Introduction by the student’s author

Praised and glorified be the glorified God, lofty in the throne, and elevated be God who created his universe in six days of work, great is he and great is his name. The whole expanse of the world cannot contain his might, since he is the place of his world, and the world is not his place. He is the Lord our God, who has known us personally out of all clans of the earth and distinguished us from all nations of the world, carried us since the womb and held us since our gestation, and called us “My son, my firstborn, Israel,” and brought us out of the Land of Egypt, the place of bondage, and brought us up with signs and miracles and a mighty hand out of Nof [Egypt], and split the sea in front of us and brought us through the sea on dry land, and guided us with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night, and he brought us to his beloved Mt. Sinai, and bequeathed us his upright, pure Torah, and commanded us upright statutes and Torah of truth and commandments and precepts, and he brought us near as a dear son and a beloved child, and placed us high above all the nations. This is all only because he has loved us with great love, and cherished us with great endearment. He has not done for any other other nature what he has done for us; he has not taught them statutes as he has taught us.

But we have not treated him as he has treated us; rather, we have dones sins and evil and wickedness and crimes, and therefore he (elevated be he!) has cast us off, sent us away from his presence and dispersed us among all nations and languages, constantly beating us with blows. But despite the fact that (due to our sins) we are in days of mourning, poverty, and pauperhood, and the exile is bitter and difficult, empty, vast, and desolate, worn down, overflowing but not sweet, [and we are] hungry and weak, pushed and barefoot, bent down and weakened and not strengthened, and spurned at driven out of our land, and caught in the trap of sorrows, separated from our beloved things, dispersed, crushed, smashed, persecuted, pursued, oppressed, weak and not sought – [despite all this], because of his covenant with his treasured inheritance, his beloved, his perfect dove, because of the promise that he has promised us, he has not rejected us to destroy us, he has not pushed us away to destroy our name. God has afflicted us, bus not given us to death. And throughout our time in our exile, he has not withheld holy men from us, fully armed for battle and hastening, running and strong, going out defiantly to avenge God’s side against the camp of the hater and the oppressor, to fight a major war against the people that demolish and loot the Torah, which is so pure, sweet and perfect, and all other branches of wisdom in comparison are shamed and considered nothing – for they are adulteress, breathing the spirit of falsehood, whereas she is the glorious princess inside; they have gotten pregnant from whoring, whereas she is a virgin, an girl without blemish. Just as we have heard, so have we seen in our own time, how God (for his own sake, not for ours!) has removed the veil from our faces and the veil from our minds, and opened our eyes by shining a glorious light upon us, bright like the light of the first seven days [of creation], a splendid crown and glorious wreath and precious crown, a lamp of light, a shining speculum, [namely] my teacher, the polymathic sage, the great pious man, **Isaac bar Abraham**, may his soul be bound up in the bond of the living, the author of this book, who gave beautiful words not in order to get a position of authority but only to show praise for the great, mighty, and awesome God, and praise for the upright, unadulterated, pure Torah, as he himself says in his introduction to the book. He calls the book *Ḥizzuq Emuna* [Strengthening the Faith], to be a support for people of weak knowledge and poor understanding, and a shield and buckler for the poor Jews, who are constantly being exiled and trembling; but to be ice or cold for people that have gone against the Torah, and given strange, silly explanations, for it demonstrates to them the lameness of their words and it annuls their statements, based on logic and [the words of] the prophets and also from [the Christians’] own books, which powerful, forceful arguments, inlaid in the name of faith, going forth from under the lintel of the words of the prophets, who had the Lord’s spirit speak through them, and the true Torah was in their midst; even our opponents admit that [the prophets’ words] were true, and they greatly value and praise them.

A statement’s truth can be demonstrated in two different ways, as people in the know are aware. The first is to cite evidence for the statement’s truth. The second is to dispel supposed disproofs, which stand like a sword facing you. Therefore, all matters firmly stated in this book are divided into two sections.

Know that the strong foundations of the world, our holy, expert sages, have stated that whatever occurred to the ancestors is a premonition of what would happen to their descendants; this is is clear to people that investigate it. Whatever happened to the patriarch Isaac [from Genesis] occurred also to my master, as we see that his name is like [Isaac’s] and his father’s name is [Abraham, like Isaac’s father], all the same; and just as Isaac was sixty years old when he began Jacob and Esau, so was my master sixty when he made his deeds favorable [apparently: the writing of this book]. And just as Jacob and Esay were born as twins, so did my master beget two twin sections of this book. The first section enlightens the eyes with clear evidence, from the prophets and from logic, built up wonderfully, perfectly and eternally, for our Torah and our faith, on the model of Jacob, the upright man who sat in tents, the prime ancestor of our fathers. The second part is about debunking the opposition, which is the Gospels, which are set in mistakes and errors, without thought, like Esau the Wicked, whose intention was to rebel against God on high, who dwells in the hidden heights; the eyes of all dear readers of this book will see all this clearly.

When my master finished his book, completed his work, and sat down to write a table of contents of the chapters of the two sections, an angel of God came to him and said: “The king has spoken, come down to me, do not stay in place, since your years have come, your days are completed.” When my master saw that his time had come to come back to the giver of his life, to return to the high place, for that would be his home, he did not ask for anything, other than that he could be connected to the living [through his book]. So he called me personally – his servant, attendant, and disciple, who poured water on his hands – and he placed his hand on my head and blessed me with a blessing, and placed some of his splendor on me, and said: “My beloved son, whom I love as I love my own eye, my days are drawing near to die, since the sicknesses of the time have surrounded me and chased me out of the comforts of this world, for the ministers of the great king have come to me, and hasten me to go up soon to my father in heaven. My son, remember my love for you, that I have cherished you, and take account of what I have shown you and tought you and instructed you. Give your hand, and take hold of the work that I have done with the help of the One that teaches knowledge to humans, in whom I have put my exclusive trust – this is my book, which I have written, which I have called *Ḥizzuq Emuna*. Inasmuch as my time has not allowed me to complete it in accordance with all the work that it needs, you should complete it, and publish out throughout the world, to make my name known among my people.” With this, he stopped speaking to me, and my splendor left me, and my glory departed from my, and Isaac breathed his last and9 died and was gathered in with glory and honor, to my people, where his tent had been at the beginning.

Now, when my master ascended to heaven with the flame of Torah and good deeds, I pressed my face to the ground and spread out my palms, and I cried out with a great, bitter cry, saying: “How has the mighty staff been broken, the glorious rod??!” I sat, moaning so hard that my loins broke, with a broken cry, on the way to Horonaim (Jeremiah 48:5); I said, with broken spirit and soft speech: “The Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; may the Lord’s name be blessed.” (Job 1:21) I then arose from my mourning and sadness to do what my master had instructed me; I took the book that my master had written to smite the enemies on the cheek and to break the teeth of the wicked. I saw that the book was entirely complete, clothed from head to foot; but in the table of contents for Part II, the author had listed only eight chapters; [my master], the necklace of my neck, had not been able to complete the table of contents for all the other chapters of Part II, so I, the poor one, arose to finish it to completion, as I was given the opportunity by my creator, who is my hope and my trust. I call to testify for me the one true one, who is unique with any second to him, and all my thoughts belong to him: it is not my haughtiness of being great that has puffed me up to stand in the breach where the great one had stood, for I know my inadequacies in knowledge, and my general lowliness, and how great the the author was, who sat in the council of wisdom, for the difference between his ways and my ways and thoughts is as vast as the space between heaven and earth, and the difference between my knowledge and his is like the proportion between an ant and an elephant. Rather, what has given me permission to do this is the will and instruction of my master, the late rabbi, for I am committed to do his word, and I run following the path of his instructions, and I keep his word, just as I did when I was being raised with him, for my awe of him remains after his death, just as it was when he was alive. Blessed be our God, whose kingdom has dominion over all, who inspired this late sage to glorify the House of Israel, his hand-tended flock and the people he pastures, who he did not withhold his kindness and truth from his manservant, son of his maidservant, allowing him to finish and complete what was instructed by the glorious crown, the rabbi who wrote this book, may his soul enjoy abundance, Amen, so be it. In the Lord’s name may we act and be successful.

These are the words of the servant, the meekest of the students in the study group, who rolled in the duest of the feet of the masters of Torah, Joseph son of the holy [=martyr] R. Mordecai, may the Lord avenge his blood, of Cracow.

Author’s introduction

*Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle.*

(Psalms 144:1)

Said the youngest of students of the scholars of the Torah, the smallest of all the members of the study group Isaac son of Abraham, may his [i.e. Abraham’s] soul be bound up in the bond of the living: I have been greatly zealous for the Lord, God of Hosts, on account of the profanation of his great, holy, dignified, awesome name, and the profanation of his holy, perfect, faithful, upright, and precious Torah, which restores the soul, makes the simple wise, makes the heart rejoice, and enlightens the eyes. When I saw that there were no more pious people, and the faithful people were gone from the righteous, faith-keeping nation, who are raised with the Torah and the books of the faithful prophets, who have understanding at the times to know how to respond to opponents, namely to the Christian nation, who speak guile and take glory in false words against the Lord of Hosts of the Hebrew, who created all things. Truth is gone when knowledge is gone and the way of falsehood prevails through the might of people that keep it, and thus all day long God’s name is blasphemed by the voice of the shooters, the quick shouters, who force and shoot the arrows of their tongues against the [Jewish] people, who are weak, faltering in their knowledge, moaning and groaning, oppressed and crushed, dispersed throughout the four corners of the earth, beaten by blow after blow. Through the long days of exile, and the short days of one’s poor, impoverished [life], and the difficult, frightening times, and the hardships of times that are designated to make them drink bitter, accursed waters, the wisdom of their sages has been lost and the understanding of their intelligent people has been concealed. Therefore, Torah dissipates, such that the true judgment is not issued; even though the words are ancient and the judgments are correct, strong as mirrors and refined as gold, all understood by those that understand them, life for those that find them, with nothing perverse in them, nonetheless anxiety causes a person to be trapped, for how can one engage in debate with someone stronger, for if the stronger person strikes, who can respond? Nonetheless, the righteous walk in [God’s ways], and the wicked stumble in them; therefore, our sages, peace be upon them, taught us: “Study Torah diligently, and know what to respond to a heretic.” This is referring to heretics that are not Jews. When they raise challenges to us against the Lord’s perfect Torah, with arguments full of trickery and guile, and they argue with the sword of logic, in accordance with their usual practice, with arguments lacking all sense; the fools and idiots say: “Do you not see, O miserable Jews, from the words of the prophets who prophesied as ordered by the supreme God, that you are so far and distant from the path of truth? You do not know the way where light is found, the way to reach redemption!” They speak at great extent, and mock us, and no one shames them. And when a poor, persecuted Jew hears the voice of the blasphemer, the mocker, the scoffer, the Jew has nothing to say, not knowing what to respond. Then the Jew is grabbed by pains and anguish, due to not having listened to the voice of teacher, and not having spent more on the oil of wisdom than on the wine of folly, or because of being prevented by the travails of the exile from obtaining true enlightenment, and therefore not knowing how to vindicate God’s statutes and kind deeds, to proclaim his great deeds to people.

Therefore, I thought: It is time to make for the Lord a book that will be short in quantity but great in quality, where my words will be short, not long; it will be a support for people weak in knowledge and poor in understanding, like me. I have called it *Ḥizzuq Emuna* [Strengthening the Faith], to strengthen faltering hands, who lack understanding in the words that were promised to us, and to fortify knees that are failing due to the great length of our exile. For I have heard guile spoken by many that used to call themselves Jews, but now the faith has been cut off from their mouths, and they have mixed in with the gentiles and learned their ways and worshipped their idols; the trap that caught them, when they mixed among them, was that they did not know how to respond to their claims with arguments from the words of the prophets, to demonstrate that they are boasting and taking glory in falsehood, and to reveal testimony about their blunders and mistakes, based on the words of their own faith and religion. Although the [Christian] nation rules over us (due to our sins), nonetheless truth helps. Even if we can not get them to leave their faith, we can get them to stop bringing complaints against us, since we know that their do not have the truth, just as many from their nation know. For their eyes are shut closed, and cannot see; their heart, and it cannot understand. Indeed, God opens the eye of my heart, with his great kindness and truth, to understand a small amount, like a drop from the sea, out of the wonders of his Torah; to understand one out of thousands of thousands and myriads and myriads of the secrets of his Law.

[Similarly, God has given me the opportunte] to see and understand some of the gentiles’ books, and their language. When I was a young man, I was sometimes come and go among the princes of the land, in their courts and palaces, and I saw the mistakes in the books that they had written. I paid attentention: They were not speaking properly, for they showed favor to strange thoughts and foolish opinions, and without thought they say many words. Despite all this, they filled their mouths with whatever poured out of their hearts, and they spoke at length with their short knowledge, citing weak arguments from our holy Torah, and making false claims and challenges based on the words of the prophets and the writings [the Kethuvim, the third section of the Hebrew Bible], which [God] had never commanded, and [the Biblical authors] had never considered, and such ideas had never been in their midst. Therefore, they err in vision, and stumble in judgment, rebelling in the wilderness against God most high. And when I, the meekest in my my tribe, was young, and throughout my life since then, despite between the least of men, and despite not having studied wisdom and knowledge of the holy ones, I engaged in debates with many people, including princes and sages, with anyone who was willing to debate with me; they did not shame me, because I my words to them were always uttered in a kindly way, not in a belligerent way; so they did not shame me, but loved me even more when they heard my arguments and my responses. Torah of truth was in my mouth, with no guile on my lips; for everything I say, I demonstrated it with something written in Scripture, so that truth would be known to all and not concealed.

Therefore, I have decided to write a book of the the arguments, which the great scholars of the Christians have argued, whose maxims are proverbs of ashes. They are from the books of their Gospels, along with the responses that I gave to each of their arguments, and with some of the arguments that I made against their words, both what I was able to come up with and what I had received from books and from teachers. I have placed my trust in the God of Israel, to guide me in the way of truth, so that I will make no error or mistake. My testimony is in heaven, that my intention in writing this little book is not because I think that I am wise, nor to give honor to my name; everyone that knows me knows that this is not how I think of myself, but rather I am the most ignorant of men, and I have no understanding. Rather, I wrote it only out of my zeal for God, the great, mighty, and awesome. I fear him alone; I do not fear myriads of people, when I write words of truth and good reason. For truth is more beloved than every master thinker, an incense of myrrh and frankincense more than all the powders of a perfurmers. As the great of philosphers said: “We love Socrates, love we love truth most of all.” Now, because the words of our holy Torah and the prophets and the writings are truth, famous to all, and even our opponents acknowlege their truth and respect them, therefore wherever there is a debate between us and them I argue from the Torah and the prophets and the writings to demonstrate the truth of the matters for which we need to bring evidence, for there is no greater evidence than the words of the prophets, who prophesied the word of the Lord. And for verses that need explanation, I have written explanations based on those of the greatest, most famous commentators, who informed us and taught us the true [meaning] of the words of truth, and they set us on the proper paths. My intention is not to write all the arguments that the Christians present to our nations; this book would not be able to contain them. If I would do so, it would be greatly tiresome, for little value. Rather, my intention is to write the arguments that the Christians think are are strong, artful, and reliable in knocking down any weak arguments at any time. Now, when something is true, it can be explained in two ways: one, by bringing arguments for its truth, and two, by fulling knocking down arguments against it. Therefore, after I have demonstrated each matter with clear evidence from our Torah, I have then brought clear proofs knocking down the opposing argument, which is the books of the Gospels, which are like a worm eating a plant, each one of them, in order, from foolish men, each of whom perverted his way; they are written in the Gospels, along with the book of the act of the apostles, called in their language *Acta Apostolorum*, along with the writings that they wrote to other foolish people [i.e., the epistles]. For all of these, I showed the weakness of their words, [with my arguments] based on the words of the prophets and on logical thinking and on [the Christians’] own books – since their words contract each other in many places, disagreeing with each other, like the words of people walking on unpaved roads. And most of their words oppose logical thinking, and they overturn the words of the prophets of truth, who prophesied God’s words. Therefore, they are undoubtedly complete falsehood, as I have demonstrated, with the help of God, who gives understanding to people. Therefore, this book will be divided into two parts, with the help of God, who gave commandments and upright laws to his people. The first part consists of the Christians’ arguments, which they state to us, and the evidence that they cite to support their faith, and responses to them, including mention of a few of the arguments that I argued against their faith based on their words. The second part points out contradictions in the words of the Gospels. The first part will be divided into chapters, in acordance with the various different topics discussed in it; but the chapters of the second part will follow those of the Gospels, and not need any other chapter division.

And may God – the God of all spirits, who placed wisdom inside people, to whom all thoughts are revealed, and to whom all eyes are raised up – strengthen the hands of ideas, and fortify the knees of thoughts, which are faltering and failing. May he make straight paths for his servant to publish what I intend, and may he pardon all my errors, and turn the path that I walk to the direction of fearing him, and may he show me the way to serve him, and enlighten my eyes with the light of his Torah, until he brings me to the place of rest and inheritance, which is ultimate success, Amen, forever, Selah.

Here I will begin to write a table of contents of this book, explaining the content of each chapter.

The first part consists of the Christians’ arguments, which they state to us, and the evidence that they cite to support their faith, and responses to them, including mention of a few of the arguments that I argued against their faith based on their words. This first part contains one hypothesis and fifty chapters.

The second part points out contradictions in the words of the Gospels. The first part will be divided into chapters, in acordance with the various different topics discussed in it; but the chapters of the second part will follow those of the Gospels, and they number one hundred, and one hypothesis.

The hypothesis is to give the reason why the Christian sages, despite all through great wisdom in the various human sciences, agree on matters of faith that are so foreign to all human reason, without any proof from the words of the prophets.