

Charity - Appeals

A Member of Abraham Maimonides' Mystical Circle,

Appeal for a Silk Weaver,

T.-S. 12.289

(The writer of this letter was certainly the ^{head of the Jewish community} Dayyan, or judge, of al-Mahalla in the Nile delta, to which town our scholar had come from Old Cairo. Despite the many polite phrases, it is evident that the recipient was not of a much higher social standing than the Dayyan, who most probably was a prosperous business man.)

Your grateful servant
Judah

I shall clothe her priests with salvation, etc.^a)

This letter has been preceded by others addressed to the Presence of my lord, the most illustrious elder, the ^{our} Havār, the ^{ed} h(onor), g(reat-ness and) h(oliness of our) ⁴ Ma(ster) a(nd) T(eacher) Abraham, the respected elder, the honored notable, the wise and the prudent, "The Pride of the Kōhanīm" - may God establish his prosperity, in which I expressed my longing for him and my regret of not sharing the privilege of his presence, as well as my prayers for him and his. The Creator - may (He be exalted) - knows that it is my wish that your position should be even more exalted, your influence enhanced, and your name become famous.

You know that the bearer of this letter, the illustrious master, the religious and devout M. and T. Ṭhūr, the scholar, who is Godfearing from his youth^b, is one of the disciples of our lord, the Nagid^c - may

his glory be exalted and his honor be enhanced. My tongue fails to tell the praise of a person like him, who has pushed out the world of existence from his heart and is seeking only the Creator. He intends now to marry a girl, who has been orphaned by the death of her mother, solely for the sake of God, for no other reason, and since she does not even possess a robe, he took off one of his own robes and clothed her with it. A long time ago, he had taken an oath to marry only in al-Mahalla; therefore, he had to leave for al-Mahalla with the girl, her father, and the latter's wife.

When I examined his situation, I found that he was in arrears with the poll-tax, and had left (Old Cairo), while in dire circumstances, having little for his maintenance, except a few dirhams given to him by our lord, the Rayyis,^{d)} to enable him to make this journey. I collected for him secretly one hundred and twenty dirhams, most of which has been already spent, with only a little remaining.

I am applying now to you to kindly help in this work of charity, which is very worthy, for "a document becomes valid only by its signatures."^{e)} There is no greater charity in the world than marrying an orphan to an orphan and to pay the poll-tax for him, as this is like the ransoming of a captive.^{f)} By this, you will secure respect, honor, and gratefulness from men, in addition to the intrinsic merit

of the deed. And please, it should be done in a dignified way.

He also mentioned to me that he had some experience in the art of silk weaving, but did not have the equipment nor the means to acquire it, in addition to being sought for (by the police) in connection with the poll-tax. There is really no need to say more. Every dirham given to him is (like) a whole burnt sacrifice on the altar.^{g)} For first of all, he is of a good family. Secondly, he occupies himself with study and exertion for what pleases the Creator,^{h)} in addition to his utmost religiosity. Had I not known that you have the highest aspirations, I would not have troubled you with this. May the H(ely one) - b(e He) b(lessed) - let you always be one to whom all needy apply, may He further you in your undertakings, may He let no one rejoice at any calamity of yours, and may He preserve you your dear son.

In conclusion, I kiss again the hands of your high Presence and send you my best wishes on the occasion of these high holidays. May the H(ely one) inscribe you in the book of life and in the book of forgiveness, pardon, and atonement. I ask you kindly to greet all our friends and to give them my best wishes for this happy and blessed feast.

Kindly try to provide this contribution quickly, for it is possible that he will pass the Fast in Minyat Ghazⁱ⁾ and come to see you during

the Holidays. I want to spare you inconvenience. There is really
no need to say more. Your welfare may increase permanently. To
the illustrious lord, Ḥayr Ismā'īl, k) respectful greetings.

Notes

- a) Psalm 132:16 - a reference to the recipient's lineage from the priestly tribe of Kshatriya, a fact, about which he was obviously very proud, as his honorific title "The Pride of the K." - for which he had certainly paid much - indicates.
- b) Cf. I Kings 18:12.
- c) The reference is to Abraham Maimonides, head of the Jews in the Fatimid empire 1205-1237, styled Nagid in Hebrew and Rayyis in Arabic. He was the initiator of a pietist religious reform movement (see p.).
- d) See Note c).
- e) The addressee had obviously contributed previously for the man concerned. The pun on the legal phrase means to say that just as a document becomes valid only through its signatures, thus the addressee should crown his benefactions by a special effort.
- f) For if the man is unable to pay the poll-tax, he will be thrown into prison (see p.).
- g) I.e., is given wholly to God. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:10.
- h) I.e., meticulous observation of the injunctions of religion.
- i) Minyat Ghawr is a town on the right arm of the Nile, on the way between al-Mahalla and Cairo. The man planned to spend the Fast, i.e., the Day of Atonement, in that town and to come for the Feast of

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Tabernaules, which is five days later, to Cairo. Most probably, a copy of the letter was sent well in advance by messenger, while the devout silk weaver carried with him a second copy in the way of introduction.

- k) Most probably, the recipient's son, an actual or honorary graduate of an academy like his father.