down from the mountain.
- 22 Again you provoked יהוה at Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah.
- 23 And when יהוה sent you on from Kadesh-barnea, saying, “Go up and take possession of the land that I am giving you,” you flouted the command of your God יהוה —whom you did not put your trust in nor obey.
- 24 As long as I have known you, you have been defiant toward יהוה.
- 25 When I lay prostrate before יהוה those forty days and forty nights, (those forty days and forty nights Lit. “the forty days and forty nights that I lay prostrate.”) because יהוה was determined to destroy you,
- 26 I prayed to יהוה and said, “O Lord יהוה, do not annihilate Your very own people, whom You redeemed in Your majesty and whom You freed from Egypt with a mighty hand.
- 27 Give thought to Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and pay no heed to the stubbornness of this people, its wickedness, and its sinfulness.
- 28 Else the country from which You freed us will say, ‘It was because יהוה was powerless to bring them into the land promised to them, and because of having rejected them, that [their god] brought them out to have them die in the wilderness.’
- 29 Yet they are Your very own people, whom You freed with Your great might and Your outstretched arm.”

10

- בַּעַת הַהוּא אָמַר יְהוָה אֵלַי פֶּסֶל־לֶךְ שְׁנֵי־לוחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרָאשֵׁינִים
וְעֲלֶה אֵלַי הָהָרָה וְעָשִׂיתָ לִּי אֲרוֹן עֹץ:
- וְאֶכְתֹּב עַל־הַלּוּחֹת אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל־הַלּוּחֹת הָרִאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר
שָׁבַרְתָּ וְשָׁמַתָם בָּאֲרוֹן:
- וְאָעַשׂ אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וְאֶפְסַל שְׁנֵי־לוחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרָאשֵׁינִים וְאָעַל
הָהָרָה וּשְׁנֵי הַלּוּחֹת בְּיָדִי:
- 1 Thereupon יהוה said to me, “Carve out two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain; and make an ark of wood.
- 2 I will inscribe on the tablets the commandments that were on the first tablets that you smashed, and you shall deposit them in the ark.”
- 3 I made an ark of acacia wood and carved out two tablets of stone like the first; I took the two tablets with me and went up the mountain.

- 4 וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלְּחָת כַּמִּכְתָּב הָרִאשׁוֹן אֶת עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם בְּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ בַּיּוֹם הַקֹּהֵל וַיִּתֶּנֶם יְהוָה אֵלַי:
- 5 וְאַפֹּן וְאַרְל מִן־הַהָר וְאָשַׁם אֶת־הַלְּחָת בְּאֲרוֹן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי וַיְהִי שֵׁם כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוֵּנִי יְהוָה:
- 6 וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָסְעוּ מִבְּאֵרֶת בְּנֵי־יֶעֱקֹן מוֹסֶרָה שֵׁם מֵת אֶהֱרֹן וַיִּקְבֹּר שָׁם וַיִּכְהֵן אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־וַחֲתָנִיו:
- 7 מִשָּׁם נָסְעוּ הַגִּדְגָּדָה וּמִן־הַגִּדְגָּדָה יֹטְבָתָה אֶרֶץ נַחֲלֵי מַיִם:
- 8 בַּעַת הַהוּא הִבְדִּיל יְהוָה אֶת־שִׁבְטֵי הַלֵּוֹי לְשֵׂאת אֶת־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה לְעֹמֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְשָׁרְתוֹ וּלְבָרְכֵךְ בְּשֵׁמוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:
- 9 עַל־כֵּן לֹא־הָיָה לְלֵוִי חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה עִם־אֲחָיו יְהוָה הוּא נַחֲלָתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא:

Second Temple | Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis, Book II 14:3 | [51] But there is a different man, one who has made the contrary choice, even Levi, who “said to his father and his mother ‘I have not seen thee,’ and knew not his brethren, and disclaimed his sons” (Deut. 33:9). This man forsakes father and mother, his mind and material body, for the sake of having as his portion the one God, “for the Lord Himself is his portion” (Deut. 10:9).

Second Temple | Concerning Noah's Work as a Planter 15:2 | [63] For he deemed it meet and right that a whole tribe, which had taken refuge at God's footstool, should be allotted no part of the country, like the other eleven tribes, but should receive the pre-eminent privilege of the priesthood, a possession not earthly but heavenly. “The tribe of Levi,” he says, “shall have no lot or portion among the children of Israel, for the Lord is their portion” (Deut. 10:9); and there is an utterance rung out on this wise by the holy oracles in the name of God, “I am thy portion and inheritance” (Numb. 18:20):

Second Temple | On Dreams, Book I 25:3 | [159] He, then, that stands upon the stairway of heaven says to him who beholds the dream-vision, “I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father and the God of Isaac: fear not” (Gen. 28:13). This oracle was the fort and most firm buttress of the practising soul. It clearly taught him that He Who is Lord and God of the universe is both Lord and God of his family, registered under both titles as held by father and grandfather, to the end that the world at large and the lover of virtue may have the same inheritance: for it has been said, “the Lord Himself is his inheritance” (Deut. 10:9).

Second Temple | On Flight and Finding 19:3 | [102] He, then, that has shewn himself free from even unintentional offence—intentional is not to be thought of—having God Himself as his portion (Deut. 10:9), will have his abode in Him alone; while those who have fallen, not of set purpose but against their will, will have the refuges which have been mentioned, so freely and richly provided.

Second Temple | On Mating with the Preliminary Studies 24:5 | [134] to soar above created being, to pass beyond its boundaries, to hold fast to the Uncreated alone, following the sacred admonitions in which we are told to cling to Him (Deut. 30:20), and therefore to those who thus cling and serve Him without ceasing He gives Himself as portion, and this my affirmation is warranted by the oracle which says, “The Lord Himself is his portion” (Deut. 10:9).

Second Temple | On Mating with the Preliminary Studies, Appendix 12 | § 133. The founder of this tribe. Wendland gives as reference for the saying “God alone must I honour” Ex. 20:3, i.e. the First Commandment, and therefore presumably took the to be Moses. But the reference is, I think, to the Blessing of Levi (Deut. 33:9) “who saith to his father

and his mother I have not seen thee, and his brothers he knew not and his sons he disclaimed.” In Leg. All. ii. 51 Philo has made a very similar use of this text (though there the father and the mother are mind and body), inferring from it that the Levi-mind rejects all such things for the sake of having God as his portion, in accordance with the words of Deut. 10:9, which he again quotes here. And the same interpretation of Deut. 33:9 is given in De Fug. 89, where Levi is called .

- 10 I had stayed on the mountain, as I did the first time, forty days and forty nights; and הוהי heeded me once again: הוהי agreed not to destroy you.
- 11 And הוהי said to me, “Up, resume the march at the head of the people, that they may go in and possess the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.”
- 12 And now, O Israel, what does your God הוהי demand of you? Only this: to revere your God הוהי, to walk only in divine paths, to love and to serve your God הוהי with all your heart and soul,
- 13 keeping הוהי’s commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good.
- 14 Mark, the heavens to their uttermost reaches (to their uttermost reaches Lit. “and the heaven of heavens.”) belong to your God הוהי, the earth and all that is on it!
- 15 Yet it was to your ancestors that הוהי was drawn out of love for them, so that you, their lineal descendants, were chosen from among all peoples—as is now the case.
- וְאֵנֹכִי עֲמַדְתִּי בְהָר כְּיָמַיִם הָרְאִשׁוֹנִים אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֵלַי גַּם בַּפֶּעַם הַהוּא לֹא־אָבָה יְהוָה הַשְׁחִיתָךְ:
- וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי קוּם לֵךְ לְמַסַּע לִפְנֵי הָעָם וַיֵּבְאוּ וַיִּירָשׁוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאֲבוֹתָם לֵתֵת לָהֶם:
- וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ כִּי אִם־לִירְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִלְכֹּת בְּכָל־דֶּרֶכָיו וּלְאַהֲבָה אוֹתוֹ וּלְעַבֹּד אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ:
- לִשְׁמֹר אֶת־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וְאֶת־חֻקָּיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לְטוֹב לָךְ:
- הֵן לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַשָּׁמַיִם וּשְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ:
- רַק בְּאַבְתָּיִךְ חֶשֶׁק יְהוָה לְאַהֲבָה אוֹתָם וַיִּבְחָר בְּזֶרְעָם אֶחָדִילָם בְּכֶם מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כְּיוֹם הַזֶּה:

Responsa | Iggerot HaRambam, Iggeret Teiman 10 | Remember, that ours is the true and authentic Divine religion, revealed to us through Moses, the master of the former as well as the later prophets, by means of which God has distinguished us from the rest of mankind, as Scripture says, "Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them and He chose their seed after them, even you above all peoples" (Deuteronomy 10:15). This did not happen because of our merits, but rather as an act of Divine grace, and on account of our forefathers who were cognizant of God and submitted to Him as we read, "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people ... but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore unto your fathers." (Deuteronomy 7:7). God has made us unique by His laws and precepts, and our pre-eminence is manifested in His rules and statutes, as Scripture says, in narrating God's mercies to us, "And what great nation is there, that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:8). Therefore all the nations instigated by envy and impiety rose up against us, and all the kings of the earth motivated by injustice and enmity applied themselves to persecute us. They wanted to thwart God, but He cannot be thwarted. Ever since the time of Revelation, every despot or slave that has attained to power, be he violent or ignoble, has made it his first aim and his final purpose to destroy our law, and to vitiate our religion, by means of the sword, by violence, or by brute force, such as Amalek, Sisera, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Hadrian, may their bones be ground to dust, and others like them. This is one of the two classes which attempt to foil the Divine will. The second class consists of the most intelligent and educated among the nations, such as the Syrians, Persians, and Greeks. These also endeavor to demolish our law and to vitiate it by means of arguments which they invent, and by means of controversies which they institute. They seek to render the Law ineffectual and to wipe out every trace thereof by means of their polemical writings, just as the despots plan to do it with the sword. But neither the one nor the other shall succeed. We possess the divine assurance given to Isaiah concerning any tyrant that will wish to undermine our Law and to annihilate it by weapons of war, that the Lord will demolish them so that they will have no effect. This is only a metaphorical way of saying that his efforts will be of no avail, and that he will not accomplish his purpose. In like manner whenever a disputant shall attempt to

demonstrate the falsity of our Law, the Lord will shatter his arguments and prove them absurd untenable and ineffective. This divine promise is contained in the following verse, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." (Isaiah 54:17). Although the exponents of both methods persuade themselves that this is a structure which can be demolished, and they exert themselves to undermine its firmly established foundations, they only increase their pain and toil. The structure remains as firmly planted as ever, while the God of Truth mocks and derides them, because they endeavor, with their feeble intelligence, to achieve a goal that is beyond the powers of mortal man. The inspired writer describes their attempt and God's scorn of them in the following verses: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their words from us, He that sitteth in heaven laugheth, the Lord hath them in derision." (Psalms 2:3-4). Both of these parties have harassed and afflicted us incessantly throughout the epoch of our political independence, and partly during the period of our dispersion. After that there arose a new sect which combined the two methods, namely, conquest and controversy, into one, because it believed that this procedure would be more effective in wiping out every trace of the Jewish nation and religion. It, therefore, resolved to lay claim to prophecy and to found a new faith, contrary to our Divine religion, and to contend that it was equally God-given. Thereby it hoped to raise doubts and to create confusion, since one is opposed to the other and both supposedly emanate from a Divine source, which would lead to the destruction of both religions. For such is the remarkable plan contrived by a man who is envious and querulous. He will strive to kill his enemy and to save his own life, but when he finds it impossible to attain his objective, he will devise a scheme whereby they both will be slain. The first one to have adopted this plan was Jesus the Nazarene, may his bones be ground to dust. He was a Jew because his mother was a Jewess although his father was a Gentile. For in accordance with the principles of our law, a child born of a Jewess and a Gentile, or of a Jewess and a slave, is legitimate. (Yebamot 45a). Jesus is only figuratively termed an illegitimate child. He impelled people to believe that he was a prophet sent by God to clarify perplexities in the Torah, and that he was the Messiah that was predicted by each and every seer. He interpreted the Torah and its precepts in such a fashion as to lead to their total annulment, to the abolition of all its commandments and to the violation of its prohibitions. The sages, of blessed memory, having become aware of his plans before his reputation spread among our people, meted out fitting punishment to him.¹ Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavor to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretenses to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah, as it is written, "Also the children of the impudent among thy people shall make bold to claim prophecy, but they shall fall." (Daniel 11:14). Quite some time after, a religion² appeared the origin of which is traced to him by the descendants of Esau, albeit it was not the intention of this person to establish a new faith. For he was innocuous to Israel as neither individual nor groups were unsettled in their beliefs because of him, since his inconsistencies were so transparent to every one. Finally he was overpowered and put a stop to by us when he fell into our hands, and his fate is well known. After him arose the Madman who emulated his precursor since he paved the way for him. But he added the further objective of procuring rule and submission, and he invented his well known religion. All of these men purposed to place their teachings on the same level with our divine religion. But only a simpleton who lacks knowledge of both would liken divine institutions to human practices. Our religion differs as much from other religions for which there are alleged resemblances as a living man endowed with the faculty of reason is unlike a statue which is ever so well carved out of marble, wood, bronze or silver. When a person ignorant of divine wisdom or of God's works sees the statue that superficially resembles a man in its contours, form, features, and color, he believes that the structure of the parts of a statue is like the constitution of a man, because he is deficient in understanding concerning the inner organization of both. But the informed person who knows the interior of both, is cognizant of the fact that the internal structure of the statue betrays no skillful workmanship at all, whereas the inward parts of man are truly marvelously made, a testimony to the wisdom of the Creator, such as the prolongation of the nerves in the muscles and their ramifications, the branching out of the sinews and their intersections and the network of their ligaments and their manner of growth, the articulations of the bones and the joints, the pulsating and non-pulsating blood vessels and their ramifications, the setting of the limbs into one another, the uncovered and covered parts, every one of these in proportion, in form and proper place. Likewise a person ignorant of the secret meaning of Scripture and the deeper significance of the Law, would be led to believe that our religion has something in common with another if he makes a comparison between the two. For he will note that in the Torah there are prohibitions and commandments, just as in other religions there are permitted and interdicted acts. Both contain a system of religious observances, positive and negative precepts, sanctioned by reward and punishment. If he could only fathom the inner intent of the law, then he would realize that the essence of the true divine religion lies in the deeper meaning of its positive and negative precepts, every one of which will aid man in his striving after perfection, and remove every impediment to the attainment of excellence. These commands will enable the throng and

the elite to acquire moral and intellectual qualities, each according to his ability. Thus the godly community becomes pre-eminent, reaching a two-fold perfection. By the first perfection I mean, man's spending his life in this world under the most agreeable and congenial conditions. The second perfection would constitute the achievement of intellectual objectives, each in accordance with his native powers. The tenets of the other religions which resemble those of Scripture have no deeper meaning, but are superficial imitations, copied from and patterned after it. They modeled their religions upon ours in order to glorify themselves, and indulge the fancy that they are similar to so and so.

However, their counterfeiting is an open secret to the learned. Consequently they became objects of derision and ridicule just as one laughs and smiles at an ape when it imitates the actions of men. This event was predicted in the divinely inspired prophecy of Daniel, according to which, in some future time a person would appear with a religion similar to the true one, with a book of Scriptures and oral communications, who will arrogantly pretend that God had vouchsafed him a revelation, and that he held converse with Him, besides making other extravagant claims. Thus Daniel in his description of the rise of the Arabic kingdom after the fall of the Roman Empire, alluded to the appearance of the Madman and his victories over the Roman, Persian, and Byzantine Empires in the vision concerning a horn which grew, became long and strong. This is clearly indicated in a verse that can be understood by the masses as well as by the select few. Since this interpretation is borne out by the facts of history, no other meaning can be given to the following verse: "I considered the horns, and, behold, there came among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things." (Daniel 7:8). Now consider how remarkably apt the symbolism is. Daniel says that he saw a small horn that was going up. When it became longer, even marvelously longer, it cast down before it three horns and behold in the side of the horn there were two eyes similar to the two eyes of man, and a mouth speaking wanton words. This obviously alludes to the person who will found a new religion similar to the divine law, and make claims to a revelation of a Scripture, and to prophecy. He will furthermore endeavor to alter and abolish the Law, as it is said, "and he shall seek to change the seasons and the law." (Daniel 7:25). Daniel was divinely informed that He would destroy this person notwithstanding his greatness and his long endurance together with the remaining adherents of his predecessors. For the three parties that warred against us will ultimately perish, i.e., the one that sought to overpower us with the sword, the second which strove to conquer us by arguments, as well the third that founded a religion similar to ours. Though they shall appear to be triumphant for a while, and be in the ascendancy for a longer or shorter period of time, they shall not last nor endure. We have a divine assurance from time immemorial that whenever a decree of apostasy is passed against us, God will ultimately terminate it. When King David inspired by the Holy Spirit and speaking in the name of the community reflected, how many peoples ruled over Israel in the past, and how many trials and tribulations they had undergone from the beginning of their history, and nevertheless were not exterminated, he was moved to exclaim, "Much have they afflicted me from my youth up; but they have not prevailed against me." (Psalms 129:2). My brethren, you all know that in the time of Nebuchadnezzar the Wicked, the Jews were compelled to worship idols and none was spared save Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Ultimately God destroyed Nebuchadnezzar, and put an end to his laws, and the religion of Truth came back to its own. Similarly during the Second Commonwealth when the wicked Greek rulers gained control of Palestine, they instituted severe persecutions against Israel in order to abolish the Torah. The Jews were compelled to profane the Sabbath, and were forbidden to observe the rite of circumcision. Every Jew was forced to write on his garment the words "we have no portion in the Lord God of Israel, and also to engrave this sentence on the horns of his ox and then plough with it."³ This state of affairs lasted about fifty-two years. Finally, God brought to an end simultaneously their empire and their laws. The sages, of blessed memory, frequently allude to persecutions in the following manner: "once the wicked government passed the following decree of persecution," or, "they decreed so and so." After a while God would make the decree null and void by destroying the power which issued it. It was this observation that led the rabbis of blessed memory to affirm that persecutions are of short duration. (Ketubot 3b). The divine assurance was given to Jacob our father, that his descendants would survive the people who degraded and discomfited them as it is written: "And thy seed shall be like the dust of the earth." (Genesis 28:14). That is to say, although his offspring will be abased like dust that is trodden under foot, they will ultimately emerge triumphant and victorious, and as the simile implies, just as the dust settles finally upon him who tramples upon it, and remains after him, so shall Israel outlive its persecutors. The prophet Isaiah has long ago predicted that various peoples will succeed in vanquishing Israel and lording over them for some time. But that ultimately God will come to Israel's assistance and will put a stop to their woes and affliction as is suggested in the following verse: "A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous one will deal treacherously, and the spoiler will spoil; Go up O Elam, besiege O Media! but ultimately the sighing thereof I shall make to cease." (Isaiah 21:2). We are in possession of the divine assurance that Israel is indestructible and imperishable, and will always continue to be a

pre-eminent community. As it is impossible for God to cease to exist, so is Israel's destruction and disappearance from the world unthinkable, as we read, "For I the Lord change not, and ye, O sons of Jacob, will not be consumed." (Malachi 3:6). Similarly He has avowed and assured us that it is unimaginable that He will reject us entirely even if we disobey Him, and disregard His behests, as the prophet Jeremiah avers, "Thus saith the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, Then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:36). Indeed this very promise has already been given before through Moses our Teacher who says, "And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God." (Leviticus 26:44). Put your trust in the true promises of Scripture, brethren, and be not dismayed at the series of persecutions or the enemy's ascendancy over us, or the weakness of our people. These trials are designed to test and purify us so that only the saints and the pious ones of the pure and undefiled lineage of Jacob will adhere to our religion and remain within the fold, as it is written, "And among the remnant are those whom the Lord shall call." (Joel 3:5). This verse makes it clear that they are not numerous, being the descendants of those who were present on Mount Sinai,⁴ witnessed the divine Revelation, entered into the covenant of God, and undertook to do and obey as is signified in their saying, "we will do, and obey." (Exodus 24:7). They obligated not only themselves but also their descendants, as it is written, "to us and to our children forever." (Deuteronomy 29:28). We have been given adequate divine assurance that not only did all the persons who were present at the Sinaitic Revelation believe in the prophecy of Moses and in his Law, but that their descendants likewise would do so, until the end of time, as it is written, "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee forever." (Exodus 10:9). Consequently it is manifest that he who spurns the religion that was revealed at that theophany, is not an offspring of the folk who witnessed it. For our sages of blessed memory have insisted that they who entertain scruples concerning the divine message are not scions of the race that were present on Mount Sinai. (Nedarim 20a). May God guard us and you from doubt, and banish from our midst confusion, suspicion, which lead to it. Now, my co-religionists in the Diaspora, it behooves you to hearten one another, the elders to guide the youth, and the leaders to direct the masses. Give your assent to the Truth that is immutable and unchangeable, and to the following postulates of a religion that shall never fail. God is one in a unique sense of the term, and Moses is His prophet and spokesman, and the greatest and most perfect of the seers. To him was vouchsafed by God what has never been vouchsafed to any prophet before him, nor will it be in the future. The entire Torah was divinely revealed to Moses of whom it was said, "with him do I speak mouth to mouth." (Numbers 12:8). It will neither be abrogated nor superseded, neither supplemented nor abridged. Never shall it be supplanted by another divine revelation containing positive and negative duties. Keep well in mind the Revelation on Sinai in accordance with the divine precept to perpetuate the memory of this occasion and not to allow it to fall into oblivion. Furthermore we were enjoined to impress this event upon the minds of our children, as it is written, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but make them known unto thy children and thy children's children." (Deuteronomy 4:9). It is imperative, my fellow Jews, that you make this great spectacle of the Revelation appeal to the imagination of your children. Proclaim at public gatherings its momentousness. For this event is the pivot of our religion, and the proof which demonstrates its veracity. Evaluate this phenomenon at its true importance for Scripture has pointed out its significance in the verse, "For ask now of the days past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?" (Deuteronomy 4:32). Remember, my co-religionists, that this great, incomparable and unique historical event, is attested by the best of evidence. For never before or since, has a whole nation witnessed a revelation from God or beheld His splendor. The purpose of all this was to confirm us in the faith so that nothing can change it, and to reach a degree of certainty which will sustain us in these trying times of fierce persecution and absolute tyranny, as it is written, "for God is come to test you." (Exodus 20:17). Scripture means that God revealed Himself to you thus in order to give you strength to withstand all future trials. Now do not slip nor err, be steadfast in your religion and persevere in your faith and its duties. Solomon, of blessed memory, has compared our people to a beautiful woman with a perfect figure, marred by no defect, in the verse, "Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee." (Song of Songs 4:7). On the other hand, he depicted the adherents of other religions and faiths, who strive to entice and win us over to their convictions, as courtesans who lure virtuous women for lewd purposes. Similarly they seek devices to trap us into embracing their religions, and subscribing to their doctrines. To these who endeavor to decoy her into avowing the superiority of their creed, our nation deftly replies, "Why do you take hold of me, can you confer upon me something like the felicity of the two companies?" She reasons thus, "If you can furnish us with something like the Revelation on Sinai, in which the camp of Israel faced the camp of the Divine Presence, then we

shall espouse your doctrines." This is metaphorically expressed in the verse, "Return, return, O Shulammitte; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will you see in the Shulammitte? As it were a dance of two companies." (Song of Songs 7:1). Now "Shulammitte" signifies the perfect one; "A dance of the two companies" alludes to the joy of the theophany in Mt. Sinai in which both the camp of Israel and the camp of God showed as is intimated in the two following verses: "Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God," (Exodus 19:17), and "The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in holiness." (Psalms 68:18). Note well the apt imagery and the deeper significance of the aforementioned verse. The fourfold occurrence of the word "return" is an allusion to the four empires, each of which will endeavor to coerce us to abandon our faith and embrace theirs. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that we are now living under the aegis of the Fourth Empire. A prediction to this effect is found in the Torah, that our enemies will force us to accept their faith, for we read, "And there shall ye serve god, the work of men's hands," (Deuteronomy 4:28). However, it will not be general throughout the world and God will never deprive us of His Law. As he assured us saying: For it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of his seed. Indeed, Isaiah, the herald of the national redemption, has already stated that Israel's indestructibility is the result of a Divine pact betokened by the perpetuation of the Torah in our midst, and our devotion to its tenets and teachings, as he says, "And as for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." (Isaiah 59:21). Our nation speaks with pride of the virulent oppression it has suffered, and the sore tribulations it has endured, to quote the words of the Psalmist, "Nay, but for Thy sake are we killed all the day." (44:23). The rabbis, of blessed memory, in Midrash Hazita, remark that the verse "nay, but for Thy sake" allude to the generation that undergoes persecution. (Midrash Song of Songs I:3, ed. Vilna, f. 13a). Let those persons exult who suffered dire misfortunes, were deprived of their riches, forced into exile and lost their belongings. For the bearing of these hardships is a source of glory and a great achievement in the sight of God. Whoever is visited by these calamities is like a burnt offering upon the altar. We may apply in commendation the verse to them, "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that he may also bestow upon you a blessing this day." (Exodus 32:29). It behooves the victim for the sake of his religion to escape and flee to the desert and wilderness, and not to consider separation from family or loss of wealth. For they are a slight sacrifice and a paltry offering due to God, King of kings, possessor of all things, the Lord thy God, whose Name is glorious and awful. God may be trusted to compensate you well in this world and in the world to come. We have noted that godly and pious folk who are animated by a desire to get acquainted with the truth and those who are engaged in its pursuit, rush to the divine religion and, wend their way from the most distant parts, to the homes of scholars. They seek to gain increased insight into the law with the concomitant hope that God will amply reward them. How much more is it one's duty to go into exile, if the question of observing the whole Torah is at stake. When a man finds it arduous to gain a livelihood in one country he emigrates to another. All the more is it incumbent upon a Jew who is restricted in the practice of his religion, to depart for another place. If he finds it impossible to leave that locality for the time being, he must not become careless and indulge with abandon in the desecration of the Sabbath and the dietary laws on the assumption that he is exempt from all religious obligations. It is the eternally inescapable duty, willy-nilly, of every one belonging to the stock of Jacob to abide by the Law. Nay, he exposes himself to punishment for the violation of each and every positive or negative precept. Let no man conclude that he may freely disregard the less important ceremonies without liability to penalty because he has committed under duress some major sins. For Jeroboam, son of Nebat, may his bones be ground to dust, was chastised not only for the sin of worshipping the calves and inciting Israel to do the same, but also for his failure to construct a booth on the Feast of Tabernacles. This is one of the fundamental principles of our religion. Understand it aright, teach it, and apply the principle widely.

Responsa | Iggerot HaRambam, Iggeret Teiman 13 | You mention that a certain man in one of the cities of Yemen pretends that he is the Messiah.¹⁷ As I live, I am not surprised at him or at his followers, for I have no doubt that he is mad and a sick person should not be rebuked or reproofed for an illness brought on by no fault of his own. Neither am I surprised at his votaries, for they were persuaded by him because of their sorry plight, their ignorance of the importance and high rank of the Messiah, and their mistaken comparison of the Messiah with the son of the Mahdi [the belief in] whose rise they are witnessing. But I am astonished that you, a scholar who has studied carefully the doctrines of the rabbis, are inclined to repose faith in him. Do you not know, my brother, that the Messiah is a very eminent prophet, more illustrious than all the prophets after Moses? Do you not know that a false pretender to prophecy is liable to capital punishment, for having arrogated to himself unwarranted distinction, just as the person who prophesies in the name of idols is put to death, as we read in Scripture "But the prophet that shall speak a word presumptuously in My

name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die." (Deuteronomy 18:20). What better evidence is there of his mendacity, than his very pretensions to be the Messiah.

How odd is your remark about this man, that he is renowned for his meekness and a little wisdom, as if these were indeed the attributes of the Messiah. Do these characteristics make him a Messiah? You were beguiled by him because you have not considered the pre-eminence of the Messiah, the manner and place of his appearance, and the marks whereby he is to be identified. The Messiah, indeed, ranks after Moses in eminence and distinction, and God has bestowed some gifts upon him which he did not bestow upon Moses, as may be gathered from the following verses: "His

delight shall be in the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:3). "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him." (11:2). "And Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins." (11:5). Six appellations were divinely conferred upon him as the following passage indicates: "For a child is born unto us, and a son is given unto us, and the government is upon his shoulder, and he is called Pele, Yoetz, el, Gibbor, Abiad, Sar-Shalom." (Isaiah 9:5). And another verse alluding to the Messiah

culminates in the following manner "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee." (Psalms 2:7). All these statements demonstrate the pre-eminence of the Messiah. Transcendent wisdom is a sine qua non for inspiration. It is an article of our faith that the gift of prophecy is vouchsafed only to the wise, the strong, and the rich. Strong is defined as the ability to control one's passions. Rich signifies wealthy in knowledge. Now if we dare not put trust in a man's pretensions to prophecy, if he does not excel in wisdom, how much less must we take seriously the claims of an ignoramus to be the

Messiah. That the man in question is a sciolist is evident from the order he issued, as you state, to the people to give away all their possessions for eleemosynary purposes. They did right in disobeying him, and he was wrong inasmuch as he disregarded the Jewish law concerning alms-giving. For Scripture says, "If a man will devote anything of all that he has" and the rabbis explain in their comment on this verse, "part of all that he has, but not all that he has," (Sifra ad locum). The sages accordingly set bounds to the bounty of the beneficent in an explicit statement which reads "He who is inclined to be liberal with the poor, may not part with more than a fifth of his possessions. (Ketubot 50a). There is no doubt that the process of reasoning which led him to claim that he is the Messiah, induced him to issue a command to his fellow-men to give away their property and distribute it to the poor. But then the affluent would become destitute and vice-versa. According to this ordinance, it would be necessary for the nouveaux riches to return their

recently-acquired property to the newly impoverished. Such a regulation, which would keep property moving in a circle, is the acme of folly. As to the place where the Messiah will make his first appearance, Scripture intimates that he will first present himself only in the Land of Israel, as we read, "He will suddenly appear in His Temple" (Malachi 3:1).

As for the advent of the Messiah, nothing at all will be known about it before it occurs. The Messiah is not a person concerning whom it may be predicted that he will be the son of so and so, or of the family of so and so. On the contrary he will be unknown before his coming, but he will prove by means of miracles and wonders that he is the true Messiah.

Scripture in allusion to his mysterious lineage says, "His name is the Shoot, and he will shoot up out of his place" (Zechariah 6:12). Similarly, Isaiah referring to the arrival of the Messiah implies that neither his father nor mother, nor his kith nor kin will be known, "For he will shoot up right forth as a sapling, and as a root out of the dry ground." (53:2). After his manifestation in Palestine, Israel will be gathered in Jerusalem and the other cities of Palestine. Then will the tidings spread to the East and the West until it will reach you in Yemen and those beyond you in India as we learn from Isaiah. "That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus upon the waters, go, ye swift messengers, to a nation that has been pulled and plucked to a people that suffered terribly from their beginning onward." (18:2). The process of the final redemption will not be reversed so that it will first appear in distant lands, and ultimately reach

Palestine. What the great powers are, which all the prophets from Moses to Malachi ascribe to the Messiah, may be inferred from various statements in the twenty-four books of Scripture. The most significant of them all is the fact that the mere report of his advent will strike terror into the hearts of all the kings of the earth, and their kingdoms will fall, neither will they be able to war or revolt against him. They will neither defame nor calumniate him, for the miracles he will perform will frighten them into complete silence. Isaiah refers to the submission of the kings to the Messiah in the verse, "Kings shall shut their mouth because of him." (52:15). He will slay whom he will, none will escape or be saved, as it is written, "And he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth." (Isaiah 11:4). Revolution and war in the entire world, from East to West, will not cease at the beginning of the Messianic era, but only after the wars of Gog and Magog, as was indicated by Ezekiel. I do not believe that this man who has appeared among you possesses these powers. You know that the Christians falsely ascribe marvelous powers to Jesus the Nazarene,18 may his bones be ground to dust,

such as the resurrection of the dead and other miracles. Even if we would grant them for the sake of argument, we should not be convinced by their reasoning that Jesus is the Messiah. For we can bring a thousand proofs or so from the

Scripture that it is not so even from their point of view. Indeed, will anyone arrogate this rank to himself unless he wishes to make himself a laughing stock? In sum, had this man acted presumptuously or disdainfully, I would deem

him worthy of death. The truth seems to be that he became melancholy and lost his mind. In my opinion, it is most advisable, both for your good and for his that you put him in iron chains for a while, until Gentiles learn that he is demented. After you have blazoned and bruited abroad the intelligence concerning this man among them, you may release him without endangering his safety. If the Gentiles gain knowledge about him after he has been locked up by you, they will taunt him, and pronounce him irrational and you will remain unmolested by them. If you procrastinate until they learn of this affair of their own accord, then you will most likely incur their wrath. Remember, my co-religionists, that on account of the vast number of our sins, God has hurled us in the midst of this people, the Arabs, who have persecuted us severely, and passed baneful and discriminatory legislation against us, as Scripture has forewarned us, "Our enemies themselves shall judge us" (Deuteronomy 32:31). Never did a nation molest, degrade, debase and hate us as much as they. Therefore when David, of blessed memory, inspired by the holy spirit, envisaged the future tribulations of Israel, he bewailed and lamented their lot only in the Kingdom of Ishmael, and prayed in their behalf, for their deliverance, as is implied in the verse, "Woe is me, that I sojourn with Meschech, that I dwell beside the tents of Kedar." (Psalms 120:5). Note the distinction between Kedar and the children of Ishmael, for the Madman and imbecile is of the lineage of the children of Kedar as they readily admit. Daniel alludes only to our humiliation and degradation "like the dust in threshing" suffered at the hands of the Arabs, may they speedily be vanquished, when he says, "And some of the host and of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled upon them." (8:10). Although we were dishonored by them beyond human endurance, and had to put with their fabrications, yet we behaved like him who is depicted by the inspired writer, "But I am as a deaf man, I hear not, and I am as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth." (Psalms 38:14). Similarly our sages instructed us to bear the prevarications and preposterousness of Ishmael in silence. They found a cryptic allusion for this attitude in the names of his sons "Mishma, Dumah, and Massa" (Genesis 25:14), which was interpreted to mean, "Listen, be silent, and endure." (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, ad locum). We have acquiesced, both old and young, to inure ourselves to humiliation, as Isaiah instructed us "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair." (50:6). All this notwithstanding, we do not escape this continued maltreatment which well nigh crushes us. No matter how much we suffer and elect to remain at peace with them, they stir up strife and sedition, as David predicted, "I am all peace, but when I speak, they are for war." (Psalms 120:7). If, therefore, we start trouble and claim power from them absurdly and preposterously we certainly give ourselves up to destruction. I shall now narrate to you succinctly several episodes subsequent to the rise of the Arabic kingdom from which you will derive some benefit.¹⁹ One of these refers to the Exodus of a multitude of Jews, numbering hundred of thousands, from the East beyond Ispahan, led by an individual who pretended to be the Messiah. They were accoutered with military equipment, and drawn swords, and slew all those that encountered them. They reached, according to the information I received, the vicinity of Baghdad. This happened in the beginning of the reign of the Umayyads. The king then said to all the Jews of his kingdom: "Let your scholars go out to meet this multitude and ascertain whether their pretension is true and he is unmistakably your Expected One. If so, we shall conclude peace with you under any conditions you may prefer. But if it is dissimulation, then I shall wage war against them." When the sages met these Jews, the latter declared: "We belong to the children of the district beyond the River." Then they asked them: "Who instigated you to make this uprising?" Whereupon they replied: "This man here, one of the descendants of David, whom we know to be pious and virtuous. This man, whom we knew to be a leper at night, arose the following morning healthy and sound." They believed that leprosy was one of the characteristics of the Messiah, for which they found an allusion to the verse: "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," (Isaiah 53:4), that is by leprosy. Whereupon the sages explained to them that this interpretation was incorrect, and that he lacked even one of the characteristics of the Messiah, let alone all of them. Furthermore they advised them as follows: "O, brethren, you are still near your native country and have the possibility of returning thither. If you remain in this land you will not only perish, but also undermine the teachings of Moses, by misleading people to believe that the Messiah has appeared and has been vanquished, whereas you have neither a prophet in your midst, nor an omen betokening his oncoming." Thereupon they were persuaded by these arguments. The Sultan turned over to them so and so many thousand of dinars by way of hospitality in order that they should leave his country. But after they had returned home, he had a change of heart with respect to the Jews upon whom he imposed a fine for his expenditures. He ordered them to make a special mark on their garments, the writing of the word "cursed," and to attach one iron bar in the back and one in the front. Ever since then the communities of Khorasan and Ispahan experienced the tribulations of the Diaspora. This episode we have learned from oral reports. The following incident we have verified and know to be true because it occurred in recent times. About fifty years ago or less, a pious and virtuous man and scholar by the name of Moses Al-Dar'i came from Dar'a to the province of Andalusia to study under Rabbi Joseph ha-Levi, of blessed memory, ibn Migash, of whom you very likely have heard. Later he left for Fez, the center of Maghreb. People flocked to him because of his piety, virtue and learning. He informed

them that the Messiah had come, as was divinely revealed to him in a dream. Yet he did not pretend on the basis of a divine communication, as did the former lunatic, that he was the Messiah. He merely affirmed that the Messiah had appeared. Many people became his adherents and reposed faith in him. My father and master, of blessed memory, endeavored to dissuade and discourage people from following him. However only a few were influenced by my father, while most, nay nearly all clung to R. Moses, of blessed memory. Finally he predicted events which came true no matter what was going to occur. He would say: "I was informed yesterday--this and this would happen," and it did happen exactly as he foretold. Once he forecast a vehement rain for the coming Friday and that the falling drops will be blood. This was considered a sign of the approaching advent of the Messiah,²⁰ as was inferred from the verse, "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke." (Joel 3:3). This episode took place in the month of Marheshvan. A very heavy rain fell that Friday and the fluid that descended was red and viscous as if it were mixed with clay. This miracle convinced all the people that he was undoubtedly a prophet. In itself this occurrence is not inconsistent with the tenets of the Torah, for prophecy will return to Israel before the messianic advent, as I have previously explained. When the majority of the people put their trust in him, he predicted that the Messiah would come that very year on Passover eve. He advised the people to sell their property and contract debts to the Muslims with the promise to pay back ten dinars for one, in order to observe the precepts of the Torah in connection with the Passover festival, for they will never see them again, and so they did. When Passover came and nothing transpired, the people were ruined as most of them had disposed of their property for a trifling sum, and were overwhelmed with debt. When the Gentiles in the vicinity and their serfs learned of this hoax they were minded to do away with him, had they located him. As this Muslim country no longer offered him protection he left for Palestine where he died, may his memory be blessed. When he left he made predictions, as I was informed by those who saw him, concerning events both great and little in Maghreb which were later fulfilled. My father of blessed memory, told me that about fifteen or twenty years before that episode, there lived respectable folks in Cordova, the center of Andalusia, some of whom were given to the cult of astrology. They were all of one mind that the Messiah would appear that year. They sought a revelation in a dream night after night, and ascertained that the Messiah was a man of that city. They picked a pious and virtuous person by the name of Ibn Aryeh who had been instructing the people. They wrought miracles and made predictions just as Al-Dar'i did until they won over the hearts of all the people. When the influential and learned men of our community heard of this, they assembled in the synagogue and had Ibn Aryeh brought there and had him flogged in public. Furthermore they imposed a fine upon him, and put him into the ban, because he gave assent by his silence to the professions of his adherents, instead of restraining them and pointing out to them that they contradict our religion. They did the same thing to the persons who assembled about him. The Jews escaped the wrath of the Gentiles only with the greatest difficulty. About forty years preceding the affair of Ibn Aryeh in Andalusia, there appeared a man in Linon,²¹ a large center in the heart of France, which numbered more than ten thousand Jewish families. He pretended that he was the Messiah. He was supposed to have performed the following miracles: On moonlit nights he would go out and climb to the top of high trees in the field and glide from tree to tree like a bird. He cited a verse from Daniel to prove that such a miracle was within the power of the Messiah: "And behold, there came with the clouds of heaven One like unto a son of man ... And there was given him dominion." (7:13-14). Many who witnessed the miracle became his votaries. The French discovered this, pillaged and put many of his followers to death, together with the pretender. Some of them maintain however, that he is still hiding until this very day. The prophets have predicted and instructed us, as I have told you, that pretenders and simulators will appear in great numbers at the time when the advent of the true Messiah will draw nigh, but they will not be able to make good their claim. They will perish with many of their partisans. Solomon, of blessed memory, inspired by the holy spirit, foresaw that the prolonged duration of the exile would incite some of our people to seek to terminate it before the appointed time, and as a consequence they would perish or meet with disaster. Therefore he admonished and adjured them in metaphorical language to desist, as we read, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the hinds of the field, that ye awaken not, nor stir up love, until it please." (Song of Songs 2:7, 8:4). Now, brethren and friends, abide by the oath, and stir not up love until it please (Ketubot 111a). May God, Who created the world with the attributes of mercy grant us the privilege to behold the return of the exiles, to the portion of His inheritance, to contemplate the graciousness of the Lord, and to visit early in His Temple. May He take us out from the Valley of the Shadow of Death wherein He put us. May He remove darkness from our eyes, and gloom from our hearts. May he fulfill in our days as well as yours the prophecy contained in the verse, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:1). May He darken our opponents in His anger and wrath, may He illuminate our obscurity, as it is written, "For behold darkness shall cover the earth ... but upon the Lord will shine." (Isaiah 60:2). Greetings unto you, my dear friend, master of the sciences, and paragon of learning, and unto our erudite colleagues, and unto all the rest of the people. Peace, peace, as the light that shines, and

much peach until the moon be no more. Amen. I beg you to send a copy of this missive to every community in the cities and hamlets, in order to strengthen the people in their faith and to put them on their feet. Read it at public gatherings and in private, and you will thus become a public benefactor. Take adequate precautions lest its contents be divulged to the Gentiles by an evil person and mishap overtake us (God spare us therefrom).²² When I began writing this letter I had some misgivings about it, but they were overruled by my conviction that the public welfare takes precedence over one's personal safety. Moreover, I am sending it to a personage such as you, "and the secret of the Lord may be entrusted to those who fear Him." Our sages, the successors of the prophets, assured us that persons engaged in a religious mission will meet with no disaster (Pesahim 8b). What more important religious mission is there than this. Peace be unto all Israel. Amen.

16 **ומליתם את ערלת לבבכם וערפכם לא תקשו עוד:** Cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts and stiffen your necks no more.

Second Temple | The Midrash of Philo 17:10:2 | I see here a twofold circumcision, one of the male creature, and the other of the flesh; that which is of the flesh takes place in the genitals, but that which is of the male creature takes place, as it seems to me, in respect of his thoughts. Since that which is, properly speaking, masculine in us is the intellect, the superfluous shoots of which it is necessary to prune away and to cast off, so that it, becoming clean and pure from all wickedness and vile, may worship God as his priest. This therefore is what is designated by the second circumcision, where God says by an express law, "Circumcise the hardness of your hearts," that is to say, your hard and rebellious thoughts and ambition, which when they are cut away and removed from you, your most important part will be rendered free.

17 **כי יהיה אלהיכם הוא אלהי האלהים ואדני האדנים האל הגדל הגבור והנולא אשר לא ישא פנים ולא יקח שחד:** For your God **הוה** is God supreme and Lord supreme, (God supreme and Lord supreme Lit. "the god of gods and the lord of lords." Heb. 'adon ("lord") normally denotes a man in a position of authority. Here it is used to claim that Israel's God is beyond the men who sit atop the social hierarchies of rank and gender.) the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe,

Second Temple | On the Confusion of Tongues 34:3 | [173] Now the nature of these two worlds has so struck with awe the minds of some, that they have deified not merely each of them as a whole, but also their fairest parts, the sun, the moon and the whole sky, and have felt no shame in calling them gods. It was the delusion of such persons that Moses saw, when he says "Lord, Lord, King of the Gods" (Deut. 10:17), to shew the difference between the ruler and the subjects.

18 **עשה משפט יתום ואלמנה ואהב גר לתת לו לחם ושמלה:** but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing food and clothing.—

19 **ואהבתם את הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים:** You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

20 **את יהוה אלהיך תירא אתו תעבד וב' תדבק ובשמו תשב:** **הוה:** only your God shall you worship, to [God] shall you hold fast, and by God's name shall you swear.

Second Temple | On the Migration of Abraham 24:1 | [132] Using still loftier language to express the irrepressible craving for moral excellence, he calls on them to cleave to Him. His words are: "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and Him shalt thou serve, and to Him shalt thou cleave" (Deut. 10:20). What then is the cementing substance? Do you ask, what? Piety, surely, and faith: for these virtues adjust and unite the intent of the heart to the incorruptible Being: as Abraham when he believed is said to "come near to God" (Gen. 18:23).

21 **הוא תהלתך והוא אלהיך אשר עשה אתך את הגדלת ואת הנוראת האלה אשר ראו עיניך:** [**הוה**] is your glory and your God, who wrought for you those marvelous, awesome deeds that you saw with your own eyes.

22 בשבעים נפש ירדו אבותיך מצרימה ועתה שמך יהוה אלהיך. ככוכבי השמים לרב: Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now your God יהוה has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

Second Temple | On the Migration of Abraham 36:6 | [201] But when, now deemed capable of seeing God, he shall have received the new name of “Israel,” he will have resort only to the principle of seventy, having cut out the five which pertains to the senses; for it is written “amounting to seventy souls thy fathers went down into Egypt” (Deut. 10:22).

11

- 1 ואהבת את יהוה אלהיך ושמרת משמרתו וחקתיו ומשפטי ו מצותיו כל־הימים: Love, therefore, your God יהוה, and always keep God’s charge, God’s laws, God’s rules, and God’s commandments.
- 2 וידעתם היום כי | לא את־בניכם אשר לא־ידעו ואשר לא־ראו את־מוסר יהוה אלהיכם את־גדלו את־ידו החזקה וזרעו הנטויה: (Syntax of Heb. uncertain.) Take thought this day that it was not your children, who neither experienced nor witnessed the lesson of your God יהוה —God’s majesty, mighty hand, and outstretched arm;
- 3 ואת־אתותיו ואת־מעשיו אשר עשה בתוך מצרים לפרעה מלך־מצרים ולכל־ארצו: the signs and the deeds that [God] performed in Egypt against Pharaoh king of Egypt and all his land;
- 4 ואשר עשה לחיל מצרים לסוסיו ולרכבו אשר הציף את־מי ים־סוף על־פניהם ברהם אחריכם ויאבדם יהוה עד היום הזה: what [God] did to Egypt’s army, its horses and chariots; how יהוה rolled back upon them the waters of the Sea of Reeds when they were pursuing you, thus destroying them once and for all; (once and for all Lit. “to this day.”)
- 5 ואשר עשה לכם במדבר עד־באתכם עד־המקום הזה: what [God] did for you in the wilderness before you arrived in this place;
- 6 ואשר עשה לדתן ולאבירם בני אליאב בן־ראובן אשר פצתה הארץ את־פיה ותבלעם ואת־בתיהם ואת־אחליהם ואת כל־היקום אשר ברגליהם בקרב כל־ישראל: and what [God] did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab son of Reuben, when the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them, along with their households, their tents, and every living thing in their train, from amidst all Israel—
- 7 כי עיניכם הראת את־כל־מעשה יהוה הגדל אשר עשה: but that it was you who saw with your own eyes all the marvelous deeds that יהוה performed.
- 8 ושמרתם את־כל־המצוה אשר אנכי מצוה היום למען תחזקו ובאתם וירשתם את־הארץ אשר אתם עברים שמה לרשתה: Keep, therefore, all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today, so that you may have the strength to enter and take possession of the land that you are about to cross into and possess,
- 9 ולמען תאריכו ימים על־האדמה אשר נשבע יהוה לאבותיכם לתת להם ולזרעם ארץ זבת חלב ודבש: and that you may long endure upon the soil that יהוה swore to your fathers to assign to them and to their heirs, a land flowing with milk and honey.

10 כי הארץ אשר אתה בא־שמה לרשתה לא כארץ מצרים הוא אשר יצאתם משם אשר תזרע את־זרעך והשקית ברגלך כגן הזקן: 10 For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There the grain you sowed had to be watered by your own labors, (by your own labors Lit. “by your foot.”) like a vegetable garden;

11 והארץ אשר אתם עברים שמה לרשתה ארץ הרים ובקעת למטר השמים תשתה־מים: 11 but the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, soaks up its water from the rains of heaven.

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Taanit, Introduction to Perek I 1 | And the land, where you are going over to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and it drinks water as the rain of heaven comes down; a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year. (Deuteronomy 11:11–12)

12 ארץ אשר־יהוה אלהיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני יהוה אלהיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה: 12 It is a land which your God יהוה looks after, on which your God יהוה always keeps an eye, from year's beginning to year's end.

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah, Introduction to Rosh Hashanah 2 | If Rosh HaShana refers to the first month of the year, however, then it should refer not to Tishrei, but to Nisan. In Nisan, prior to the exodus from Egypt, God explicitly instructed Moses: “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you” (Exodus 12:2). The Torah consistently lists months as the first, the second, etc., counting from Nisan. The Sages resolved this apparent contradiction by distinguishing between four different New Years, each on a different date, depending on what type of year is being discussed. They also defined four different times when the world is judged. Nisan marks the New Year for historical dating. The agricultural year begins in Tishrei (see Deuteronomy 11:12 and Exodus 23:16). In addition, there are other significant annual cycles.

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah, Introduction to Rosh Hashanah 3 | For certain matters, time is not fixed with a single New Year; rather, it is based on the actual age of people or animals and their physical development. The Sages established how to measure time for each concept based on its unique considerations. Tractate Rosh HaShana lists the various New Years and explains which calendars should be used for various counts, e.g., dating documents, interpreting vows, and giving tithes. The Jewish calendar is based to a large degree on the lunar cycle, which is approximately twenty-nine and one half days. The Jewish calculation of months is based on the appearance of the new moon. However, certain times of the year must also correspond to certain seasons, which are related to the solar year. Since most of the Festivals and events in the Jewish calendar are connected to specific days in the lunar month, the Gemara grapples with questions such as: To what extent must the court rely on the natural, heavenly cycles? Is it possible to create a fixed calendar based solely on mathematical calculations, or must it be based entirely or at least somewhat on direct observation?

13 והיה אם־שמעו תשמעו אלי־מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום לאהבה את־יהוה אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל־לבבכם ובכל־נפשכם: 13 If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving your God יהוה and serving [God] with all your heart and soul,

14 ונתתי מטר־ארצכם בעתו יורה ומלקוש ואספת דגלך ותירשך ויצהרך: 14 I (I That is, יהוה; Samaritan reads “He.”) will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil—

15 ונתתי עשב בשדה לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת: 15 I (I See note at v. 14.) will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle—and thus you shall eat your fill.

16 השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחויתם להם: 16 Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them.

Second Temple | Book of Jubilees 1:10 | And do thou write for thyself all these words which I declare unto thee this day, for I know their rebellion and their stiff neck, before I bring them into the land of which I sware to their fathers, to

Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob, saying: "Unto your seed will I give a land flowing with milk and honey

Responsa | Iggerot HaRambam, Iggeret Teiman 11 | In your letter you mention that the apostle has spurred on a number of people to believe that several verses in Scripture allude to the Madman, such as "bimeod meod"⁵ (Genesis 17:20), "he shined forth from Mount Paran"⁶ (Deuteronomy 33:1), "a prophet from the midst of thee" (Deuteronomy 18:15), and the promise to Ishmael "I will make him a great nation" (Genesis 17:20). These arguments have been rehearsed so often that they have become nauseating. It is not enough to declare that they are altogether feeble; nay, to cite as proofs these verses is ridiculous and absurd in the extreme. For these are not matters that can confuse the minds of anyone. Neither the untutored multitude nor the apostates themselves who delude others with them, believe in them or entertain any illusions about them. Their purpose in citing these verses is to win favor in the eyes of the Gentiles by demonstrating that they believe the statement of the Koran that Mohammed was mentioned in the Torah. But the Muslims themselves put no faith in their own arguments, they neither accept nor cite them, because they are manifestly so fallacious.

Inasmuch as the Muslims could not find a single proof in the entire Bible nor a reference or possible allusion to their prophet which they could utilize, they were compelled to accuse us saying, "You have altered the text of the Torah, and expunged every trace of the name of Mohammed therefrom." They could find nothing stronger than this ignominious argument the falsity of which is easily demonstrated to one and all by the following facts. First, Scripture was translated into Syriac, Greek, Persian and Latin hundreds of years before the appearance of Mohammed. Secondly, there is a uniform tradition as to the text of the Bible both in the East and the West, with the result that no differences in the text exist at all, not even in the vocalization, for they are all correct. Nor do any differences effecting the meaning exist. The motive for their accusation lies therefore, in the absence of any allusion to Mohammed in the Torah. The phrase "a great nation" cited above does not connote a people in possession of prophecy or a Law, but merely one large in numbers just as in reference to idolaters Scripture says "nations greater and mightier than yourselves." (Deuteronomy 11:23). Similarly, the phrase "bimeod meod" simply signifies "exceedingly." Were there any allusion in the verse to Mohammed, then it would have read "and I shall bless him bimeod meod," and whoever likes to hang on to a spider's web might then discover a reference to Mohammed therein. As it is, since Scripture says "I shall increase him bimeod meod," it can only denote an extravagant increment in numbers. There is no question that the Divine assurance to Abraham to bless his descendants, to reveal the Torah to them, and to make them the Chosen People, refers only to the offspring of Isaac. For Ishmael is mentioned as an adjunct and appendage in the blessing of Isaac, which reads "and also of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation." (Genesis 21:13). This verse suggests that Isaac holds a primary position and Ishmael a subordinate place. This point is made even more explicit in the blessing which ignores Ishmael entirely. "For in Isaac shall seed be called in thee." (Genesis 21:12). The meaning of God's promise to Abraham is that the issue of Ishmael will be vast in numbers but neither pre-eminent nor the object of divine favor, nor distinguished for the attainment of excellence. Not because of them will Abraham be famed or celebrated, but by the noted and illustrious scions of Isaac. The phrase "shall be called" simply means, shall be renowned, as it does in the verse, "Let thy name be called in them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac." (Genesis 48:16). Other verses also indicate that when God promised Abraham that His law would be vouchsafed to his children as is implied in the words "And I will be their God" (Genesis 17:8), He meant Isaac to the exclusion of Ishmael as is intimated in the declaration "But My covenant will I establish with Isaac" (Genesis 17:21), although He had already conferred His favor upon Ishmael when He said "Behold I have blessed him" (Genesis 17:20). Similarly, Isaac by bestowing the blessing of Abraham upon Jacob exclusively, debarred Esau from it, as we read in his benediction "And may He give you the blessing of Abraham" (Genesis 28:4). To sum up, the Divine covenant made with Abraham to grant the sublime Law to his descendants referred exclusively to those who belonged to the stock of both Isaac and Jacob. Hence the prophet expresses his gratitude to God for "the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac, which He established unto Jacob for a statute, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." (Psalms 105:9, I Chronicles 16:16). It is also to be noted that the name of the Arabian prophet which the Mahommedans believe to be mentioned in the Torah, by way of allusion, which the Jewish apostates find in the phrase "bimeod meod," is A.H.M.D. and not M.H.M.D. So it is explicitly stated in the Koran: "They find him mentioned in the Torah and the Gospels (Sura 7:156); his name is Ahmad." But the numerical value⁷ of the latter is not equal to that of the words "bimeod meod" which is supposed to contain an allusion to the prophet of Islam. The argument from the phrase "He shined forth from Mount Paran" (Deuteronomy 33:2) is easily refutable. Shined is past tense. Had Scripture employed the future tense "he will shine forth from Mount Paran" then the imposters might have had a semblance of truth on their side. However the use of the past tense "he shined forth" demonstrates that this phrase describes an event that has taken place, namely the theophany on Sinai. When the Deity was about to reveal Himself on Sinai, the heavenly light did not descend suddenly like a thunder-bolt, but came down

gently, manifesting itself gradually first from the top of one mountain, then from another, until He reached His abode on Sinai. This notion is implied in the verse "The Lord revealed himself at Sinai, after His light had radiated to them from Seir and glimmered from Mount Paran." (Deuteronomy 33:2). Mark well, that the phrase "unto them" refers to Israel. Note also how Scripture indicates the various gradations in the intensity of the Divine Splendor. It speaks of the light that glimmered from Mount Paran which is further removed from Sinai, but of the light that radiated from Mount Seir, which is nearer to it, and finally of the revelation of the full splendor of God on Sinai which was the goal of the theophany as is related in the verse "And the glory of God abode on Mount Sinai" (Exodus 24:16), "and the Lord came from Sinai". (Deuteronomy 33:2). Similarly, the idea that the light descended gradually from mountain to mountain is conveyed in Deborah's description of the grandeur of Israel at the Revelation on Sinai when she exclaimed "Lord when Thou didst go forth out of Seir, when Thou didst march out of the field of Edom" (Judges 5:4). Our sages of blessed memory, tell us that God, may He be praised and exalted, charged a prophet before the time of Moses to go to the Romans and another to go to the Arabs with the purpose of presenting them the Torah, but each of them in turn spurned it. When Moses was later sent to us we signified our acceptance in the words "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and obey" (Exodus 24:7). The aforementioned event happened before the Sinaitic Revelation, consequently Scripture speaks in the past tense: "He came, radiated forth, and shone," which proves that no prophecy is intended in these words." You write in your letter, that some people were duped by the argument that Mohammed is alluded to in the verse "A prophet will the Lord thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren" (Deuteronomy 18:15), while others remained unconvinced because of the phrase "from the midst of thee." It is most astonishing that some folks should be deluded by such specious proof, while others were almost persuaded, were it not for the phrase "from the midst of thee." Under these circumstance it is incumbent upon you to concentrate and understand my view in the matter. Remember that it is not right to take a passage out of its context and to draw inferences from it. It is imperative to take into consideration the preceding and following statements in order to fathom the writer's meaning and purpose before making any deductions. Were it otherwise, then it would be possible to assert that Scripture has prohibited obedience to any prophet, and interdicted belief in miracles, by quoting the verse, "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet," (Deuteronomy 13:4). It could likewise be affirmed that a positive command exists requiring us to worship idols, by citing the verse "And ye shall serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 11:16). Other illustrations could be multiplied ad libidinem. To sum up, it is wrong to interpret any given verse apart from its context. In order to comprehend unequivocally the verse under discussion namely, "A prophet will the Lord thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren," it is necessary to ascertain its context. The beginning of the paragraph whence the verse is taken, contains prohibitions of the acts of soothsaying, augury, divination, astrology, sorcery, incantation and the like. The Gentiles believe that through these practices they can predict the future course of events and take the necessary precautions to forestall them. The interdiction of these occult proceedings were accompanied with the explanation that the Gentiles believe they can depend upon them to determine future happenings. But you may not do so. You will learn about the time to come from a prophet who will rise up among you, whose predictions will come true without fail. You will thus arrive at a foreknowledge of circumstances without being obliged to resort to augury, divination, astrology and the like, for he will spare you that. Matters will be facilitated for you by the fact that this prophet will live within your borders. You will not be compelled to go in search after him from country to country, nor to travel to distant parts, as is implied in the phrase, "from the midst of thee." Moreover, another notion is conveyed in the words "from the midst of thee from thy brethren like unto me," namely, that he will be one of you, that is, a Jew. The obvious deduction is that you shall be distinguished above all others for the sole possession of prophecy. The words "like unto me" were specifically added to indicate that only the descendants of Jacob are meant. For the phrase "of thy brethren" by itself might have been misunderstood and taken to refer also to Esau and Ishmael, since we do find Israel addressing Esau as brother, for example, in the verse, "Thus saith thy brother Israel" (Numbers 20:14). On the other hand, the words "like unto me," do not denote a prophet as great as Moses, for this interpretation is precluded by the statement "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." (Deuteronomy 34:10). The general drift of the chapter points to the correctness of our interpretation and will be confirmed by the succession of the verses, to wit "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire etc.," (Deuteronomy 18:10), "For these nations, that thou art to dispossess, hearken unto soothsayers, and unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do ." (Verse 14). "A prophet will the Lord why [sic] God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me," (Verse 15). It is obviously clear that the prophet alluded to here will not be a person who will produce a new law, or found a new religion. He will merely enable us to dispense with diviners and astrologers, and will be available for consultation concerning anything that may befall us, just as the Gentiles confer with soothsayers and prognosticators. Thus we find Saul advising with Samuel

concerning his lost asses, as we read, "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he said: 'Come and let us go to the seer'; for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer." (Samuel 9:9). Our disbelief in the prophecy of Omar and Zeid⁸ is not due to the fact that they are non-Jews, as the unlettered folk imagine, and in consequence of which they are compelled to justify their standpoint by the Biblical statement "from thy midst, out of thy brethren." For Job, Zophar, Bildad, Eliphaz, and Elihu are all considered prophets and are non-Jews. On the other hand, although Hananiah, the son of Azur was a Jew, he was deemed an accursed and false prophet. Whether one should yield credence to a prophet or not depends upon the nature of his doctrines, and not upon his race, as we shall explain presently. Our ancestors have witnessed Moses, our Teacher, foremost among the prophets, holding a colloquy with the Divinity, reposed implicit faith in him when they said to him, "Go thou near and hear," (Deuteronomy 5:24). Now he assured us that no other law remained in heaven that would subsequently be revealed, nor would there even be another Divine dispensation, as the verse, "It is not in heaven," (Deuteronomy 30:12) implies. Scripture prohibits us from making any amendments to the Law or eliminating anything, for we read "Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 13:1). We pledged and obligated ourselves to God to abide by His Law, we, our children, and our children's children, until the end of time as Scripture says "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever." (Deuteronomy 29:28). Any prophet, therefore, no matter what his pedigree is, be he priest, Levite, or Amalekite, is perfidious even if he asserts that only one of the precepts of the Torah is void, in view of the Mosaic pronouncement "unto us and unto our children forever." Such a one we would declare a false prophet and would execute him if we had jurisdiction over him. We would take no notice of the miracles that he might perform, just as we would disregard the wonder-working of one who seeks to lure people to idolatry, as we are enjoined in the verse "And the sign or wonder came to pass ... thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet" (Deuteronomy 13:3). Since Moses, of blessed memory, has prohibited image worship for all the time, we know that the miracles of a would-be-seducer to idolatry are wrought by trickery and sorcery. Similarly, since Moses has taught us that the Law is eternal, we stamp definitely as a prevaricator any one who argues that it was destined to be in force for a fixed duration of time, because he contravenes Moses. Consequently we pay no attention to his assertions or supernatural performances. Inasmuch as we do not believe in Moses because of his miracles, we are under no obligations to institute comparison between his miracles and those of others. Our everlastingly firm trust and steadfast faith in Moses is due to the fact that our forebears as well as he, had heard the Divine discourse on Sinai, as it is intimated in the Scripture, "and they will also believe thee forever" (Exodus 19:9). This event is analogous to the situation of two witnesses who observed a certain act simultaneously. Each of them saw what his fellow saw and each of them is sure of the truth of the statement of his fellow, and does not require proof or demonstration, whereas other people, to whom they would report their testimony, would not be convinced without confirmation or certification. Similarly, we of the Jewish faith, are convinced of the truth of the prophecy of Moses, inasmuch as our ancestors in common with him witnessed the Divine revelation on Sinai, and not merely because of his miracles.⁹ He performed all of these only as the occasion demanded and as is recorded in Scripture. We do not give credence to the tenets of a miracle worker, in the same way we trust in the truth of Moses our Teacher, nor does any analogy exist between them. This distinction is a fundamental principle of our religion, but seems to have fallen into oblivion, and has been disregarded by our co-religionists. This thought was present in the mind of Solomon when he addressed the Gentiles in behalf of Israel, "What will you see in the Shulamite? as it were a dance of two companies." (Song of Songs 7:1). The verse means to say, "If you can produce anything like the revelation on Sinai then we shall concede some misgivings concerning Moses." If a Jewish or Gentile prophet urges and encourages people to follow the religion of Moses without adding thereto or diminishing therefrom, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the others, we demand a miracle from him. If he can perform it we recognize him and bestow upon him the honor due to a prophet, but if he fails to do so, he is put to death. We require only a miracle as his credentials, although it may be wrought by stratagem or magic, just as we accept the evidence of witnesses although there is a possibility of perjury. For we are divinely commanded through Moses to render judgment in a suit at law in accordance with the testimony of two witnesses, the possibility of false swearing notwithstanding. Similarly we are enjoined to yield obedience to one who asserts that he is a prophet provided he can substantiate his claims by miracle or proofs, although there is a possibility that he is an impostor. However, if the would-be-prophet teaches tenets that negate the doctrines of Moses, then we must repudiate him. This point was made abundantly clear in the introduction to our large work on the commentary of the Mishnah, where you will find some useful information concerning principles which form the foundation of our religion, and the pillars of our faith. It is incumbent upon you to know that the rule that nothing may ever be added to or diminished from the Laws of Moses, applies equally to the oral law, that is the traditional interpretation transmitted through the sages of blessed memory. Be cautious and on your guard lest any of the heretics, may they speedily perish! mingle among you,

for they are worse than apostates. For although this country is, as you know, a place of scholars, students and schools, they indulge in bombastic talk and we warn our people against their occasional errors, heresies and mistakes. As for you, in this distant country, although you are scholars, learned in the law, and pious, you are few in number, may God increase your number and hasten the time of gathering you all together. If any of the heretics rises up to corrupt the people, they will undermine the faith of the young folks and they will not find a savior. Beware of them and know that it is permitted to slay them in our opinion for they repudiate the statement in the prophecy of Moses who commanded us to act "According to the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee thou shalt do." (Deuteronomy 17:11). They assert in wicked defiance that they believe most firmly in the prophecy of Moses, as the Arabs and Byzantines say, yet they destroy and nullify his law and kill the adherents thereof. Whoever joins them is just like his seducer. We deemed it imperative to call your attention to these facts, and to raise the young generation on these tenets, because they are a pillar of faith!

17 וְחָרָה אַף־יְהוָה בְּכֶם וְעָצָר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וְאֲבֹדְתֶם מִהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה נָתַן לָכֶם: For יהוה's anger will flare up against you, shutting up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that יהוה is assigning to you.

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Taanit, Introduction to Perek I 2 | And the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will close up the heavens, and there will be no rain, and the earth will not give its fruit, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord gives you. (Deuteronomy 11:17)

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Taanit, Introduction to Taanit 5 | The most common misfortune that should stir feelings of repentance is a lack of rain, and therefore most of the tractate deals with this issue. As stated in the Torah (Deuteronomy 11:17), a drought is a sign of God's anger, as both a warning and a punishment. At a time of a dearth of rain, even more than with other disasters, one has no way to improve the situation other than by turning to God and praying. Furthermore, a lack of rain is not simply a local or temporary problem; it can bring catastrophe on the entire country. Much of tractate Ta'anit, and indeed many of the halakhot of fast days, concern fasts established to entreat God for rainfall. Since a drought of rain causes increasingly severe difficulties as time goes on, the fasts become correspondingly severe as well. The Sages did not simply establish one fast day, but several complex cycles of fasts, which become more and more stringent as a drought continues.

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Taanit, Introduction to Taanit 6 | Any communal fast that does not have a fixed date, i.e., which is neither a response to a current emergency nor commemorates a historical event, is established on a Monday or Thursday, the days on which the Torah is read in public and the courts would convene. The cycle of fast days does not occur on the other days of the week but only on these two days, in consecutive order.

Naturally, there is a gloomy, even mournful, aspect to fasts, as they are declared for sad events and are intended to prevent misfortunes from continuing or becoming worse. One exception to this rule is Yom Kippur, which is classified as a Festival, and which includes the joy of purification. Furthermore, as explained at the end of the tractate, this date was established as a joyful holiday, on which marriageable young girls would go out, dance in the vineyards, and seek husbands. These apparently negative features of fast days are designed to awaken one's heart to repentance and have the same goal as public gatherings for prayer, readings from the Torah, speeches of moral reproof and instruction, and all other such activities. The aim is for all the participants to correct their errors and shortcomings, both as a community and as individuals.

18 וְשִׂמְתֶם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי אֵלֶּה עַל־לִבְבְּכֶם וְעַל־נַפְשְׁכֶם וְקִשְׁרְתֶּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל־יְדֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם: Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: (very heart Lit. "heart and self.") bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, (symbol on your forehead See notes on 6.8.)

Second Temple | On the Special Laws, Book IV, Appendix 55 | § 137. Shaking before the eyes. Though Philo does not actually use nor get nearer to it than below, there can be no doubt that this is what he read. It is equally clear that it is a misreading, and his explanation is fantastical. But the mistake is not confined to him. The Apparatus Criticus in Brook and Maclean's edition of the LXX shows that one MS. has in Deut. 11:18, though not apparently in 6:8, and that the Old Latin version had "mobilia." This is also supported by a treatise of Origen, which only survives in the Latin. The reference to this is not given. Otherwise it would be interesting to see whether Origen

owed the idea to Philo and gave it further currency.

- 19 and teach them to your children—reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up;
- 20 and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates—
- 21 to the end that you and your children may endure, in the land that הוהי swore to your fathers to assign to them, as long as there is a heaven over the earth.
- לְמַדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:
וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל־מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:
לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיַמֵּי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאֲבֹתֵיכֶם לֵאמֹר לְהָאֵם כִּי־מִי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ*:

Guides | Introductions to the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, Introduction to Berakhot 9 | Shema consists of three sections (Shema – Deuteronomy 6:4–9; VeHaya im Shamo – Deuteronomy 11:13–21; VaYomer – Numbers 15:37–41.) which, although they do not appear consecutively in the Torah, combine to form a single, meaningful unit. Shema is, first and foremost, a recitation of the fundamental tenets of Judaism. Reciting it each day provides the stabilizing foundation and the guidelines for Jewish life. It is conceivable that reciting Shema each morning and evening will not constitute a profound religious experience. However, it is accessible to all, and it provides the Jewish person with the ability to delve into the text and endow all of his thoughts and actions with the essence of Shema, thereby fulfilling the contents of those sections in the most profound sense.

Responsa | Noda BiYehudah I, Orach Chaim 1:61 | Nevertheless, I found that rabbi Yaakov [Tam] (A most ‘famous’ Tosafot, where Rabbeinu [Yaakov] Tam (here called the R’I as the I represents the letter yod which also could mean Ya’akov.) argues with his grandfather, Rashi, as to the order of the parchment scriptures in the tefillin. A search of תיב לש לאמשמו, ארוק לש ימימי קאבי יכ היהו שדק: ת"ר שרפמו...ב דומע דל יד תוחנמ תכסמ תופסות: yielded only one relevant source: וניאש וציחה תיב לכ (טפ יד) יירדהנסב לאננח וניבר שריפ נכו וקלחש המ אתשה אחינו מינפבמ עומש סא היהו הירחאו קוחבמ עמש יוה ארוק Our master rabbi Tam explained that the verses of “Make you first born unique to me” (Ex. 13:1-10), and “When you come to the land” (Ex. 13:11-16) are on one’s right of the one reading it, and to the left of the one reading it are “Hear Oh Israel” (Deut. 6:4-9) on the outside and afterwards “When you will certainly listen” (Deut. 11:13-21) as this now resolves the dispute, as was also explained by our master rabbi Khanan’el (Chananel ben Chushiel or ananel ben ushiel (Hebrew: נב לאננח), an 11th-century Kairouanan Rabbi and Talmudist, was a student of one of the last Geonim. He is best known for his commentary on the Talmud. Chananel is often referred to as Rabbeinu Chananel - Hebrew for “our teacher, Chananel Rabbeinu Chananel” was born in 990 in Kairouan (modern Tunisia). R. Chananel studied under his father, Chushiel, head of the Kairouan yeshiva and through correspondence with Hai Gaon. He is closely associated with Nissim Ben Jacob in the capacity of rabbi and Rosh yeshiva of Kairouan. His most famous student is probably Isaac Alfasi.) quoting the tractate Sanhedrin 89a “Any [parchment] not on the outside, exposed to the outer air, is disqualified, as in “Make you first born unique to me” (Ex. 13:1-10)” and “Hear Oh Israel” (Deut. 6:4-9); so too was the custom of Rav Hai Gaon.) wrote that the disqualification was not secondary to being prevented from ‘seeing the outside air’, except, specifically to the tefillin box worn on the head. However, the tefillin box worn on the arm it does not apply as there is no ‘outer box covering’ issues for the arm tefillin.

- 22 If, then, you faithfully keep all this Instruction that I command you, loving your God הוהי, walking in all God’s ways, and holding fast to [God],
- כִּי אִם־שָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֹתְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתָהּ לְאַהֲבָהּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בְּכָל־דֶּרֶכָיו וּלְדַבְּקָהּ־בּוֹ:
וְהוֹרִישׁ יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִלְפָּנֶיךָ וִירְשָׁתָם גּוֹיִם גְּדֹלִים וְעֲצָמִים מִכֶּם:

Responsa | Iggerot HaRambam, Iggeret Teiman 11 | In your letter you mention that the apostle has spurred on a number of people to believe that several verses in Scripture allude to the Madman, such as “bimeod meod”⁵ (Genesis 17:20), “he shined forth from Mount Paran”⁶ (Deuteronomy 33:1), “a prophet from the midst of thee” (Deuteronomy 18:15), and the promise to Ishmael “I will make him a great nation” (Genesis 17:20). These arguments have been rehearsed so often that they have become nauseating. It is not enough to declare that they are altogether feeble; nay, to cite as proofs these verses is ridiculous and absurd in the extreme. For these are not matters that can confuse the minds of anyone. Neither the untutored multitude nor the apostates themselves who delude others with them, believe in them or entertain any

illusions about them. Their purpose in citing these verses is to win favor in the eyes of the Gentiles by demonstrating that they believe the statement of the Koran that Mohammed was mentioned in the Torah. But the Muslims themselves put no faith in their own arguments, they neither accept nor cite them, because they are manifestly so fallacious.

Inasmuch as the Muslims could not find a single proof in the entire Bible nor a reference or possible allusion to their prophet which they could utilize, they were compelled to accuse us saying, "You have altered the text of the Torah, and expunged every trace of the name of Mohammed therefrom." They could find nothing stronger than this ignominious argument the falsity of which is easily demonstrated to one and all by the following facts. First, Scripture was translated

into Syriac, Greek, Persian and Latin hundreds of years before the appearance of Mohammed. Secondly, there is a uniform tradition as to the text of the Bible both in the East and the West, with the result that no differences in the text exist at all, not even in the vocalization, for they are all correct. Nor do any differences effecting the meaning exist. The

motive for their accusation lies therefore, in the absence of any allusion to Mohammed in the Torah. The phrase "a great nation" cited above does not connote a people in possession of prophecy or a Law, but merely one large in numbers just as in reference to idolaters Scripture says "nations greater and mightier than yourselves." (Deuteronomy

11:23). Similarly, the phrase "bimeod meod" simply signifies "exceedingly." Were there any allusion in the verse to Mohammed, then it would have read "and I shall bless him bimeod meod," and whoever likes to hang on to a spider's web might then discover a reference to Mohammed therein. As it is, since Scripture says "I shall increase him bimeod meod," it can only denote an extravagant increment in numbers. There is no question that the Divine assurance to Abraham to bless his descendants, to reveal the Torah to them, and to make them the Chosen People, refers only to the offspring of Isaac. For Ishmael is mentioned as an adjunct and appendage in the blessing of Isaac, which reads "and also

of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation." (Genesis 21:13). This verse suggests that Isaac holds a primary position and Ishmael a subordinate place. This point is made even more explicit in the blessing which ignores Ishmael entirely. "For in Isaac shall seed be called in thee." (Genesis 21:12). The meaning of God's promise to Abraham is that the issue of Ishmael will be vast in numbers but neither pre-eminent nor the object of divine favor, nor distinguished for the attainment of excellence. Not because of them will Abraham be famed or celebrated, but by the noted and

illustrious scions of Isaac. The phrase "shall be called" simply means, shall be renowned, as it does in the verse, "Let thy name be called in them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac." (Genesis 48:16). Other verses also indicate that when God promised Abraham that His law would be vouchsafed to his children as is implied in the words "And I will be their God" (Genesis 17:8), He meant Isaac to the exclusion of Ishmael as is intimated in the declaration "But My covenant will I establish with Isaac" (Genesis 17:21), although He had already conferred His favor upon Ishmael when He said "Behold I have blessed him" (Genesis 17:20). Similarly, Isaac by bestowing the blessing of Abraham upon Jacob exclusively, debarred Esau from it, as we read in his benediction "And may He give you the blessing of Abraham"

(Genesis 28:4). To sum up, the Divine covenant made with Abraham to grant the sublime Law to his descendants referred exclusively to those who belonged to the stock of both Isaac and Jacob. Hence the prophet expresses his gratitude to God for "the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac, which He established unto Jacob for a statute, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." (Psalms 105:9, I Chronicles 16:16). It is also to be noted that

the name of the Arabian prophet which the Mahommedans believe to be mentioned in the Torah, by way of allusion, which the Jewish apostates find in the phrase "bimeod meod," is A.H.M.D. and not M.H.M.D. So it is explicitly stated in the Koran: "They find him mentioned in the Torah and the Gospels (Sura 7:156); his name is Ahmad." But the numerical

value⁷ of the latter is not equal to that of the words "bimeod meod" which is supposed to contain an allusion to the prophet of Islam. The argument from the phrase "He shined forth from Mount Paran" (Deuteronomy 33:2) is easily refutable. Shined is past tense. Had Scripture employed the future tense "he will shine forth from Mount Paran" then the imposters might have had a semblance of truth on their side. However the use of the past tense "he shined forth" demonstrates that this phrase describes an event that has taken place, namely the theophany on Sinai. When the Deity was about to reveal Himself on Sinai, the heavenly light did not descend suddenly like a thunder-bolt, but came down gently, manifesting itself gradually first from the top of one mountain, then from another, until He reached His abode on Sinai. This notion is implied in the verse "The Lord revealed himself at Sinai, after His light had radiated to them from Seir and glimmered from Mount Paran." (Deuteronomy 33:2). Mark well, that the phrase "unto them" refers to Israel. Note also how Scripture indicates the various gradations in the intensity of the Divine Splendor. It speaks of the light that glimmered from Mount Paran which is further removed from Sinai, but of the light that radiated from Mount

Seir, which is nearer to it, and finally of the revelation of the full splendor of God on Sinai which was the goal of the theophany as is related in the verse "And the glory of God abode on Mount Sinai" (Exodus 24:16), "and the Lord came from Sinai". (Deuteronomy 33:2). Similarly, the idea that the light descended gradually from mountain to mountain is conveyed in Deborah's description of the grandeur of Israel at the Revelation on Sinai when she exclaimed "Lord when

Thou didst go forth out of Seir, when Thou didst march out of the field of Edom" (Judges 5:4). Our sages of blessed memory, tell us that God, may He be praised and exalted, charged a prophet before the time of Moses to go to the Romans and another to go to the Arabs with the purpose of presenting them the Torah, but each of them in turn spurned it. When Moses was later sent to us we signified our acceptance in the words "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and obey" (Exodus 24:7). The aforementioned event happened before the Sinaitic Revelation, consequently Scripture speaks in the past tense: "He came, radiated forth, and shone," which proves that no prophecy is intended in these words." You write in your letter, that some people were duped by the argument that Mohammed is alluded to in the verse "A prophet will the Lord thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren" (Deuteronomy 18:15), while others remained unconvinced because of the phrase "from the midst of thee." It is most astonishing that some folks should be deluded by such specious proof, while others were almost persuaded, were it not for the phrase "from the midst of thee." Under these circumstance it is incumbent upon you to concentrate and understand my view in the matter. Remember that it is not right to take a passage out of its context and to draw inferences from it. It is imperative to take into consideration the preceding and following statements in order to fathom the writer's meaning and purpose before making any deductions. Were it otherwise, then it would be possible to assert that Scripture has prohibited obedience to any prophet, and interdicted belief in miracles, by quoting the verse, "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet," (Deuteronomy 13:4). It could likewise be affirmed that a positive command exists requiring us to worship idols, by citing the verse "And ye shall serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 11:16). Other illustrations could be multiplied ad libidinem. To sum up, it is wrong to interpret any given verse apart from its context. In order to comprehend unequivocally the verse under discussion namely, "A prophet will the Lord thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren," it is necessary to ascertain its context. The beginning of the paragraph whence the verse is taken, contains prohibitions of the acts of soothsaying, augury, divination, astrology, sorcery, incantation and the like. The Gentiles believe that through these practices they can predict the future course of events and take the necessary precautions to forestall them. The interdiction of these occult proceedings were accompanied with the explanation that the Gentiles believe they can depend upon them to determine future happenings. But you may not do so. You will learn about the time to come from a prophet who will rise up among you, whose predictions will come true without fail. You will thus arrive at a foreknowledge of circumstances without being obliged to resort to augury, divination, astrology and the like, for he will spare you that. Matters will be facilitated for you by the fact that this prophet will live within your borders. You will not be compelled to go in search after him from country to country, nor to travel to distant parts, as is implied in the phrase, "from the midst of thee." Moreover, another notion is conveyed in the words "from the midst of thee from thy brethren like unto me," namely, that he will be one of you, that is, a Jew. The obvious deduction is that you shall be distinguished above all others for the sole possession of prophecy. The words "like unto me" were specifically added to indicate that only the descendants of Jacob are meant. For the phrase "of thy brethren" by itself might have been misunderstood and taken to refer also to Esau and Ishmael, since we do find Israel addressing Esau as brother, for example, in the verse, "Thus saith thy brother Israel" (Numbers 20:14). On the other hand, the words "like unto me," do not denote a prophet as great as Moses, for this interpretation is precluded by the statement "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." (Deuteronomy 34:10). The general drift of the chapter points to the correctness of our interpretation and will be confirmed by the succession of the verses, to wit "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire etc.," (Deuteronomy 18:10), "For these nations, that thou art to dispossess, hearken unto soothsayers, and unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do ." (Verse 14). "A prophet will the Lord why [sic] God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me," (Verse 15). It is obviously clear that the prophet alluded to here will not be a person who will produce a new law, or found a new religion. He will merely enable us to dispense with diviners and astrologers, and will be available for consultation concerning anything that may befall us, just as the Gentiles confer with soothsayers and prognosticators. Thus we find Saul advising with Samuel concerning his lost asses, as we read, "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he said: 'Come and let us go to the seer'; for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer." (Samuel 9:9). Our disbelief in the prophecy of Omar and Zeid⁸ is not due to the fact that they are non-Jews, as the unlettered folk imagine, and in consequence of which they are compelled to justify their standpoint by the Biblical statement "from thy midst, out of thy brethren." For Job, Zophar, Bildad, Eliphaz, and Elihu are all considered prophets and are non-Jews. On the other hand, although Hananiah, the son of Azur was a Jew, he was deemed an accursed and false prophet. Whether one should yield credence to a prophet or not depends upon the nature of his doctrines, and not upon his race, as we shall explain presently. Our ancestors have witnessed Moses, our Teacher, foremost among the prophets, holding a colloquy with the Divinity, reposed implicit faith in him when they said to him, "Go thou near and hear," (Deuteronomy 5:24).

Now he assured us that no other law remained in heaven that would subsequently be revealed, nor would there even be another Divine dispensation, as the verse, "It is not in heaven," (Deuteronomy 30:12) implies. Scripture prohibits us from making any amendments to the Law or eliminating anything, for we read "Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 13:1). We pledged and obligated ourselves to God to abide by His Law, we, our children, and our children's children, until the end of time as Scripture says "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever." (Deuteronomy 29:28). Any prophet, therefore, no matter what his pedigree is, be he priest, Levite, or Amalekite, is perfidious even if he asserts that only one of the precepts of the Torah is void, in view of the Mosaic pronouncement "unto us and unto our children forever." Such a one we would declare a false prophet and would execute him if we had jurisdiction over him. We would take no notice of the miracles that he might perform, just as we would disregard the wonder-working of one who seeks to lure people to idolatry, as we are enjoined in the verse "And the sign or wonder came to pass ... thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet" (Deuteronomy 13:3). Since Moses, of blessed memory, has prohibited image worship for all the time, we know that the miracles of a would-be-seducer to idolatry are wrought by trickery and sorcery. Similarly, since Moses has taught us that the Law is eternal, we stamp definitely as a prevaricator any one who argues that it was destined to be in force for a fixed duration of time, because he contravenes Moses. Consequently we pay no attention to his assertions or supernatural performances. Inasmuch as we do not believe in Moses because of his miracles, we are under no obligations to institute comparison between his miracles and those of others. Our everlastingly firm trust and steadfast faith in Moses is due to the fact that our forebears as well as he, had heard the Divine discourse on Sinai, as it is intimated in the Scripture, "and they will also believe thee forever" (Exodus 19:9). This event is analogous to the situation of two witnesses who observed a certain act simultaneously. Each of them saw what his fellow saw and each of them is sure of the truth of the statement of his fellow, and does not require proof or demonstration, whereas other people, to whom they would report their testimony, would not be convinced without confirmation or certification. Similarly, we of the Jewish faith, are convinced of the truth of the prophecy of Moses, inasmuch as our ancestors in common with him witnessed the Divine revelation on Sinai, and not merely because of his miracles.⁹ He performed all of these only as the occasion demanded and as is recorded in Scripture. We do not give credence to the tenets of a miracle worker, in the same way we trust in the truth of Moses our Teacher, nor does any analogy exist between them. This distinction is a fundamental principle of our religion, but seems to have fallen into oblivion, and has been disregarded by our co-religionists. This thought was present in the mind of Solomon when he addressed the Gentiles in behalf of Israel, "What will you see in the Shulamite? as it were a dance of two companies." (Song of Songs 7:1). The verse means to say, "If you can produce anything like the revelation on Sinai then we shall concede some misgivings concerning Moses." If a Jewish or Gentile prophet urges and encourages people to follow the religion of Moses without adding thereto or diminishing therefrom, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the others, we demand a miracle from him. If he can perform it we recognize him and bestow upon him the honor due to a prophet, but if he fails to do so, he is put to death. We require only a miracle as his credentials, although it may be wrought by stratagem or magic, just as we accept the evidence of witnesses although there is a possibility of perjury. For we are divinely commanded through Moses to render judgment in a suit at law in accordance with the testimony of two witnesses, the possibility of false swearing notwithstanding. Similarly we are enjoined to yield obedience to one who asserts that he is a prophet provided he can substantiate his claims by miracle or proofs, although there is a possibility that he is an impostor. However, if the would-be-prophet teaches tenets that negate the doctrines of Moses, then we must repudiate him. This point was made abundantly clear in the introduction to our large work on the commentary of the Mishnah, where you will find some useful information concerning principles which form the foundation of our religion, and the pillars of our faith. It is incumbent upon you to know that the rule that nothing may ever be added to or diminished from the Laws of Moses, applies equally to the oral law, that is the traditional interpretation transmitted through the sages of blessed memory. Be cautious and on your guard lest any of the heretics, may they speedily perish! mingle among you, for they are worse than apostates. For although this country is, as you know, a place of scholars, students and schools, they indulge in bombastic talk and we warn our people against their occasional errors, heresies and mistakes. As for you, in this distant country, although you are scholars, learned in the law, and pious, you are few in number, may God increase your number and hasten the time of gathering you all together. If any of the heretics rises up to corrupt the people, they will undermine the faith of the young folks and they will not find a savior. Beware of them and know that it is permitted to slay them in our opinion for they repudiate the statement in the prophecy of Moses who commanded us to act "According to the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee thou shalt do." (Deuteronomy 17:11). They assert in wicked defiance that they believe most firmly in the prophecy of Moses, as the Arabs and Byzantines say, yet they destroy and nullify his law and kill the adherents thereof. Whoever joins them

is just like his seducer. We deemed it imperative to call your attention to these facts, and to raise the young generation on these tenets, because they are a pillar of faith!

כִּלְי־מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרֹךְ כַּף־רַגְלְכֶם בּוֹ לָכֶם יִהְיֶה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר
וְהַלְבָּנוֹן מִן־הַנָּהָר נְהַר־פָּלַת וְעַל הַיָּם הָאֲחֵלּוּן יִהְיֶה גְבֻלְכֶם:

24 Every spot on which your foot treads shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River—the Euphrates—to the Western (Western I.e., Mediterranean; cf. 34.2.) Sea.

לֹא־יִתְיָצֵב אִישׁ בְּפָנֶיכֶם פַּחַדְכֶם וּמוֹרָאֲכֶם יִתֵּן | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
עַל־פָּנָי כִּלְי־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרֹכוּ בָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָכֶם:

25 No one shall stand up to you: your God יהוה will put the dread and the fear of you over the whole land in which you set foot, as promised.