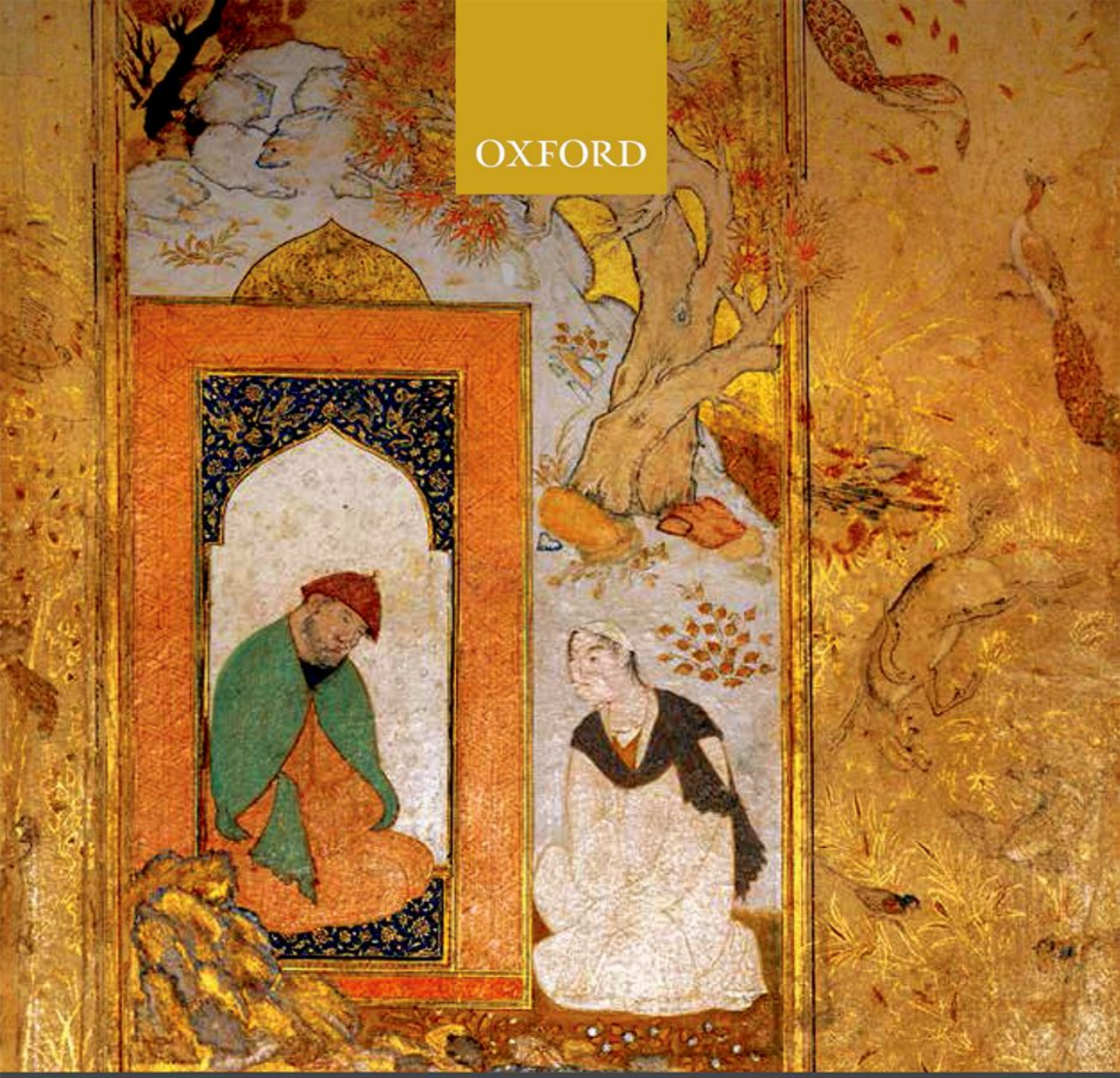

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JUDAISM, SUFISM, AND THE PIETISTS OF MEDIEVAL EGYPT

A Study of Abraham Maimonides and His Times

Elisha Russ-Fishbane

OXFORD STUDIES IN THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

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For Tzippy

שלי ושלכם שלה הוא

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West Hartford, Connecticut
Thanksgiving, 2014

Contents

Abbreviations

General

AM	Anno Mundi
BCE	Before the Christian era
BT	Babylonian Talmud
ED	Era of Documents
H	Hijrī (Islamic calendar)
M	Mishnah
MT	Mishneh Torah
PT	Palestinian Talmud
T	Tosefta

Books

HW	S. Rosenblatt, ed., *The High Ways to Perfection of Abraham Maimonides*
Med. Soc.	S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*
MH	R. Margaliot, ed., *Rabbenu Avraham ben ha-Rambam: Milḥamot Hashem*
Perush	E. Wiesenberg, ed., *Perush Rabbenu Avraham ben ha-Rambam z"l ʻal Bereshit u-Shemot*
SM	N. Dana, ed., *Rabbi Avraham ben ha-Rambam: Sefer ha-Maspik le-ʻOvdey Hashem, Kitab Kifayat al-ʻābidīn (Part Two, Volume Two)*
Teshuvot	A. H. Freimann and S. D. Goitein, ed., *Teshuvot Rabbenu Avraham ben ha-Rambam*

Periodicals

AAJR	*American Academy for Jewish Research*. New York, 1930–2001.
AESC	*Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. Paris, 1946–93 (since 1994: *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales*).
BHM	*Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. Baltimore, 1939–.
BIJS	*Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies*. London, 1973–5.
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. London, 1940–.
CHM	*Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*. Paris, 1953–72.
DI	*Diné Israel*. Tel-Aviv, 1969–.
GQ	*Ginze Qedem*. Jerusalem, 2005–.
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*. Columbus, 1977–.

HMEIR	*Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*. Cambridge, M.A., 1994–2006.
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual.* Cincinnati, 1924–.
IC	*Islamic Culture*. Hyderabad Deccan, 1907–2004.
ILS	*Islamic Law and Society*. Leiden, 1994–.
IOS	*Israel Oriental Studies*. Tel Aviv, 1971–2002.
IS	*Islamic Studies.* Islamabad, 1962–.
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*. New Haven, 1843/49–.
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*. Leiden, 1957–.
JH	*Jewish History.* Haifa, 1986–.
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies. Cambridge*, Eng., 1948–.
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies.* Chicago, 1942–.
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review.* Old Series (o.s.): London, 1889–1908. New Series: Philadelphia, 1910–.
JRE	*The Journal of Religious Ethics.* Atlanta, 1973–.
JS	*Jewish Studies (Mada'e ha-Yahadut).* Jerusalem, 1990–.
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam.* Jerusalem, 1979–.
JSQ	*Jewish Studies Quarterly*. Tübingen, 1993–.
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*. Manchester, 1956–.
JWH	*Journal of World History. Paris*, 1953–72.
JZWL	*Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben*. Breslau, 1862–75.
KS	*Kirjath Sepher.* Jerusalem, 1924–2003.
KVDEAWJ	*Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins zur Gründung und Erhaltung einer Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Frankfurt am Mein, 1920–30.
MGWJ	*Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*. Dresden, 1851–1939.
ME	*Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue*. Leiden, 1995–.
MS	*Maimonidean Studies*. New York, 1990–.
PAAJR	*Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*. New York, 1930–2001.
PIJS	*Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies*. Jerusalem, 1964.
REJ	*Revue des études jueves*. Paris, 1880–1915, 1918–.
RSR	*Religious Studies Review*. Hanover, 1975–.
SI	*Studia Islamica*. Paris, 1953–.
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*. Leipzig, 1846–2004.
ZHB	*Zeitschrift für hebräische Bibliographie*. Berlin, 1896–8; Frankfurt am Main, 1900–10, 1912–21.

Introduction

In his polemical epistle of 1235 directed at the Jews of Provence—a number of whom had condemned his father's philosophical writings and were rumored to have consigned them to the flames—Abraham, head of Egyptian Jewry and only heir of Moses Maimonides, chastised his European coreligionists for their own heretical beliefs in repudiating the monotheism of their ancestors. The alleged cooperation of the Provençal Jews with local Church officials in their anti-Maimonidean campaign came as no surprise, Abraham chided, "for the faith of these is not very different from the faith of those."[1] As for the Jews living in Islamic lands, he observed with more than a little irony, they express not the slightest doubt in the strict monotheism advocated by Maimonidean rationalism. "There is no doubt as to all of this among any of the Jews living in the lands of Ishmael, from the farthest east to the foremost west."[2] As if this pointed suggestion were not absolutely clear, Abraham then directed his readers to consider the religion of Islam on its own terms, so as to emphasize its strict adherence to pure and unadulterated monotheism.

> The children of Ishmael have, for their part, adopted this [monotheistic] faith from the children of Israel and have built the foundation of their religion upon it. They have rejected the error and folly of their ancestors, who used to worship idols and did not affirm the unity and exaltedness of [God's] name, as it is written, "Nations shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, 'Our ancestors have inherited lies, [vanity] that is of no avail" (Jer. 16:19).[3] This was also expressed by one of the prophets, "From the rising of the sun to its setting, My name is great among the nations" (Mal. 1:11). Because their worship is characterized by pure monotheism, scripture likened it to the sacrificial rite [in the Temple] offered for His name, as it is written, "And in every place incense and a pure offering are brought for My name" (ibid.). Whoever differs and asserts that the Creator, may He be magnified and exalted, has a likeness or image, a body or a circumscribed space, does not

[1] See *MH*, 55. [2] See *MH*, 51.

[3] The word "emptiness" (*hevel*), as cited from the verse, is missing from the manuscript, as indicated by Margaliot ad loc.

> believe in the truth of his Creator by making [such] a comparison to [God]. He is, for this reason, a heretic and has no place in the world to come.[4]

Abraham Maimonides' remarks in his epistle to the Provençal Jews, full of disdain for his wayward coreligionists and respect for the core faith of the Islamic religion, call to mind many of the surprising turns of his remarkable career, and, what is more, encapsulate many of the themes at the heart of this book. The career of Abraham Maimonides (or, as he is frequently called in the medieval sources and throughout this book, the Nagid)[5] came to dominate and define his generation, the twilight of the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt and, in a larger sense, the final chapter of what S. D. Goitein has dubbed both the classical Genizah period and the zenith of "the physical and educational symbiosis between Muslims and Jews" in the High Middle Ages.[6] As we shall have cause to revisit on a number of occasions in this book, the Nagid was far from complacent with the religious and spiritual condition of his people, whether in Provence or (more frequently) in Egypt, and the urgency of his critique is on full display in this epistle. He was, if nothing else, an adamant reformer of the religious life of Egyptian Jewry in all its aspects. While his own community did not suffer from the alleged heresy of the Provençals, his rebuke bears all the characteristics of discontent with the faithful of his own religion in the light of the dominant faith of Islam, a major leitmotif of his controversial career.

The irony of Abraham's polemic in the epistle could not have been lost on his contemporaries. His comparison of the faith of his coreligionists in Christian Europe with that of the communities of the Islamic world, "from the farthest east to the foremost west," carried a double valence. Beyond the simple contrast of proper and misguided doctrine, Abraham's remarks bespeak the more basic contrast between the religion of Christianity and that of Islam in the eyes of Abraham and many of his Jewish contemporaries in the Near East. While Christianity was perceived, without exception, as idolatrous and polytheistic in essence, Islam was generally viewed as completely and uncompromisingly monotheistic, a view for which Maimonides, Abraham's father, was predominantly, though not exclusively, responsible.[7] With this in

[4] *MH*, 51–2.

[5] For background to this term, the Hebrew equivalent of the Arabic *ra'īs al-yahūd* ("head of the Jews"), see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, II:23–40. On the origins of this office in Egypt, see the now classic study by Mark Cohen, *Jewish Self-Government in Medieval Egypt: The Origins of the Office of Head of the Jews, ca. 1065–1126* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3–49, and *passim*. On the use of the term Nagid in this book, see the discussion below pp. 16–17.

[6] For Goitein's expression, "classical Geniza period," see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, I:18–19 and 29. For his description of this period as one of "physical and educational symbiosis," see *Med. Soc.*, V:9, and see the discussion on symbiosis at the end of this introduction, pp. 30–9.

[7] See the sources cited in my "Respectful Rival: Abraham Maimonides on Islam," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, ed. A. Meddeb and B. Stora (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), n. 4. For a comparative view of Maimonides'

mind, the full irony of Abraham's critique of the Jews of Christendom and praise of the Jews of Islam comes to the fore. In their current downtrodden state, as a result of generations of decline and degradation in exile, the Jews of his day were depicted as highly swayed and influenced by the dominant faith in their respective environments.[8] If for the Jews of Christian Europe, he suggested, the influence had largely been a pernicious one, for the Jews of Islam it had had a remarkably salutary impact on the purity of their faith. "The misguided faith concerning these principles [of monotheism]," Abraham continued, "in the land of Shin'ar [Iraq] and the east, Syria and the Beautiful Land [Palestine], Egypt and the land of the west [Maghrab], is negligible for its scarcity. As soon as anyone [with this faith] would utter it in public, even in the company of the ignorant, such a one would be reduced to mockery, derision, and scorn."[9] The implication is clear. In contrast with some of the greatest sages dwelling in the realm of Christendom, even the greatest ignoramuses among the Jews of Islam are unwavering and unsullied in their commitment to monotheism. While the anti-rationalist scholars of Provence, as the Nagid acerbically hinted at the end of the passage in the epistle cited above, have been reduced to the status of heresy, the simplest Jew in the realm of Islam, thanks in large part to the salutary influence of their immediate environment, remain impeccable believers.

Here we are confronted with yet another leitmotif of Abraham Maimonides' legacy—intimately connected with the first—the role played by Islam in his effort to reform Jewish practice. Despite appearances to the contrary in the epistle, the Nagid found much to critique in his own community's practical observance and the general state of religious life in Egypt. As we shall soon see, not long after his rise to communal leadership, Abraham became embroiled in a number of communal controversies of various kinds and with varying degrees of tenacity and success. As the foremost authority over all administrative and religious matters affecting Egyptian Jewry, many of the Nagid's initiatives were laden from the beginning with controversy and polemic over the current state of affairs in his community. A number of these controversies involved internal disputes of Jewish practice and scholarship with no bearing on Islam, as was the case with his liturgical reforms. Others, such as his efforts to reintroduce long-defunct postures and rites into synagogue practice, bespeak the more delicate question of the appropriation of religious norms from the Islamic environment. This was all the more evident in the case of his

perception of Islam versus Christianity in light of previous attitudes, see D. Lasker, "Tradition and Innovation in Maimonides' Attitude toward Other Religions," in *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, ed. J. Harris (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 167–82.

[8] On the theme of spiritual and religious decline in exile in the thought of the Nagid and his colleagues, see the discussion on pp. 64, n. 85, 161, n. 13, 175, n. 67.

[9] See *MH*, 54.

pietist revival, which engaged openly and intensively with the Sufi matrix of his day.

A consistent yet complex theme of his polemical writing, as we have already witnessed in the epistle, is the unique role—sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit—played by the image of Islam as the foil to the current spiritual malaise in the Jewish community. The epistle cited above makes a deliberate point of praising the unadulterated faith of Islam, with the not-so-subtle implication (articulated before and after this passage) that not all Jews, in particular those residing in Christian Europe, deserve such praise. For the discerning reader, however, the epistle includes an additional, more subversive, theme at play in the relationship between Judaism and Islam. The passage begins with the calculated observation that the monotheism of "the children of Ishmael" may be traced historically to the original influence of "the children of Israel," thereby casting the dominant Islamic faith in a derivative position vis-à-vis its Jewish subjects. The purification of Jewish monotheism after the model of Islam is thus depicted as a return to its origins, ironically mediated by the faith of another.

It is here that the deeper implications of Abraham Maimonides' campaign to reform Jewish faith and practice in his day emerges with greater clarity, albeit with a surprising twist. The undercurrent of reform can only be understood in light of the paradoxical interplay of Judaism and its host religion. The path to Jewish renewal for Abraham Maimonides and his circle, expressed as a conservative and straightforward appeal to tradition, was a circuitous one, with frequent stops through the spiritual byways of its most intimate rival. More so than at any other point in medieval Jewish history, under crescent or cross, Jewish tradition was explicitly and rather boldly recast through the looking glass of the majority religion. In its fervent call to revive the inner core and ancient traditions of Judaism, the call to religious renewal by Abraham Maimonides and his pietist circle found itself encompassed and thoroughly entangled in the embrace of Islam.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The first half of the thirteenth century was one of the most tumultuous and colorful chapters in the history of Egyptian Jewry in premodern times. It is also one of the best represented by the papers of the Cairo Genizah prior to the decline in Genizah documentation that began in the second half of that century. For all of this *embarras de richesses*, it remains at present among the most neglected periods of historical research.[10] The Ayyubid period of

[10] For the periods of greater or lesser Genizah documentation, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, I:16–23. For the rich documentation of the first half of the thirteenth century, see *Med. Soc.*, 18–19; II:142; IV:12.

Jewish history still awaits a comprehensive study, although the first decades of Ayyubid rule have received moderate attention owing in no small measure to scholarly interest in Moses Maimonides.[11] By contrast, Jewish history in the Fatimid and Mamluk periods benefitted early on from two monumental studies which, though increasingly out of date, remain classics in the field.[12] By far the most seminal contribution to the study of Jewish society in medieval Egypt, S. D. Goitein's magisterial *A Mediterranean Society*, provides a wealth of information on daily life from nearly every facet of Jewish society, yet by virtue of its sheer breadth moves back and forth through the classical Genizah period, from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries, without covering any single period in greater detail than any other. The present work does not attempt to address the larger desideratum of a comprehensive history of Jewish life in the Ayyubid period, focusing instead on the foremost socio-religious movement within the Egyptian Jewish community during those years. In an earlier iteration of this work, I called attention to the tumultuous events of the early thirteenth century, the combined result of natural catastrophes in Egypt and the Levant and socio-economic strain within the Egyptian Jewish community proper.[13]

This book provides a detailed portrait of the foremost spiritual movement of medieval Egyptian Jewry, known to its adherents as pietism (*ḥasidut*), the only religious and intellectual movement among the Jews to take root and flourish in Egyptian soil. The rise of Egyptian Jewish pietism is unique in the history of Jewish spirituality, both for its broad (and almost immediate) appeal across the social spectrum—among scholars and non-scholars, rich and poor, men and women—and for its bold appeal to an external tradition as a legitimate model and source of inspiration. From its inception in the second half of the twelfth century to its height in the first half of the thirteenth, the

[11] See, for example, M. Cohen, "Maimonides' Egypt," in Eric Ormsby, ed., *Moses Maimonides and his Times* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 21–34, and Andrew Ehrenkreutz, "Saladin's Egypt and Maimonides," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. J. Kraemer (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1991), 303–7.

[12] The landmark study by Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fātimid Caliphs*, reissued with a new preface and reader's guide by S. D. Goitein (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970), has largely been surpassed by the important contribution by Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), although the two works do not cover identical terrain and Mann's work remains a classic reference for the Fatimid period. Eliyahu Ashtor's fundamental study of the Jews of the Mamluk period, *History of the Jews of Egypt and Syria under the Rule of the Mamluks* (Hebrew), 3 vol. (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1944–70), has thus far not been matched by any subsequent work.

[13] The coincidence of war, famine, and natural disasters, coupled with the influx of waves of Byzantine and French Jews onto Egypt's shores, and the financial strain it imposed on an already beleaguered population, was discussed in my "Between Politics and Piety: Abraham Maimonides and his Times," Dissertation, Harvard University, 2009, 34–97.

movement was perceived by opponents and adherents alike as indebted to the spiritual matrix of Islamic mysticism, leading some modern scholars to describe Egyptian Jewish pietism as "Jewish-Sufism," whether on account of its resemblance to Sufism or its implicit competition with it.[14]

The book is subdivided into three parts, each exploring a different facet of the ramified movement at its height in the first half of the thirteenth century. The first part addresses fundamental questions of origins, scope, and impact, arguing for a gradual shift in both the character and content of the movement from the late twelfth to the early thirteenth century. Chapter one explores the historical background and social foundations of the pietist movement, its impact on communal and family life, and the internal Jewish controversies it provoked. Critics of the pietists and their innovations to Jewish devotional life were quick to respond, notwithstanding the prominence of the movement's chief proponent, Abraham Maimonides, in his capacity as head of Egyptian Jewry. Chapter two, in turn, delves into the details of pietist practice, both as private devotion and collective praxis, concentrated within circles of discipleship and formal conventicles under the guidance of spiritual masters.

If Sufism served as a spiritual template for the nascent pietist movement, other aspects of Islamic religious life were key to the broader reform of Jewish devotional practice—the subject of Part three of this work. In addition to the controversial liturgical reforms instituted by Abraham Maimonides in synagogues throughout Egypt, the Nagid was the most outspoken proponent of the revitalization of Jewish worship, including a considerable overhaul of prevailing practice.[15] Chapter three takes up the theme of prayer and the

[14] On the language of "Jewish-Sufism," see Chapter one, p. 46, n. 13. G. Cohen, in his "The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni," *PAAJR* 35 (1967–8): 75–98 and 36: 33–56, was the sole exception to the scholarly consensus that Sufism was the predominant influence on Abraham Maimonides' spiritual worldview as the foremost representative of the Egyptian pietist movement. I shall return to a number of Cohen's interpretations, including his denial of Sufi influence, on several occasions throughout this book.

[15] Abraham Maimonides' liturgical reforms (including the removal of the synagogue recitation of the morning blessings, the cessation of poetic changes to established prayers, and his effective crippling of the Palestinian liturgical rite), like his devotional reforms, were concentrated on synagogue life, yet the two should not be confused as identical, or even similar. The liturgical reforms were imposed by Abraham in his capacity as head of the Jews, whereas the devotional reforms were recommended to the broader community but were only practiced in his own pietist circle. On these reforms, see the articles by M. A. Friedman, "Opposition to Palestinian Prayer and Prayer Rites in Responsa from the Genizah (from the Responsa of R. Joseph Rosh ha-Seder)" (Hebrew), in *Keneset Ezra: Sifrut ve-Ḥayyim be-Vet ha-Keneset, Asufat Ma'amarim Mugeshet le-Ezra Fleischer*, ed. S. Elizur et al. (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1995), 96–201, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven: Studies on the Liturgical Debate of Abraham Maimonides and his Generation" (Hebrew), *Teʿudah* 10 (1996): 245–98, "A Cry of Distress over the Elimination of the Recitation of Piyyutim—An Appeal to the Sultan" (Hebrew), *Peʿamim* 78 (1999): 128–47, and, most recently, "Abraham Maimonides on his Leadership, Reforms, and Spiritual Imperfection," *JQR* 104 (2014): 495–512. See also my "The Maimonidean Legacy in the East: A Study of Father and Son," *JQR* 102 (2012): 190–223, and "Between Politics and Piety," 203–59.

significance of the devotional reform in Egyptian pietism, including the scope of the reforms and their adherence to Islamic norms. The proposed changes—including prostration and kneeling, as well as other rituals considered authentic and beneficial, such as the ritual washing of the feet before worship and the arrangement of worshipers in orderly rows—are the subject of Chapter four. Each of the devotional forms advocated by Abraham and his associates, while found in one form or another in the classical Jewish sources, was strongly influenced not by Sufism in particular but by more general Islamic practice. The promotion of reform required an extensive reinterpretation of Jewish tradition in support of the proposed rites and a simultaneous argument for the selective appropriation of Islamic praxis, while raising a defense against those who did not hesitate to charge the pietists with outright imitation of gentile practice.

At the heart of the effort to revitalize Jewish worship was the belief that the spiritual awakening initiated by these reforms constituted a vital step toward the rehabilitation of Israel in exile and the arrival of the messianic era. According to Abraham's overall vision, the Jewish pietists were expected to serve as the spiritual vanguard of this transformation and as models of religious devotion for the people as a whole. Even more significant was the contention expressed by a number of prominent leaders that the pietist path aimed at nothing less than the revival of prophecy among the people in anticipation of the advent of the messianic redemption. Chapter five addresses the question and significance of prophetic attainment among the pietists, with its synthesis of philosophical and mystical traditions in search of a language of ultimate human attainment. Chapter six turns to the pietist conception of prophetic attainment within the framework of sacred history. Biblical prophecy was idealized not as a relic of the past, but as a tradition of prophetic discipleship, severed over the course of the exile and in vital need of restoration. In this conception, the revival of the prophetic path in the community of Israel serves as the harbinger of the long-awaited redemption of Israel, and, with it, the onset of the messianic era.

Viewed in the context of the tumultuous events of the early thirteenth century, it is tempting to interpret the turn to mystical piety and messianic expectation among segments of Egyptian Jewry as the result of the economic distress and social volatility of the period. Yet to do so would be to reduce a movement of intellectual and spiritual depth (and the polemical activity it spawned) to flights of mystical rapture as a means to escape the upheavals of the day. I would suggest that the socio-economic interpretation is problematic for at least two reasons. First and foremost, the bold effort to integrate key elements of Islamic practice into the substructure of Jewish piety involved anything but a passive retreat from social engagement. Pietist leaders did not eschew the fierce reaction of the community, but took a polemical approach and aggressively appealed to their coreligionists to embrace the new reforms.

Equally significant is the fact that the most outspoken proponent and public face of Egyptian pietism, Abraham b. Moses Maimonides (1186–1237),[16] served as official head and chief religious authority of Egyptian Jewry, responsible for overseeing and directing the life of the community in its myriad details. The life and career of the head of the Jews—known to the Muslim authorities as *ra'īs al-yahūd* and to his constituents simply as *al-ra'īs* or *al-rayyis*—was anything but a retreat from communal engagement.[17] As just noted, Abraham's protean activity for religious reform was designed to spiritually rehabilitate the Jewish people from its state of cultural decline in exile. The turn inward was at the same time a turn outward, in which mysticism and messianism constituted not an escape from society but a total regeneration of communal life.

During the first three decades of the thirteenth century, spanning nearly his entire adult life, Abraham served as the administrative and religious figurehead of Egyptian Jewry, a position he filled not long after the death of his father in 1204. Both in his direction of the religious life of his flock and in his oversight of communal affairs and management of the crises confronting his generation, Abraham was directly engaged in virtually every level of daily administration. As such, while this book is not a biography of the Nagid, Abraham's singular role in every aspect of communal life for three decades, including the social and religious transformations that would come to define the period, make his story (and his writings) an integral part of the history of his generation. It is to the story of this critical and somewhat enigmatic figure, and his reception or reinvention in modern scholarship, that we now turn.

[16] Abraham is often referred to by scholars as Abraham Maimonides or Abraham Maimuni, suggesting that these were not patronymics but family names. Although this is clearly erroneous, it has become quite standard to refer to Abraham with the patronymic of his father and I do not depart from this practice in this book. In addition, I refer to the Nagid's elder pietist colleague, Abraham "the Pious" (*he-ḥasid*) ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ (d. *c.*1221), not as Abraham or Abraham the Pious alone but either by his full name or simply as ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ, in order to avoid confusion with the Nagid, who was also occasionally known as Abraham "the pious." See ENA 2379.1v, ll. 9–10, published by A. S. Halkin, "A Defense of the 'Mishneh Torah'" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 25 (1956), 424, and see M. A. Friedman, "Lists of a Disciple in Maimonides' Academy concerning Doctrine and Law" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 62 (1993), 527. Note that Halkin published this as folio 3b, according to the internal order of the document, rather than according to its shelf-mark of 1b. See also the end of Abraham's son, Obadiah's, treatise, Bodl. Or. 661, 27, *verso*, published by Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, n.p., and his translation, *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqala al-Hawdiyya* (London: The Octagon Press, 1981), 116.

[17] The Judaeo-Arabic honorific, *al-ra'īs* ("head") and *al-rayyis* ("chief" or "captain") appear identical in Judaeo-Arabic (אלריים), due to the lack of a *hamzah* (the Arabic character designating the glottal stop) when written in Hebrew characters. See, however, Goitein's remark in *Med. Soc.*, II:27, which does not explain the differentiation between the two in Judaeo-Arabic sources. For the title "Nagid," the term used most often by scholars as the title *par excellence* for the head of Egyptian Jewry, see the discussion on pp. 16–17.

ABRAHAM B. MOSES MAIMONIDES (1186–1237): A HISTORICAL ENIGMA

I. Portrait of a Communal Leader

From Scion to Successor

According to family tradition, Abraham was born in Fustat on the eve of the Sabbath, the twenty-eighth of Sivan, 4946 (June 13, 1186), when Maimonides was 48.[18] In a poem composed on the occasion of Abraham's wedding, we learn that his father had all but given up hope of fathering a child by the time his son was born.[19] There is no firm evidence that Maimonides had any other children, although there is a distinct possibility that he had a daughter who died at a young age, and a spurious suggestion that he had another son born in his later years.[20] Even if Abraham had no siblings, he appears to have been

[18] For a citation and discussion of the sources of this date, see A. H. Freimann, "The Genealogy of the Maimonidean Family" (Hebrew), *Alumah* 1 (1936), 16–22. On Sambari's late chronology, see M. Brann, "Joseph Sambari's Nachrichten über das Geschlecht der Maimoniden," *MGWJ* 44 (1900), 14–24. See also the remarks by Friedman, "Lists of a Disciple," 540, n. 84.

[19] See TS NS Box 309.5, *recto*, ll. 1–2, published by N. Allony, "On Sephardic Poetry and its Language" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 55 (1964), 249. The lines read: "God graced his father with a son after he had given up all hope (*aḥare ye'ush*). For his sake people prayed and fasted. / They merited to see his birth . . . and to witness his [attainment of] wisdom and his wedding day. In him they have found contentment." Based on this poem, Fenton suggested that "Maimonides . . . had fasted and prayed" to sire a child. According to the alternative reading of the poem offered here, the verses attest that Maimonides' family or others in the community prayed and fasted "for his sake" (*le-ragelo [pilel]u ve-ṣamu*), according to Allony's reading. This use of *le-regel* may be based on Gen. 30:30. For Fenton's reading, see his "Maimonides—Father and Son: Continuity and Change," in *Traditions of Maimonideanism*, ed. C. Fraenkel. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 104, n. 1. Goitein suggested that Abraham's surname, Abū'l-Munā', meaning roughly "object of my desire," was given him by his father as an expression of gratitude after fathering a child (or son) after many years of waiting. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:640, n. 284.

[20] There has been considerable speculation as to the existence of a possible daughter of Maimonides who died young. In a letter to his disciple, Joseph b. Judah, Maimonides wrote, "I have already informed you of the passing of the little daughter. May God, may He be exalted, make her death an atonement!" See *Iggerot ha-Rambam: Ḥalifat ha-Mikhtavim 'im R. Yosef b. Yehudah*, ed. D. H. Baneth (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985), 93–4. Following Geiger and Steinschneider, Baneth was of the opinion that the "little daughter" in question was not Maimonides' own but that of his brother, an interpretation shared by Mordechai Friedman. See *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Baneth, 91, and S. Goitein, "R. Ḥananel the Chief Judge, Son of Samuel ha-Nadiv, Brother-in-Law of Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 50 (1981), 376 and 394. This suggestion is supported by the fact that Maimonides took responsibility for his brother's young daughter after the former's death at sea. See *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Y. Shailat (Jerusalem: Shailat Publishing, 1995), I:229. The position that the daughter was in fact Maimonides' own was taken by Freimann, "Genealogy," 22, and again by Shailat in his *Iggerot*, I:260–1; and see n. 2. As for the possibility of another, younger, son of Maimonides, there is a legendary report of a son, David, born to Maimonides in his later years and named after his late brother. According to this singular account, the sage was preferential to David, while his wife favored Abraham. See A. Neubauer, "Documents inédits," *REJ* 4 (1882), 179. Although the document is suspect on many counts, and should not be regarded as genuine, it is curious to find the following blessing

raised by his father together with his first cousins, including the orphaned daughter of Maimonides' late brother, and the son of Maimonides' sister, Joseph Abū'l-Riḍā', who trained as a physician under the master.[21] In a query addressed to Maimonides by one of his disciples in 1201, when Abraham was fifteen years old, he was given the blessing that "his darling, precious, only child (*ḥamudo yeḥido*)[22] may live and be worthy [to receive] his Torah, wisdom, stature, and greatness . . ."[23] In a letter to another disciple, Maimonides described his only son as possessed of intellectual capacity and a moral disposition worthy of his great namesake.

bestowed on Maimonides in another letter: "May your sons (*ḥamudekha*) be forever blessed and may they sit upon the seat of their father in your lifetime . . ." See TS Misc. Box 28.140, *recto*, ll. 12–14, published by A. Scheiber, "Bibliographisches aus der Genisa," in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography: History and Literature in Honor of I. Edward Kiev*, ed. C Berlin (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 416. Though one cannot rule out the possibility that a second son was born to Maimonides late in life as the legendary report has it ("the son of his old age"), it is more likely that the letter writer in question either did not know the number of Maimonides' children or included one or more unknown daughters in the expression *ḥamudekha*, meaning, in that case, "your children." On the origin of this legend, see the different suggestions by Freimann, "The Genealogy of the Maimonidean Family," 24, and M. A. Friedman, "Two Maimonidean Documents: A Letter from Maimonides to the Sage, R. Samuel, and an Epistle of Congratulations to Maimonides on the Occasion of His Wedding" (Hebrew), in *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, E. Fleischer et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), 208, n. 80.

[21] Maimonides took in David's widow and small daughter after the latter's sudden demise. See *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Shailat, I:229. See also Friedman, "Two Maimonidean Documents," 202, n. 50. In a letter to his disciple, Joseph ibn 'Aqnīn, in 1191, Maimonides referred to his sister's husband, Abū'l-Ma'ālī 'Uzziel, and their son, Joseph Abū'l-Riḍā', as members of his household. See *Iggerot*, ed. Baneth, 70–1, published earlier by S. Munk, "Notice sur Joseph b. Jehouda," *Journal Asiatique* (third series) 14 (1842), 22–3, and translated by B. Goldberg, *Sefer Birkat Avraham*, ed. B. Goldberg (Lyck (Ełk): n.p., 1859), "Zikhronot," no. 2, and partly by Freimann, "Genealogy," 15. Goitein has argued that a Genizah letter alluding to Maimonides' brother's son (*walad akhī al-maulā'*) as his disciple in the art of medicine is a copyist's error for his sister's son (reading *walad ukht al-maulā'*). See TS 16.291, ll. 38–40, and Goitein's comments in his essay, "Maimonides' Biography according to Recent Discoveries from the Cairo Genizah" (Hebrew), *Peraqim* 4 (1966), 36–7. See also S. D. Goitein, "The Medical Profession in the Light of the Cairo Geniza Documents," *HUCA* 34 (1963), 185, reprinted in *Med. Soc.*, II:248. See also H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37–8, J. Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds* (New York: Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008), 232, and M. Halbertal: *Life and Thought*, tr. J. Linsider (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), *Maimonides*, 37–9.

[22] See also TS 16.291, l. 14 (*ve-yiḥye ḥamudo*). The term *ḥamud* in the Genizah and contemporary *responsa* literature signifies a son, often abbreviated to only the first letter of the word. But see n. 20, on the possibility that the plural (*ḥamudim*) may also mean "children" and not only "sons."

[23] *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1986), I:195, no. 112. This *responsum*, sent to Se'adiah b. Berakhot, was dated to "the year 4961 [AM = 1201 CE] since creation in Ṣo'an Miṣrayim. May the Merciful One bring benefit from the travails and suffering of this year." See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, I:204. The year was unparalleled in natural devastation and human suffering.

> When I consider the state of the world, only two things give me consolation: my [intellectual] inquiry and contemplation, and my son Abraham, whom God, may He be exalted, has granted grace and blessing from the blessing of his namesake. May He who believed in his name and his gift grant him length of days,[24] for he is the most humble and modest of men and possessed of noble attributes, with a subtle intellect and good nature. With God's help, he will no doubt attain renown among the great. I pray that God, may He be exalted, watch over him and bestow His goodness upon him.[25]

Very little is known of Abraham's early years in his father's home or of his rise to prominence in the Jewish community. There are suggestions that Maimonides may have groomed him from an early age in the running of communal affairs, although the evidence, in my view, suggests otherwise.[26] Even when communal honorifics are applied to Abraham as a young man, they must be taken as little more than epistolary etiquette.[27] Other details of Abraham's

[24] The medieval Hebrew translation of the original Judaeo-Arabic letter (not extant) is difficult to render and may have referred to the patriarch Abraham rather than God, although this does not resolve all of the difficulties.

[25] *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Baneth, 96. Both Baneth and Shailat speculated that the reference to the difficult "state of the world" may have been an allusion to the trials of the early years of the thirteenth century, around the same time as Se'adiah b. Berakhot's letter, cited on p. 10. See *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Baneth, 95, and *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Shailat, 423. I agree that the letter could not have belonged to that sent in 1191, with which it has been traditionally grouped, if only because that would have made Abraham no more than 6 years old when he so impressed his father. Both Fenton and Friedman are inclined to accept the traditional dating. See P. Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237): Founding a Mystical Dynasty," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, ed. M. Idel and M. Ostow (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 131, and Fenton, "Maimonides—Father and Son," 104; and see n. 3; and Friedman, "Two Maimonidean Documents," 209, n. 82.

[26] In an analysis of a Genizah letter describing an encounter with Maimonides and his son, tentatively dated to the late 1190s, Fenton suggested that Abraham's attendance at the meeting is an indication that he was being groomed to learn "the intricacies of communal affairs." See P. Fenton, "A Meeting with Maimonides," *BSOAS* 45 (1982), 2–4; cf. also P. Fenton, "Abraham ben Moses ben Maimon," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), I: 304–5, and "Maimonides—Father and Son," 104. As I understand the letter, TS 8 J 14.18, Abraham's presence need not be surprising, given that the meeting took place in his home. Abraham's role in the meeting was to entertain the messenger's young child, which he appears to have done to his father's great delight. See the above fragment, *verso*, ll. 6–17. In spite of the fact that the letter may have been delivered from a community leader (*nasi*) in Moṣul, as Fenton suggested ("A Meeting with Maimonides," 2), there is no indication that the meeting was a matter of communal business. It should also be recalled that Abraham was 10 years old at the time or possibly a bit older. See also Ben-Sasson's hesitations in his essay, "Maimonides in the House of Maimonides—Between Conservatism and Reform" (Hebrew), in *Ha-Rambam: Shamranūt, Meqoriyut, Mahapekhanut*, ed. A Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Institute, 2008), I: 50, n. 21. While there is reason to assume that Abraham later helped groom his own son, David, in the conduct of communal affairs when the latter was 16, it appears that Abraham was ill or on his deathbed at the time. See TS Box K 3.6.

[27] On the basis of the honorific, *ha-sar ha-adir ha-etan be-yisra'el*, applied to Abraham in a query to Maimonides, Eppenstein concluded that the young man was appointed to a high office during his father's lifetime, on the assumption that the title *sar* and its accompanying epithets

upbringing are more forthcoming. Maimonides took great care in his son's education, ensuring that he learn to write in the cursive script of his Andalusian homeland rather than in the square form common in Egypt, as is evident in all of Abraham's handwriting.[28] In addition to training him in rabbinic law and tradition,[29] and presumably also in medicine,[30] Maimonides did not omit to instruct his precocious son in philosophical matters through a close reading of parts of the *Guide*, on which Abraham later fielded questions,[31] and even set out to compose a treatise of his own on the subject after his father's death.[32]

conveyed communal status. See S. Eppenstein, *Abraham Maimuni, sein Leben und seine Schriften, nebst Proben aus seinem Pentateuchkommentar* (Berlin: Verlag von Louis Lamm, 1914), 2–3. Though there are Genizah sources to support this use of *sar*, such as those cited by Mann, *Jews in Egypt*, I: 260, it is worth recalling that similar titles were at times purely formulaic. Such was no doubt the case when applied to Abraham's own sons, David and Obadiah, who were adorned with the honorific *ha-sarim ha-adirim* in 1230, when they were no more than 8 and 2 years old respectively. See CUL Or. 1080 J 281, *recto*, l. 12, and *verso*, l. 9, published by M. A. Friedman, *Jewish Polygyny in the Middle Ages: New Sources from the Cairo Genizah* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1986), 327–8. Abraham, it may be recalled, was also called "rabbi" in the account of the meeting with Maimonides described above, when he was perhaps as young as 10. See TS 8 J 14.18, *recto*, l. 16, and *verso*, ll. 7, 14, published by Fenton, "A Meeting with Maimonides," 4. While not following Eppenstein's hypothesis, Friedman has more recently conjectured as to whether Abraham was first assigned the post of head of the Jews by the Muslim authorities, and only later accepted as Nagid by the community, which would explain the earlier titles of *sar* and the like before the title Nagid was applied to him. Friedman acknowledged that this would be counter to the usual sequence of appointment. See M. A. Friedman, "On the Responsa of Abraham Maimonides and his Generation from the Genizah" (Hebrew), *Bar-Ilan* 26–7 (1994)," 263, n. 20.

[28] See Goitein's remarks in "R. Ḥananel the Chief Judge," 388.

[29] There are numerous occasions in his writings in which Abraham quoted his father's religious teachings from memory, which are not otherwise found in any extant works. See *HW*, II: 70, ll. 5–10; 110, ll. 5–11; 216, ll. 13–15; 346, l. 16 to 348, l. 4; *Perush*, 247, 295, 303, 313, 315, 343, 463; *Teshuvot*, 59, no. 59; cf. also *SM*, 71.

[30] Although there is no direct evidence of this, the fact that Abraham was already an accomplished physician in the Sultan's court early in his career makes this supposition very likely. There is also a strong suggestion that Maimonides trained a nephew in medicine, on which see TS 16.291 and n. 21 above. That Maimonides trained Abraham in medicine has at times been taken for granted, although direct evidence is lacking. See *Sefer Birkat Avraham*, ed. Goldberg, intro., no. 2. It is evident that Abraham also possessed at least rudimentary training in astronomy, based on his remarks in *MH*, 87.

[31] Abraham recalled asking his father a question on the seventh introduction to the second part of the *Guide*, which proved too difficult to answer immediately. Unfortunately, his father never managed to give him an answer before he died. See *Teshuvot*, 141, no. 96. Abraham's *responsum* on the topic reveals some training in Aristotelian logic.

[32] See *Teshuvot*, 143, no. 96, the only known reference to his proposed treatise demonstrating the introductory theses at the beginning of part two of the *Guide*. Note also the *responsum* published by G. Margoliouth, "A Muhammadan Commentary on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah," *JQR*, o.s., 13 (1901), 502, and included in *Teshuvot*, 204–5, no. 119, which appears to be spurious. On Abraham's transmission of otherwise unknown teachings in the name of his late father, see Y. T. Langermann, "Sayings and Commentaries of Maimonides or Attributed to Him" (Hebrew), in *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. E. Fleischer et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), 227–8, 235–6, 237–8.

Abraham's mastery of rabbinic law and tradition was evident from an early age, and he quickly assumed the position of preeminent scholar in Egypt following his father's demise. Intricate questions of talmudic exegesis were brought before him in 1208 from a well-known French judge in Alexandria, Meir b. Barukh, which the 22-year-old *ra'īs* answered with the full corpus of talmudic, geonic, Iberian, and Maimonidean writings at his fingertips.[33] In a heated halakhic exchange dating to the same year, Abraham faced down the challenges of an elder scholar with the biting retort that such trifles were not worth his time and an implicit rebuke for the latter's lack of propriety.[34] Numerous queries were sent in the years that followed, including a series of questions from a scholar or group of scholars in Yemen in 1216, who began a querulous correspondence with him on various controversial customs and other matters.[35] According to Judah al-Ḥarizi (d. 1225), who visited Fustat around 1218, Abraham proved a worthy heir to his father's legacy, being "young in years but great in knowledge, a young man who makes fools out of the wise."[36]

While Abraham's prestige as a rabbinic scholar may have facilitated his sudden transition to communal leadership on his father's death, his appointment was no doubt influenced by the unique reverence held for his late father, known throughout Egypt as "the great sage in Israel,"[37] and perhaps even due

[33] See Langermann, "Sayings and Commentaries of Maimonides," 1–12, nos. 1–3, and see 1, n. 2, for the likely identification of this Me'ir as Me'ir b. Barukh.

[34] See *Responsa*, 87–90, no. 71. Friedman has convincingly shown that Abraham's interlocutor in this *responsum* and the entire correspondence (nos. 68–71) was Joseph Rosh ha-Seder. See Friedman, "On the Responsa of Abraham Maimonides and his Generation," 264–6, and cf. Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," 254. On this scholar, see L. Ginat, "R' Joseph Rosh Hasseder and his Commentaries to the Mishnah (from the Geniza)" (Hebrew), Tel Aviv University Master's Thesis, 1990, 23–5, and see pp. 235–7, 247–9. Abraham's rebuke of the elder scholar is an interesting parallel to his response to Daniel ha-Bavli's criticisms of his father's code: "If you read [the talmudic discussion], you did not review it, and if you did review it, you have not reviewed it carefully. If you did review it carefully, [your teachers] have not explained it to you clearly." See Sefer *Birkat Avraham*, ed. Goldberg, 81, no. 47. Yet Abraham also exhibited a degree of humility in his dispatches, as in *Responsa*, 12, no. 3: "It is worth looking into this question as I have not found a better solution. May God instruct us and all Israel, companions on the path of truth (*ve-ḵhol yisra'el ḥaverim 'al derekh ha-emet*)." The phrase, *kol yisra'el ḥaverim*, based on Judges 20:1$\overline{1}$ and BT Ḥagīgah 26a, was used by Maimonides at the end of the *Guide*, III.54, ed. Qafiḥ, 696.

[35] See *Responsa*, 107–36, no. 82–94, and M. A. Friedman, "An Exchange between a Yemenite Scholar and Abraham Maimonides on the Stipulated Amount of Money in a Ketubbah and on the Authority of Tradition" (Hebrew), *Te'udah* 14 (1998), 139–92.

[36] Judah al-Ḥarizi. *Rabbi Yehudah al-Ḥarizi: Taḥkemoni*, ed. A. Kaminka (Warsaw: Shuldberg, 1899), 352, maqāmah 46. See also *Taḥkemoni*, ed. Kaminka, 395, maqāmah 50, a poem in Abraham's honor that was not included in the main body of the work.

[37] In addition to the many such titles in Maimonides' *responsa*, see TS Box J 2.78, published by S. D. Goitein, "Moses Maimonides, Man of Action: A Revision of the Master's Biography in Light of the Geniza Documents," in *Hommage à Georges Vajda* (Louvain: Peeters, 1980), 167. See also Friedman, "Two Maimonidean Documents," 202, n. 51, and Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 223, 227–8, 231. It is possible that Maimonides was himself instrumental in insuring his son's

to the latter's influence as head of the Jews, a point disputed by scholars.[38] Yet the prevailing consensus among scholars is that Abraham faced considerable political opposition from members of the Fustat community, led by the established ha-Levi family, otherwise known as "the sons of the Sixth" (*aulād al-shishi*), which may have felt disenfranchised at the prospect of a Maimonidean succession.[39] It has been further suggested that the delay in crowning Abraham "Nagid" of the community is to be attributed to the local controversy over his appointment.[40] My own reading of the sources, however, has led me toward a somewhat different conclusion as to the nature of the controversy. The Genizah documents are notoriously fragmentary and have led, on occasion, to various interpretations. In the case at hand, there is ample testimony of communal divisions over Abraham's proposed liturgical reforms,

succession in anticipation of his death. For Maimonides' view on the subject of succession, see MT, "Laws of Kings," 1:7, based on a number of midrashic sources, on which see *Hagahot Maimuniyot* ad loc. For an analysis of family succession in medieval Jewish communities, though it does not deal with Egypt or the case of Maimonides directly, see A. Grossman, "Dynastic Succession in the Religious Leadership of Jewish Communities in the Early Middle Ages" (Hebrew), *Zion* 50 (1985), 189–220.

[38] For the argument that Maimonides was, for a period of time, appointed head of the Jews, see D. Neustadt, "In Regard to Maimonides' Title of Nagid" (Hebrew). *Zion* 11 (1945–6), 147–8, and esp. S. D. Goitein, "An Autograph of Maimonides and a Letter to Him from His Sister, Miriam (with an Addendum to the Responsa of Maimonides)" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 32 (1963), 184–6, esp. n. 4, "A Letter to Maimonides on Donations and New Information on His Descendents, the Negidim" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 34 (1965), 232–4, "Maimonides' Biography according to Recent Discoveries from the Cairo Genizah," 31; and see the more recent work of M. A. Friedman, "Maimonides: 'Ra'īs al-Yahūd' (Head of the Jews) in Egypt" (Hebrew), in *By the Well: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Halakhic Thought Presented to Gerald J. Blidstein*, ed. U. Ehrlich et al. (Beer-Sheba: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2008), 413–35, and Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 222–7. For the skeptical view, see J. Levinger, "Was Maimonides 'Rais al-Yahud' in Egypt?," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 83–93, and H. Davidson, "Maimonides' Putative Position as Official Head of the Egyptian Jewish Community," in *Ḥazon Naḥum: Studies in Jewish Law, Thought and History Presented to Dr. Norman Lamm*, ed. Y. Elman and J. S. Gurock (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 115–28, and Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 54–64, to which Friedman responded in his article.

[39] This theory was first proposed by S. D. Goitein, "New Documents from the Cairo Geniza," in *Homenaje a Millás Vallícrosa* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1954), I: 709, and "The Renewal of the Controversy over the 'Reshut' after the Appointment of R. Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, ed. S. Löwinger and J. Somogyi (Budapest: n.p., 1948–58), vol. II, 50–2, and has since been accepted by scholars. See Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237)," 133–4, Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," 269–70, and M. Ben-Sasson, "Tradition and Change in Patterns of Controversy in the Maimonidean Dynasty (Abraham and David Maimonides)" (Hebrew), in *Masoret ve-shinui ba-tarbut ha-'aravit ha-yehudit shel yeme ha-benayim*, ed. J. Blau and D. Doron (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 76–8. For the name, "sons of the Sixth," see TS Arabic Box 51.111, l. 8, published by Goitein, "New Documents," 717.

[40] See S. D. Goitein, "The Title and Office of the Nagid: A Re-examination," *JQR* 53 (1962), 96, and Friedman, "On the Responsa of Abraham Maimonides and his Generation," 263.

but no direct indication of political disputes over the candidate slated for communal appointment.[41]

At the heart of the confusion are two separate Genizah documents, dated 1205 and prior to 1219 respectively, which allude to independent disputes in the community.[42] The first document describes a communal crisis in which an increasing number of Jews in Fustat were found to be congregating in makeshift prayer halls, called *majālis* (sing. *majlis*), rather than attending one of the main synagogues in the city.[43] As a result, the community failed to collect sufficient alms for the poor, which were often raised through promises of donations in the main synagogues. The reason for not attending was concern over violating a ban, originally promulgated in 1170, prohibiting the invocation of the chief communal authority, known as the *reshut*, in the synagogues.[44] According to Goitein, the appeal to the ban of 1170 reflected communal protest over Abraham's appointment, at the age of 19, as head of the community.[45]

It is striking, however, that the document in question does not allude to a single critique of Abraham or of his selection by members of the community. The appeal was made not against the appointment itself but against the invocation of the *reshut*, which appears to have been reintroduced in the synagogues following the appointment, prompting a reaffirmation of the decree instituted thirty years earlier under the guidance of Abraham's father. Rather than renounce their new leader, members of the community found themselves "unable to listen to the *reshut* for the *ra'īs* on account of the old ordinance and the effectiveness of the ban."[46] There is no reason to assume, on the basis of this document, that the authority of the new leader was ever cast into doubt. When communal officials conceded to the public concerns by removing the *reshut* from the synagogues, a separate decree was issued prohibiting private worship services "with the exception of the residence of

[41] On the liturgical controversies initiated by Abraham, see above, p. 6, n. 15.

[42] The documents in question are TS Arabic Box 51.111, published by Goitein, "New Documents," 717, and TS 16.187, also published by Goitein, "Renewal of the Controversy," 52. The first document, dated by Goitein to the reign of Malik al-'Ādil (d. 1218), has been tentatively dated by Friedman closer to the end of Abraham's career, *c.*1235, although he did not provide an immediate explanation. See Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," 276.

[43] It should be recalled that Islamic law did not permit the construction of new synagogues or churches after the advent of Islam. As a result, new prayer services were typically organized in informal settings, often in an individual home or local study hall. This was the case with Maimonides himself, as Abraham attested in his *Compendium*. See Abraham's remarks in *SM*, 180. See also *SM*, 215, where Abraham described the protocol for priests ascending to the podium "when there is no *hekhal* or *dukhan* in the place of worship, since communal prayer may be conducted other than in a synagogue, such as . . . in study halls and the like." Note also *Teshuvot*, 64, no. 62: "given that they [pray] in their own homes" (*ho'il u-ve-vatehem hen 'osin*).

[44] For the ban of 1170, see *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, 596–9, no. 329.

[45] See Goitein, "Renewal of the Controversy," 50–1.

[46] TS 16.187, ll. 7–9.

our honorable lord, our noble, esteemed master and rabbi, Abraham, the noble lord of Israel and great and exalted sage . . ."[47] There was no need to concede to a communal protest against Abraham's appointment, as no such protest seems to have been leveled in the first place.

The second document concerning a communal dispute over the *ra'īs* is more explicit in its critique. Abraham's opponents sought to issue a complaint to the Sultan, al-Malik al-'Ādil (r. 1200–18), regarding his controversial reform of the Palestinian liturgical rite, of which members of the ha-Levi family were leading advocates. The desperate efforts of this faction to undermine the *ra'īs* by appealing to the Sultan had everything to do with salvaging the venerable Palestinian rite from its detractors and, on the surface, betrays no trace of political rivalry. Goitein may indeed be right that the ha-Levi family hoped to gain politically from Abraham's expected fall from grace, but the document in question is silent on the matter.[48] Whatever hidden motives lay behind the scandal, the opposition was primarily motivated by the threat posed to the survival of their congregation in Egypt rather than by overt political rivalry.[49]

Much has been made of the fact that Abraham was not known by the title of Nagid during his early years in office. According to Goitein, the title was not consistently applied to him until late 1213 or early 1214.[50] While it is true that the title was not regularly applied before this period, it was used in Fustat as an honorific of the *ra'īs* as early as 1209.[51] Yet, as Goitein himself recognized, the title of Nagid was not the preferred designation for the head of the Jews until the latter part of Abraham's career, after which it became common among his descendants.[52] There are no clear grounds to assume that the application of the title in 1213 marked an end to political discontent, as the title was not the sole, or even primary, honorific associated with the office at this point in

[47] TS 16.187, ll. 19–20.

[48] For Goitein's theory, see "New Documents," 709–11.

[49] It should be noted that the prayer invoked in favor of contested leaders, known from Genizah letters, ("May God turn the hearts of all Israel to you") is found in the case of Abraham's son, David, but not of Abraham himself. See Goitein, "Title and Office of the Nagid," 103.

[50] See Goitein, "Title and Office of the Nagid," 96, n. 8.

[51] Gaster published a Genizah fragment dating to "the month of Mar[ḥeshvan] of the year 1520 [ED = 1209 CE] in Fustat, Miṣrayim, on the Nile . . . [upon the authority of] our lord and prince (*va-adonenu negidenu*) . . ." See M. Gaster,"Geniza-Fragmente," in *Gedenkbuch zur Erinnerung an David Kaufmann*, ed. M. Brann and F. Rosenthal (Breslau: Schles. Verlags Anstalt, 1900), 236. Given that Abraham served as head of the Jews at this time, he is the only candidate for the title of "our Nagid," linked with the authority of the head of the Jews in the document. See also J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1970; reprint of 1920–2 London edition), II:326–7.

[52] Goitein likewise argued that the debate over whether Maimonides served as Nagid or not is "entirely futile," on the assumption that it was not inextricably linked with the highest office during this period. See Goitein, "Title and Office of the Nagid," 96. On the dynastic succession of Maimonides' descendants and their use of the term "Nagid," see Freimann, "Genealogy," 24–9, and Goitein, "Title and Office of the Nagid," 96–7.

time.[53] More typical at this stage is the Arabic designation for the head of the Jews, both in Genizah documents and contemporaneous Arabic sources, as *ra'īs*.[54] As we have seen, a Genizah document designates "our honorable lord . . . Abraham" as *ra'īs* as early as spring 1205.[55] What is more, during the first half of the thirteenth century, the honorific "Nagid" was occasionally applied to a prominent individual who was not the head of the Jews, including Abraham's father-in-law, Ḥananel b. Samuel, who served for a period as chief judge in Fustat.[56] This may have served as a parallel Hebrew term to the Arabic *ra'īs* or *rayyis*, and may have been applied with the same flexibility as the latter terms during the early years of the thirteenth century.[57]

Court Duties and Communal Governance

Abraham's rise to communal prominence was likewise due to his inherited position as court physician to the Sultan,[58] a job that was historically associated with communal headship due to its potential for intercession on behalf of Egyptian Jewry.[59] It is for their role as intercessors that communal leaders and

[53] Friedman, as already noted, proposed that the adoption of this title marked the cessation of formal opposition in the community.

[54] The conflation of the two terms appears in Goitein's translation of TS 16.187, ll. 8 and 13, where he renders "*ra'īs*" as "Nagid." See Goitein, "Renewal of the Controversy," 52–3.

[55] See above, pp. 15–16.

[56] See MS Frankfurt a. M., published by J. Horovitz, "Ein arabischer Brief an R. Chananel," *ZHB* 4 (1900), 155–6, reproduced by Goitein, "R. Ḥananel the Chief Judge," 379–80. According to Friedman, Ḥananel may have served as Nagid for a time, although this assumes that the title had an exclusive application in Egyptian society—an assumption that ought to be revisited. See M. A. Friedman, "The ibn al-Amshāṭī Family, In-laws of Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Zion* 69 (2004), 292–5, and M. A. Friedman and S. D. Goitein, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza ('India Book')* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008), 114–16.

[57] In spite of this ambiguity in the earlier sources, it has become commonplace among scholars to designate Abraham Maimonides, no less than his successors, as the Nagid of Egyptian Jewry, and this work will not be an exception to this rule, if only for the sake of simplicity. When not referring to Abraham Maimonides by name, I will designate him by the title of Nagid, *ra'īs*, or head of Egyptian Jewry.

[58] In addition to his father, who became court physician in al-Afḍal's court in the winter of 1198–9, Maimonides' brother-in-law, Abū'l-Ma'ālī, was al-Afḍal's mother's personal scribe, as we learn from al-Qiftī's report. See *Ibn al-Qifṭī's Ta'rīk̲ al-Ḥukamā'*, ed. Lippert (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903), 318.

[59] It was quite common for heads of the Jews to be court physicians. For a list of prominent Jews who served in both roles simultaneously, see R. Gottheil, "An Eleventh-century Document concerning a Cairo Synagogue," *JQR*, o.s., 19 (1907), 498, and Goitein, "The Medical Profession," 178–81. In his role as intermediary, Abraham did not always deal with the Sultan directly, but often communicated with different ministers of the royal court. In cases concerning communal taxation, he dealt with the Qāḍī Shams al-Dīn, as in TS Box K 25.11, published by M. Gil, *Documents of the Jewish Pious Foundations from the Cairo Geniza* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 416, whereas in general matters pertaining to the community he would communicate with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Būrī, on which see TS 10 J 6.8, and cf. Goitein, "A Letter to Maimonides on Donations," 239–40.

court physicians were designated "the Mordekhai of the age" in the Genizah documents.[60] Even if there are no documents directly linking Abraham's position in the court with his initial appointment in the community, the two posts were clearly intertwined. Writing to Daniel ha-Bavli in the summer of 1211, Abraham referred to his work as court physician as an official engagement from which he could not hope to extricate himself on account of his responsibilities as head of the Jews: "My sins have gotten me stuck working in the service of the gentiles (*khidmat al-goyim*) and I am not a free man to absolve or extricate myself from it. Were it my choice to leave it all and were it not for the fact that it is indispensable in order to [obtain] all that our [community] requires, I would be rid of it!"[61] In his second response to Daniel, Abraham expressed his exasperation with the demands on his time: "A good part of [my time] is taken up with my service to the nations of the world and, as for the other part, I am indentured to lead the vineyard of the Lord of hosts"—a clear allusion to his twin responsibilities as court physician and communal authority of Egyptian Jewry.[62]

Abraham's aggravation in this letter should not be read as disdain for the medical profession, a tradition he proudly inherited from his father, but as exasperation with his arduous schedule, which often conflicted with his communal engagements. In addition to time allotted to work at the Sultan's court, his medical duties included shifts at the hospital in Cairo, a rotation he shared with other prominent physicians and which occasionally interfered with personal or communal matters.[63] In one Genizah letter, an overworked

[60] On the phrase, "Mordekhai of the age" (*Mordekhai ha-zeman*), see *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, IV:42, no. 475; TS 8 J 9.16, l. 4; TS 13 J 4.13, published by Mann, *Jews in Egypt*, II:329, no. 4, and see Mann's view on this term in *Jews in Egypt*, I:256; TS NS Box 246.22, ll. 4–5, published by N. Allony, "A List of Honored Officials and Their Titles in Twelfth-Century Egypt" (Hebrew) *Sefunot* 8 (1964), 131; Bodl. MS Heb. b 13.41, l. 16; CUL Or. 1080 J 281, *recto*, l. 7, published by Friedman, *Jewish Polygyny in the Middle Ages*, 327; the poem published by S. M. Stern, "Some Unpublished Poems by al-Harizi," *JQR* 50 (1960), 272, l. 6, and cf. ll. 9–10, and Stern's remarks, "Some Unpublished Poems by al-Harizi," 274, and see Blau et al., ed., *Kitāb al-durar*, 21, n. 60; the letter (a photograph in the Mosseri collection in wrapping marked 825) published by J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (2 vols) (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1972; reprint of 1931 Cincinatti edition), I:432. See also the additional references included by M. A. Friedman, *Maimonides, the Yemenite Messiah, and Apostasy* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002), 195, n. 34 and 35.

[61] B. Goldberg, ed., *Sefer Ma'aseh Nissim*. (Paris: n.p., 1867), 107, on which see the important discussion by Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," pp. 264–7. Compare Abraham's remarks in a letter dated 1543 ED (= 1232 CE), in which he referred to his work as court physician as *'avodat ha-melekh*. See A. Neubauer, "Mittheilungen aus MSS." *Israelitische Letterbode* 3 (1877–8), 53, republished by Rosenblatt, *HW*, I:125–6. A similar sentiment was expressed by his father, in a letter to Jonathan of Lunel, in which he referred to his work as physician as "the yoke of the gentiles upon my neck." See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, III:56.

[62] See *Birkat Avraham*, ed. Goldberg, 2a.

[63] For Abraham's responsibilities in the hospital (*bīmāristān*) and their impact on his communal duties, as when it interfered with his ability to perform a wedding for a disciple,

physician and religious leader, who is most likely to be identified with Abraham, expressed regret (through the writer and messenger) at the limitations posed by his medical rotation on his communal activities:

> As for your request regarding the answers to your queries (*al-fatāwī*): When I handed over the first query that arrived to our lord, the head (*sayyidinā al-ra'īs*), he was tending to the sick of Cairo and Fustat, working in the hospital night and day—without taking a break by night or by day—for more than two nights a week, continuously visiting on those two nights the Jewish and Muslim sick by candlelight until midnight. Whenever I met with him, I asked him to attend to it and he would excuse himself by saying, "Yes, when I am free!"[64]

The letter offers a glimpse of Abraham's overlapping responsibilities to the royal court in Cairo and in Fustat, where he made his home.[65] The parallel with his father's extended schedule in the Sultan's court and in Fustat, where he likewise treated Jews and Muslims late into the night, is unmistakable.[66]

Abraham's approach to medicine, like that of his father, was informed by a deep religious sensibility, coupled with a reverence for science that occasionally pitted him against fellow pietists.[67] Resisting the fideism of reactionary traditionalists, a number of whom launched an ideological battle against Maimonidean rationalism, Abraham embraced the naturalism of the scientists while simultaneously advancing an attitude of inner piety. His public insistence on the rigor of science and the integrity of the medical profession was further motivated by the intellectual standards of Muslim society and the effort to protect his coreligionists from outside scorn.[68] His own reputation

see TS 10 J 14.5, *recto*, ll. 8–12, published by S. D. Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle" (Hebrew). *Tarbiz* 33 (1964): 181–97. Published in English translation in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 193. For the view that rotation in the Cairo hospital was given to the most distinguished Egyptian physicians, see Goitein, "The Medical Profession," 187.

[64] AIU VII E 119, *recto*, ll. 7–10, published by Cohen, "The Burdensome Life of a Jewish Physician and Communal Leader," 127, with a facsimile on 129. Cohen tentatively identified the haggard physician and scholar with Abraham, an assumption that seems quite plausible. See M. Cohen, "The Burdensome Life of a Jewish Physician and Communal Leader: A Geniza Fragment from the Alliance Israélite Universelle," *JSAI* 16 (1993), 134–6.

[65] On Abraham's place of residence in Fustat, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, IV:12. In addition to Bodl. MS Heb. b 3, 6, cited by Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 350, n. 44, see TS 13 J 25.19, l. 22, on which see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 281.

[66] See *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Shailat, II:550–1, and see a similar letter, TS AS 149.41, esp. ll. 5–6, published and discussed by Friedman, "Two Maimonidean Documents," 191–4. As Cohen pointed out, Maimonides never mentioned having worked in a hospital in his communications on the subject. See Cohen, "The Burdensome Life," 136.

[67] The controversy over Maimonides' and Abraham's attitude to science is an important theme, to which I intend to return on a separate occasion.

[68] Abraham's pious attitude can be found in *HW*, II:90, ll. 14–18; 106, l. 18 to 108, l. 2, and ll. 8–9; 134, l. 15. For his insistence on the necessity of medicine and the cultivation of science, see *HW*, 136, l. 16 to 138, l. 19; 148, ll. 15–16; 150, ll. 10–21; and esp. 130, l. 18 to 134, l. 8, on the "desecration of [God's] name" by Jewish anti-rationalists and the importance of scientific

and staunch devotion to his craft won him the admiration of his Muslim colleagues, including the renowned medical chronicler, ibn Abī Uṣaibiʿah (d. 1270), who dedicated a separate entry to Abraham, known among his colleagues as Abūʾl-Munā', based on first-hand observations during their joint rotations in the hospital.[69] The entry, included in his *Lives of the Physicians*, is the only surviving account of Abraham's physical stature and of the powerful impression he left on his colleagues:

> He was a celebrated physician, learned in the art of medicine and skilled in its practice. He [worked] in the service of the king, al-Kāmil [r. 1218–38] . . . He also frequently left the royal palace to tend to the sick in the hospital in Cairo. I met him in Cairo during my medical appointment in the hospital in 631 or 632,[70] and found him to be a tall gentleman, slender in build and refined in manners, elegant in conversation and outstanding as a physician.[71]

What was true of Abraham's extended schedule as a physician was no less true of his responsibilities on behalf of the community. Perhaps even more than his avowed profession, his devotion to communal affairs came at a cost to his spiritual leadership and literary undertakings. In a correspondence with Daniel ha-Bavli in 1213, Abraham apologized for his belated response to the latter's queries, referring to his public role as a form of "servitude" to the community: "My lord! Do you intend to consume the little time I have left? As you know, part of it is consumed in the service of the gentile nations and the other part in servitude (*mushuʿabad*) for the governance of the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts. The little that remains is dedicated to the books I have undertaken to compose and to commentaries I have begun."[72] What he failed

investigation. For an example of medical theory, see *HW*, 166, ll. 4–12. On Maimonides' approach to medicine, see F. Rosner, "Maimonides as the Physician: A Bibliography," *BHM* 43 (1969), 221–35, and F. Rosner, "The Medical Writings of Moses Maimonides," *Proceedings (Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists)* 8–9 (1987), 75–91. Maimonides himself was compelled to contend with pious rejections of medicine among his coreligionists. See his commentary on M. Pesaḥim 4:10. The famous "physician's prayer," composed by the German-Jewish physician, Marcus Herz (d. 1803) and spuriously attributed to Maimonides, was examined by F. Rosner, "The Physician's Prayer Attributed to Moses Maimonides," *BHM* 41 (1967), 440–54. Despite the doubts cast on its authenticity, the prayer continues to be attributed to Maimonides by many. See J. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 83–4.

[69] This is the only attested instance of Abraham's *kunyah* in all the sources of the period. On this name, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:640, n. 284.

[70] These two years in the Islamic calendar fall within the range of October, 1233, and September, 1235 CE, when Abraham Maimonides was between 47 and 49 years of age.

[71] A. Müller, ed., *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ* (Königsberg i. Pr.: Selbstverlag, 1884), 118, reprinted by Rosenblatt, *HW*, I:124.

[72] *Birkat Avraham*, ed. Goldberg, 2a. The rhetorical appeal was not directed, as might appear, to Daniel ha-Bavli, but to Maimonides, who (Abraham related) appeared to him in a dream after his death with a call to arms against his detractors. See my essay, "The Maimonidean Legacy in the East," 192.

to mention in this context was that his public duties precluded him from devoting himself wholeheartedly to the spiritual movement he assiduously promoted and directed. He reflected openly on the impact of public governance on the spiritual life, suggesting that Moses, too, preferred solitude to his public role, so as to "concentrate his efforts on his own perfection."[73] As spiritual advisor to his own followers, Abraham counseled against adopting the public life, unless no alternative presented itself. Abraham's own vision for rigorous communal reform, as Goitein once aptly observed, constituted just such an exception to justify the evident sacrifice to his private devotions.

> When one is engaged in communal governance, such as the administration of justice or public leadership, the discipline of asceticism is virtually impossible without great effort, due to the constraints of time on one's outer discipline . . . and the heart's distractions from inner discipline . . . It was concerning such a situation that the verse stated: "Can a man take fire into his bosom and his clothes not be burnt? Can a man walk upon coals and his feet not be singed?" (Prov. 6:27–28) . . . Anyone who is pursuing [the path of] asceticism must avoid a leadership position as far as possible and extricate oneself from it if one is already involved in it, unless doing so would have a deleterious effect on religious life.[74]

Yet for all his inner ambivalence, Abraham thrust himself into the torrent of communal governance well beyond the standard set by his predecessors.[75] Given the high stakes of his vision for communal life and the spiritual peril posed by inaction, the new *ra'īs* did not wait long before embarking on his controversial policy of reform.[76] It is reasonable to assume that the urgency of Abraham's early liturgical reforms was driven not only by a zealous pursuit of "controversy for the sake of heaven," which provided him with a measure of justification for his unpopular policies, but also by his own self-perception as the guardian and champion of the Maimonidean legacy.[77] In a unique combination of public roles, Abraham functioned as chief administrator and overseer of all communal posts throughout the country, appointing judges and welfare workers and arbitrating disputes, while simultaneously serving as the foremost religious authority in matters of jurisprudence and synagogue life.

[73] See *Perush*, 231 (Ex. 4:13) and also 299 (Ex. 18:19–20).

[74] *HW*, II:260, l. 17 to 262, l. 3, and ll. 12–15, and see *Sefer ha-maspik*, 180. For Goitein's observation, see *Med. Soc.*, V:493. See the additional references on the subject provided by Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," 263, n. 75 and 76.

[75] See my "Between Politics and Piety," 205–6.

[76] The earliest references to the controversy over liturgical reform date from 1211, as Friedman has illustrated in detail. See Friedman, "Controversy," 251–67.

[77] For the appeal to "controversy for the sake of heaven" in Abraham's writings, see *SM*, 181, the basis for Friedman's article under that name. On Abraham's self-perception as the bearer of his father's legacy, see my "The Maimonidean Legacy in the East," 190–2.

As head of a populous and diverse community spread across over 50 towns throughout Egypt,[78] the demands of communal governance extended well beyond the religious domain into the minutiae of daily life. During the most pressing periods of famine and poverty, Abraham was intimately engaged with the smallest of administrative tasks ordinarily delegated to communal welfare workers.[79] But even in typical times, Abraham was the front line of various public and private appeals that sought the direct attention of the *raʾīs* and frequently demanded an expeditious response. With these various and sundry duties competing for his immediate attention, not every private appeal could expect to receive the same degree of priority from the head of the Jews.[80]

Yet the Genizah documents bear witness to a depth of humanity manifest in his many labors on behalf of the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community. His fierce advocacy for Milāḥ bint Surūr, a woman suffering at the hands of an oppressive husband unwilling to release her from a joyless marriage and the threat of a second wife, earned Abraham the title of "father of orphans and widows."[81] For his devotion to the well-being of the people under his care, as when he worked to secure peace among rival factions in the community, Abraham was granted the fulsome praise that may now be restored to him as his unsung legacy preserved in the Cairo Genizah documents: "Everything crooked and twisted has been straightened in your days, may God crown us all with your life . . . For you, our lord, are the true light of Israel in our generation, and it is on account of you, our lord, that the well-being of us all has been uplifted!"[82]

[78] See Mann, "Number of the Jews," 9–42 (part I) and 1–22 (part II), and Golb, "Topography," 251–71 (part I) and 116–49 (part II).

[79] See my "Between Politics and Piety," 56–65.

[80] In TS 13 J 22.9, we find the exasperated appeal of a poor community member, who was still waiting on the Nagid to fulfill a promise to collect money to pay his poll tax. See S. D. Goitein, "Evidence on the Muslim Poll Tax from Non-Muslim Sources: A Geniza Study," *JESHO* 6 (1963), 279–80, and *Med. Soc.*, II:381.

[81] See TS 8 J 22.22, *recto*, l. 14, published by Friedman, *Jewish Polygyny*, 231. Similar designations were common in the Genizah sources for other communal heads and dignitaries. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, II:36. Milāḥ's story survives in three separate letters from the Genizah: TS 8 J 22.22, TS 18 J 3.12, and CUL Or. 1080 J 285, all edited and published by Friedman, *Jewish Polygyny*, 230–1, 233–5, and 237–9, respectively. On two occasions, the documents refer to the pain the situation caused Abraham, such as when a certain local leader (*muqaddam*) did not respond promptly to his circular regarding Milāḥ's case. See TS 18 J 3.12, *recto*, l. 25 (*fa-inna al-amr maḍḍa fīhi*), and CUL Or. 1080 J 285, l. 23 (*fa-ʿazza ʿala sayyidina ḏalik*). The name "Milāḥ" was a common abbreviation for Sitt al-Milāḥ ("dame d'esprit"). See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, III:318, and Friedman, *Polygyny*, 225, n. 2.

[82] TS 16.305, *verso*, ll. 22–3, 29–31. The lines cited come from a letter to the Nagid from the al-ʿAmmānī family in Alexandria. Because the letter mentions a prayer for the Nagid's recovery from illness, I have tentatively dated the letter to the period of plague in Egypt in 1216–17. See pp. 48–50. Goitein translated a few of these lines out of order and with the wrong citation in "The Title and Office of the Nagid," 110 (as Bodl. Heb. a 3.2, *verso*, ll. 5–8), and then a portion of the letter correctly in *Med. Soc.*, V:490.

II. Recovering a Lost Legacy: Between History and Historiography

Scholars have not failed to note, with some degree of lament, that Abraham's legacy was already eclipsed within his own lifetime by the imposing shadow cast by his renowned father.[83] There are indications that this was the case even within Abraham's inner circle, among those inclined toward pietism. Even among Abraham's colleagues and immediate successors who most fervently advanced the pietist movement in Egypt, Maimonides and his *oeuvre* continued to exert a disproportionate influence. An interesting case in point is that of Abraham's younger son, Obadiah, whose pietist work on the attainment of mystical communion, known as *Treatise of the Pool*, includes more references to the works of his grandfather than to those of his father, when the latter clearly provided the immediate inspiration for the work at hand.[84] Perhaps even more telling is the way in which Abraham's memory was later almost entirely eclipsed in comparison with his father, as when Obadiah was cited by a later pietist author as "our master, Obadiah, grandson of our master [Maimonides]" rather than as son of Abraham.[85]

Even if not for his father, Abraham's impact outside of Egypt was compromised by other factors. The potential impact of Abraham's magnum opus, *Kifāyat al-ʿābidīn*, or *The Compendium for the Servants of God* (hereafter: *Compendium*), may have been blunted already during his lifetime by being distributed piecemeal rather than as a self-contained work.[86] Another consideration is that of the linguistic discrepancy. As earlier classics of Judaeo-Arabic literature were being translated into Hebrew in thirteenth-century Provence, Abraham's work was never once honored with a translation, cutting off any

[83] See R. Margaliot, *Rabbenu Avraham ben ha-Rambam: Milḥamot ha-Shem* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1953), 11, and, more recently, Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides," 154: "Had Abraham's works not been overshadowed by those of his illustrious progenitor, they would certainly have deeply marked the course of Jewish spiritual history . . . Were it not for having had so great a father, it would surely have been said of the son: 'From Abraham to Abraham, there was no other Abraham.'" See also the remarks by A. Grossman, "Woman and Family in the Thought of Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Dine Yisra'el* 26–7 (1999–2000), 121–2. For this expression ("From Abraham to Abraham . . ."), see *Birkat Avraham*, ed. Goldberg, intro., no. 2.

[84] On Maimonides' influence on Obadiah, see Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 27–8.

[85] For this reference to the extensive, yet anonymous, Judaeo-Arabic treatise known as *Abstract of Speculative Truths and Extract of Ethical Aims* (*Tajrīd al-ḥaqāʾiq al-naẓarīyah wa-talkhīṣ al-maqāṣid al-nafsānīyah*), see Fenton, *Treatise*, 26, and see P. Fenton, "The Literary Legacy of David ben Joshua, Last of the Maimonidean Nĕgīdim," *JQR* 75 (1984), 3.

[86] In a Hebrew letter addressed to an unknown admirer outside of Egypt, Abraham alludes to the way in which his work was distributed in separate sections in distant lands. In this letter, Abraham translated his Judaeo-Arabic title, *Kifāyat al-ʿābidīn*, into Hebrew as *Sefer ha-maspik le-ʿovde hashem*, the title which was later adopted in modern times as the Hebrew title for the work. For the original letter, see Neubauer, "Mittheilungen," 53–4, republished a number of times. Abraham's reference to having sent sections of the work abroad occurs in Neubauer, "Mittheilungen," 53.

potential influence among European Jewish writers and mystics, unlike the case of Baḥya's *Duties of the Heart* a century before.[87] Beyond this, the resettlement of large numbers of Iberian Jews in North Africa and the Ottoman realms in the sixteenth century contributed both to the increased influence of Qabbalah in Jewish mysticism and to the diminished use of Judaeo-Arabic by Jewish authors in the Arab world in the late medieval period.[88] In addition, internal factors limited the potential influence of Abraham's writings outside his community. Unlike Maimonides, who wrote in a universalist vein with little reference to local context or controversy, Abraham devoted considerable space to internal Egyptian Jewish disputes and to polemical jousts with his opponents, none of which would have been particularly relevant, if even intelligible, to readers outside the Egyptian community. For all these reasons, Abraham's works were only sporadically cited in theological and legal writings up to the sixteenth century, and became increasingly marginal to the intellectual and spiritual life of late medieval Jewry.[89]

[87] It is ironic that Abraham's choice to write the *Compendium* in Arabic was likely due to his wish for the wide dissemination and reach of his work, as already noted by Friedman, *Maimonides*, 55, and n. 21. It is noteworthy that Abraham was not an exception in his lack of a translation. While translation activity continued as a dynastic tradition among Provençal Jews into the fourteenth century, no translation was made of any Judaeo-Arabic author after Moses Maimonides. This has much to do with the relative lack of Jewish migration from Islamic to Christian realms after the Almohad period, limiting the access of European Jews to literary developments in Judaeo-Arabic. For an overview of the Provençal tradition of Hebrew translation, see Robinson, "The Ibn Tibbon Family: A Dynasty of Translators in Medieval Provence," in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. J. Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 193–224. A section of Abraham's *Compendium* on rabbinic homilies, *Ma'amar 'al odot derashot ḥazal* (Epistle concerning Rabbinic Homilies), has often been considered a separate treatise and was one of the few sections of the work to be translated into Hebrew, although it remains unclear when the anonymous translation was produced. It was published by Samuel Goldberg in the journal *Kerem Ḥemed* in 1836 and has been reprinted a number of times.

[88] While the rapid rise of Qabbalah may have contributed, in its own way, to the displacement of the Judaeo-Arabic pietist tradition, there can be no doubt as to the impact of Sufi, and perhaps even "Jewish-Sufi" ideas and ideals on Qabbalistic praxis in the thirteenth century and beyond. See the studies of Fenton, "La 'Hitbōdedūt' chez les premiers Qabbalistes en Orient et chez les Soufis," in *Prière, mystique et judaïsme*, ed. R. Goetschel (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), 134–57, "Influences soufies sur le développement de la Qabbale à Safed: le cas de la visitation des tombes," in *Expérience et écriture mystiques dans les religions du Livre*, ed. P. Fenton and R. Goetschel (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 163–90, among others, and those of Idel, "Jewish Mysticism and Muslim Mysticism" (Hebrew), *Maḥanayim* 1 (1991), 28–33, and *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 73–169, Pedaya, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism* (Hebrew), (Culver City: Cherub Press, 2002), 171–200, Fishbane, *As Light before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 250–9, and Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Land of the Ishmaelites: A Reorientation," in *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam: Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions*, ed. M. Laskier and Y. Lev (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 147–67.

[89] Most frequent are the citations of Abraham's legal responses to Daniel ha-Bavli in late medieval sources, although references to the *Compendium* are found into the sixteenth century, if not later. See Fenton, *Deux traités de mystique juive* (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1987), 103.

It was ultimately left to modern scholarship to wrest Abraham's legacy from the brink of obscurity. This was primarily achieved in the form of critical editions and translations of parts of his extant work, beginning in the nineteenth century, although interest in Abraham's *oeuvre* began even before the publication of his works began in earnest.[90] A number of scholars reaped the fruits of these early labors, contributing surveys of Abraham's thought and career based on the available sources.[91] The publication of portions of Abraham's *chef d'oeuvre* and of his responsa in the 1920s and 1930s, Wiesenberg's edition of his biblical commentary to Genesis and Exodus in 1959,[92] and S. D. Goitein's publication of key Genizah fragments pertaining to Abraham's

[90] See the references in I. Benjacob, *Ozar ha-sepharim: Thesaurus liborорum hebraicorum tam impressorum quam many scriptorium* Wilna (n.p.), 1880, 332–3, no. 1311, for scholarship as of the year 1860. The editions of Ber Goldberg were formative to scholarship on Abraham Maimonides in subsequent years (see Bibliography). See also the latter's introduction to *Birkat Avraham* and his "Travel in Arabia" (Hebrew), *Ha-Magid* 5 (1861), 23b–24a, and see the response of Geiger to Goldberg's *Birkat Avraham*, Geiger, "Daniel ha-Babli und Abraham Sohn des Moses Maimonides," *JZWL* 6 (1868), 155–6. Simon Eppenstein likewise provided not only partial editions from manuscripts, but contributed the first substantial monograph on the Nagid. See Eppenstein, *Abraham Maimuni, sein Leben und seine Schriften*, *passim*, and see the review of Eppenstein by Poznanski (see Bibliography). After Goldberg and Eppenstein, the first major edition of the Nagid's *oeuvre* was Samuel Rosenblatt's two-volume (1927 and 1938) publication of *High Ways*, an edition and English translation of the extant chapters of the fourth part of Abraham's *Compendium*, including a helpful introduction by the editor. See the 1938–9 review by Goitein (see Bibliography). The next major volume was the 1937 edition with Hebrew translation of Abraham's responsa by Goitein and Freimann, which includes a valuable introduction on the sources and content of the responsa. See the early review by Y. Warfel, "The Responsa of Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 2 (1938), 102–8. Reuven Margaliot synthesized portions of this material in his introduction on the life of Abraham Maimonides in his 1953 publication of the *Milḥamot ha-Shem*. An edition of the extant portion of part two of the *Compendium*, with Hebrew translation, was prepared in 1989 by Nissim Dana as *Sefer ha-maspik*, which likewise includes an introduction by the editor. See the review on Dana's edition by Frank and the two by Fenton. A fragment of the *Compendium* from the Firkovitch collection has recently been published by Sabato, "A New Fragment from the Book, 'The Compendium for the Servants of God' of Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Me'aliyot* 25 (2005), 22–30.

[91] The first effort to capitalize on the publication of Abraham's epistle in defense of his father (1821), his chapter on rabbinic homilies (1836), and his replies to Daniel ha-Bavli on his father's halakhic works (1859 and 1867) was made by an otherwise unknown Hungarian scholar, Béla Rapaport, in a brief work on Abraham's views on rabbinic homilies, *Abulmeni* [sic] *Abraham élete és müvei*, published in 1896, on which see *ZHB* 2 (1897): 49. See also the remarks of Steinschneider in *Die arabische Literatur der Juden: Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte der Araber, grossenteils aus handschriftlichen Quellen* (Frankfurt a.M., J. Kauffmann, 1902; rep. in Hildesheim by Georg Olms, 1986), 221–4, no. 159, and see the references in the previous note.

[92] Abraham's biblical commentary has elicited quite a bit of interest, beginning with Eppenstein (see n. 90) and with increasing interest in recent years. See the important study by Ilan, "Theological Presuppositions and Exegetical Principles," 31–70, and see the references in Ilan, "Theological Presuppositions and Exegetical Principles: On the Nature and Distinctiveness of Abraham Maimonides' Commentary to the Torah" (Hebrew), in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Quran*, ed. M. Bar-Asher et al. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2007), 31–2, n. 1. Rabbinic interest has also grown around Abraham's commentary. See esp. C. Cohen, *In Peace and Integrity: Ethics and Doctrine in the Biblical Commentary of Abraham Maimonides* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Me'aliyot Press, 1998), *passim*, and E. Labaton,

career in the 1950s and 1960s paved the way for a more ambitious overview of Abraham's thought by Gerson Cohen in 1967.[93] Since then, scholarship on Abraham and the Egyptian pietist movement has expanded considerably, due mainly to the diligent work of two Genizah historians: Paul Fenton, who has almost single-handedly shaped the contours and direction of scholarship of Jewish-Sufi pietism in medieval Egypt, and Mordechai Friedman, who has contributed a wealth of analysis and insight on Abraham's career and controversial prayer reforms.[94] The present work would have been inconceivable without the formidable labors of these two scholars.[95]

It would be impossible and improper to discuss the resurgence of interest in Abraham Maimonides without noting the particular fascination he inspired in the late doyen of Genizah studies, S. D. Goitein.[96] As readers of his magnum

"A Comprehensive Analysis of Rabenu Abraham Maimuni's Biblical Commentary," Doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University, 2012, esp. 117–303.

[93] On the editions of Abraham Maimonides' *oeuvre*, see n. 90. Goitein's relevant publications from this period include "New Documents" (1954), "The Renewal of the Controversy" (1958), "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle" (1964), and "A Treatise in Defence of the Pietists by Abraham Maimonides," *JJS* 16 (1965). G. Cohen's analysis in his two-part study, "Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni" (1967), while offering many valuable insights into Abraham's thought, contains a number of tendentious interpretations that must now be rethought in light of later scholarship. Perhaps the most problematic interpretation offered by Cohen was his insistence on the primarily internal Jewish roots of Abraham's pietism (viz. Pirqe Avot) over Sufi influence, and his claim that Abraham's mystical doctrine was intended for public effect rather than genuine belief (p. 54: "If he could not lick 'em, he would seem to join 'em."). For a cautious reception of Cohen's thesis, see Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 58, n. 46.

[94] See the publications of Fenton and Friedman in the Bibliography. Friedman is currently preparing a much-anticipated edition of the responsa of Abraham Maimonides and his generation from the Genizah, which will be sure to add invaluable information and enrich scholarship in the field. See M. A. Friedman, "Responsa of R. Abraham Maimonides from the Cairo Geniza: A Preliminary Review," *PAAJR* 56 (1990), 29–49, and "On the Responsa of Abraham Maimonides and his Generation," 259–76.

[95] Two other scholars have recently made meaningful contributions to the thought of Abraham Maimonides. Carmiel Cohen has devoted a number of thematic essays and one monograph to Abraham's thought, particularly as it pertains to his biblical commentary and its reliance on, and divergence from, that of his father (see Bibliography). Dov Maimon has provided a valuable overview of the world and worldview of Abraham Maimonides, with a note of special urgency as to its value for the present hour. See D. Maimon, "The Limits of the Encounter between Rabbinic Judaism and Islamic Mysticism" (Hebrew), *Aqdamot* 7 (1999), 9–29 (part I), and 43–72 (part II), and "Tolerance in Spite of Disagreement in Medieval Egypt: Abraham Maimonides and Muslim Mystics" (Hebrew), in *Burden of Tolerance: Religious Traditions and the Challenge of Pluralism* (Hebrew), ed. S. Fisher and A. Seligman (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute, 2007), 355–63.

[96] See Udovitch's foreword to the final volume of Goitein's *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–93), xiv–xvi. See also G. Libson, "Hidden Worlds and Open Shutters: S. D. Goitein between Judaism and Islam," in *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*, ed. D. Myers and D. Ruderman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 163–98, S. Wasserstrom, "Apology for S. D. Goitein: An Essay," in *A Faithful Sea: The Religious Cultures of the Mediterranean, 1200–1700* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 182–3, A. Hoffman and P. Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo*

opus, *A Mediterranean Society*, are well aware, Goitein's last stroke of the pen, with which he concluded his fifth and final volume, was his portrait of Abraham, whom he endearingly called "a perfect man with a tragic fate."[97] Goitein confessed that, during the period in which he translated Abraham's Judaeo-Arabic responsa into Hebrew in the 1930s, he "developed quite a personal affection for him . . . ," adding that "Abraham Maimonides was possessed of a most loveable personality."[98] While displaying a "fervent religiosity" in spiritual matters, he proved himself a leader imbued with a "humane consideration" for his community, coupled with "a sober, secular humanism."[99]

Goitein's characterization of Abraham's humanity as a leader of Egyptian Jewry has been taken as an indication of his general tolerance in religious matters—a point that has been recently disputed by scholars.[100] Even more intriguing, however, is his suggestion that Abraham represents the strongest expression of a Judaeo-Islamic synthesis during the medieval period. Goitein, like others before him, emphasized aspects of cultural integration between the two religious groups, yet also defined these communities, more than any other scholar, as part of a single, interconnected Mediterranean society, eventually spawning an interest among later scholars in what has been described as "Mediterraneanism."[101] But it was Abraham's religious and intellectual openness to Islam that profoundly impressed Goitein as the consummate expression of this cultural integration. For Goitein, Abraham represented a pious and unapologetic Judaism with an equally unapologetic admiration for the fruits of Islamic civilization.

Geniza (New York: Schocken, 2011), 214–21, and, most recently, Friedman, "Abraham Maimonides on His Leadership, Reforms, and Spiritual Imperfection," 495–6.

[97] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:474. The reference to Goitein's "last stroke of the pen" is intended rhetorically, as it does not take into account the epilogue or the order in which the volume was written. What is significant is that the section devoted to Abraham constitutes the last word of the final volume.

[98] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 482.

[99] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 481 and 482.

[100] See my discussion in "Between Politics and Piety," 213–15, and see esp. the position taken by Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," 247–8.

[101] For Goitein's emphasis on an integrated Mediterranean society (the basis for the title of his *chef d'oeuvre*), see *Med. Soc.*, I:42–74 and V:501–2, and earlier expressions of this principle in his "The Cairo Geniza as a Source for the History of Muslim Civilisation," *SI* 3 (1955): 75–91, and "The Documents of the Cairo Geniza as a Source for Mediterranean Social History," *JAOS* 80 (1960): 91–100. See also J. Kraemer, "Goitein and His Mediterranean Society" (Hebrew), *Zemanim* 3 (1990), 6–17. Mark Cohen has recently stressed the importance of Genizah for Islamic studies in his "Geniza for Islamicists, Islamic Geniza, and the 'New Cairo Geniza'," *HMEIR* 7 (2006): 129–45. For the recent trend in "Mediterraneanism," see S. Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: A Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3–6, and the references in nn. 10–11. See also the recent discussion of this trope in E. Horowitz, "Scholars of the Mediterranean and the Mediterranean of Scholars," *JQR* 102 (2012), 477–90, and F. Astren, "Goitein, Medieval Jews, and the 'New Mediterranean Studies'," *JQR* 102 (2012), 513–31.

> Abraham Maimonides lived near the end of "humanistic Islam." He was a son of his time. In addition to his unique personality, his life and teaching convey so harmonious an impression because they were in conformity with the best and most congenial elements in the contemporary surrounding civilization, and at the same time represented the most perfect realization of the religion of his forefathers.[102]

Goitein's affinity for Abraham was thus emblematic of his underlying enthusiasm for a Judaeo-Islamic cultural nexus, a motivating historical outlook that would come to define his scholarly career.[103] From his graduate training in Berlin in the early 1920s to his anthropological work with Yemenite Jewry in the 1930s, Goitein felt powerfully drawn to the history of Judaeo-Islamic culture, which he endearingly and even wistfully referred to as "the world of the east."[104] In an article written in 1949, anticipating many of the themes of his later work, Goitein wrote passionately of what he called the cultural and religious symbiosis—adopting a biological term implying intertwined destinies—of the Jewish and Islamic traditions, suggesting that the cultural climate of Islam was more congenial to traditional Jewish life than that of modern western civilization.[105] Goitein again emphasized the unique affinity of Judaism and Islam in his pioneering survey, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages*, first published in 1955, in which he distinguished medieval Judaeo-Islamic symbiosis from all other examples of cultural integration in Jewish history, whether before or after.

> Modern Western civilization, like the ancient civilization of the Greeks, is essentially at variance with the religious culture of the Jewish people. Islam, however, is from the very flesh and bone of Judaism. It is, so to say, a recast, an enlargement of the latter, just as Arabic is closely related to Hebrew. Therefore, Judaism could draw freely and copiously from Muslim civilization and, at the same time,

[102] Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 485.

[103] See the essays by Shaked, "Scholar of the Historic Partnership between Judaism and Islam" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 22 (1985), 4–9, Friedman, "Prof. S. D. Goitein, the Man and the Scholar—A Character Sketch" (Hebrew), *Yedi'on (World Union of Jewish Studies)* 26 (1986), 51–66, Friedman, "On S. D. Goitein's Contribution to Interdisciplinary Studies of Judeo-Arab Culture" (Hebrew), *Sefunot* 8 (n.s.) (1991), 11–20, and Libson, "Hidden Worlds and Open Shutters," 163–98.

[104] See, e.g., S. D. Goitein, *The Yemenites: History, Communal Organization, Spiritual Life: Selected Studies* (Hebrew), ed. M. Ben-Sasson. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1983), 3. Goitein delivered a retrospective address on his life and scholarship in "The Life Story of a Scholar," included in Attal, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Prof. Shelomo Dov Goitein* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1975), XIII–XXVIII.

[105] See Goitein, "On Judaeo-Arab Symbiosis" (Hebrew), *Molad* 2 (1949): 259–66, esp. 264–5. In this article, Goitein defined symbiosis as "the coexistence of two organs in such a way as to benefit from the proximity, in the sense that one party benefits while the other does not suffer." See Goitein, "On Judaeo-Arab Symbiosis," 259, based on the translation by Libson, "Hidden Worlds and Open Shutters," 175. On the language of symbiosis and its alternatives, see my discussion below.

> preserve its independence and integrity far more completely than it was able to do in the modern world or in the Hellenistic society of Alexandria . . . Never has Judaism encountered such a close and fructuous symbiosis as that with the medieval civilization of Arab Islam.[106]

An idyllic view of medieval Islamic civilization as the fertile ground for a Judaeo-Arab "golden age," as is now well known, was a defining feature of modern Jewish historiography from its inception, from the utopian vision of Heinrich Graetz (d. 1891) to the romantic self-identification of Ignác Goldziher (d. 1921).[107] What was unique about Goitein's enthusiasm was not the ideal conception of a cultural synthesis, which he clearly shared with his illustrious predecessors, but the detailed investigation with which he approached the question of symbiosis from the standpoint of social and religious history. From the vantage point of cultural influence and appropriation, Goitein espoused a diachronic approach to Jewish–Muslim symbiosis, suggesting that Judaism initially exerted a definitive influence on the new religion, which in turn, after becoming the dominant cultural and political force from the western Mediterranean to the fertile crescent and beyond, exercised its own influence on Jewish society in its midst.[108]

But beyond the question of appropriation and acculturation that has long exercised historians, Goitein suggested an additional, more intimate form of symbiosis. Jews and Muslims in the medieval Arab world shared, in Goitein's view, an intertwined social and legal system and a parallel religious sensibility, permitting a mutual understanding and even genuine respect among the more enlightened scholars of the period.[109] Goitein devoted much of his career to investigating the daily features of this Mediterranean society, only rarely turning his attention to intellectual or spiritual biographies of individual figures who best exemplify this social and religious interplay. Yet throughout his career he would return, again and again, to Abraham, "the worthy son of the great Maimonides,"[110] as the consummation of Judaism's "close and

[106] S. D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: A Concise History of their Social and Cultural Relations* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005). Reprint of original: *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages* (New York: Scholken Books, 1955), 130. The reprint with an updated subtitle, *Jews and Arabs: A Concise History of their Social and Cultural Relations*, includes a new introduction by Mark Cohen.

[107] See J. Gerber, "Reconsiderations of Sephardic History: The Origin of the Image of the Golden Age of Muslim–Jewish Relations," in *The Solomon Goldman Lectures*, vol. IV, ed. N. Stampfer (Chicago: Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1985), 85–93, and the summary and critique of M. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–6.

[108] Note the same approach in H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Judeo-Arabic Culture," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book* (1977/8), 101–6.

[109] Goitein wrote of the creative interplay of Jewish and Islamic cultures in numerous studies throughout his career, on which see the above notes.

[110] See Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, 152.

fructuous symbiosis" with the cultural and religious world of medieval Islam. It therefore behooves us to consider, if only briefly, the deeper meaning and meaningfulness of the term "symbiosis," that so animated Goitein and that has made such a definitive mark on subsequent scholarship.

JEWISH–MUSLIM SYMBIOSIS AND ITS ALTERNATIVES: A REASSESSMENT

Perhaps no other term has enjoyed so much currency among historians, and elicited so much confusion among their readers, as Goitein's application of the biological conception of symbiosis to the Jewish–Islamic nexus. For Goitein, as for a number of his successors, the term captured an unparalleled measure of cultural cooperation as well as religious compatibility between medieval Judaism and Islam.[111] As Goitein strongly suggested in *Jews and Arabs*, the unique synergy of the two communities was due less to temporary conditions on the ground than to the essential congeniality of their religious traditions, producing in time "a close and fructuous symbiosis" that had no true parallel in Jewish history.[112] The notable parallels between the Jewish and Islamic traditions—already observed and discussed by medieval Jewish authors—have elicited renewed inquiry of late among historians, and certainly warrant further investigation.[113] Yet Goitein's assertion as to the essential compatibility

[111] For an early example of the adoption of this term, see G. Vajda's language of "une symbiose positive," in his "Mystique juive et mystique musulmane," *Les nouveaux cahiers* 2 (1966), 37–8. For a more recent use, see Maimon, "The Limits of the Encounter between Rabbinic Judaism and Islamic Mysticism," 70 (part II): "It is possible to describe the interreligious encounter as symbiotic—two partners benefitting from the partnership yet battling for supremacy within it." Maimon's approach, however, is not tied to this concept, but viewed the pietist encounter with Islam as the product of a posture of spiritual openness, stemming "from a genuine inquiry into the points of truth in the world of the 'other'," suggesting that this open posture can and should serve as a model for intercultural and interreligious dialogue today. See Maimon, "The Limits of the Encounter between Rabbinic Judaism and Islamic Mysticism," 72, and in general, 69–73.

[112] See p. 29 and n. 106.

[113] Much of the recent scholarship on comparative Jewish-Islamic literature has been devoted to the field of religious law. Goitein devoted a brief study to the topic in his "The Interplay of Jewish and Islamic Laws," in *Jewish Law in Legal History and the Modern World*, ed. B. Jackson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 61–77. See also the essays by G. Libson, "Interaction between Islamic law and Jewish law during the Middle Ages," 95–100, "The Connection between Jewish Law and Islamic Law," in *Law in Multicultural Societies: Proceedings of the IALL Meeting, Jerusalem, July 21–26, 1985*, ed. E. I. Cuomo (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989), 74–91, "Jewish–Islamic Comparative Law: History and Difficulties of Research" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 62 (1995), 43–81, and his remarks on the history of research on comparative Jewish and Islamic law in his monograph, *Jewish and Islamic Law: A Comparative Study of Custom during the Geonic Period* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1–15. For a comparison of Maimonidean law, in particular, with Islamic law, see J. Kraemer, "Influences of Islamic Law on

of the two religions raises critical questions regarding the equally important case of Christianity, which exhibited a similar cultural and religious efflorescence in the medieval Islamic world, as well as the problem of the comparative decline of Jewish life under Islam in subsequent centuries.[114]

The most ambitious attempt to come to terms with Goitein's coinage and its impact on a generation of scholars was made of late by Steven Wasserstrom. In his review of scholarship indebted to the notion of "creative symbiosis," followed by a systematic treatment of the subject in his monograph on the Jews of early Islam, Wasserstrom sought to deconstruct the meaning of symbiosis and whether it may yet be salvaged by contemporary historians.[115] In consideration of the power imbalance between the two communities (and its manifold implications) from the earliest period of their coexistence into modern times, Wasserstrom rejected the literal conception of symbiosis as mutual benefit, and likewise dismissed the projection of binary influence as overly simplistic. Yet Wasserstrom was reluctant to abandon the term "symbiosis" altogether, offering a subtler alternative to the current usage. "Symbiosis," he wrote, "as a thinly happy and monovalently positive benefit, did not happen. Its complexity is reduced to *mere* benefit only by a tendentious dilution. It does suggest, however, a view of real relations sufficiently capacious to include the means by which harm helps."[116] Even when each entity views the other as fundamentally illegitimate and detrimental to its own self-conception, Wasserstrom suggests, the very means of engagement and negotiation with one's rival demonstrates a level of mutual accommodation to the realities of coexistence, present in various guises in every age of Jewish–Muslim relations.

> *Jew*, then, served as an essential and necessary catalyst in the self-definition of Islam; and *Muslim*, likewise, operated in synergy with a Jewish effort at

Maimonides: Al-Aḥkām al-Kamsah" (Hebrew). *Te'udah* 10 (1996), 225–44, and G. Libson, "Maimonides' Connection with Islamic Law against the Background of His Age" (Hebrew), in *Maimonides: Conservatism, Originality, Revolution* (Hebrew), ed. A. Ravitzky. (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Institute, 2008), I: 247–94.

[114] On the fruits of Christian culture in medieval Islam, see S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 75–128. On the question of the economic and cultural decline of Judaeo-Arabic culture in the later Middle Ages, with the important exception of the Ottoman revival of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see N. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 64–94, and see the latter's exchange with Cohen in "Myth, Countermyth, and Distortion," *Tikkun* 6 (1993), 60–4, and see N. Stillman, "Judaism and Islam—Fourteen Hundred Years of Intertwined Destiny? An Overview," in *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam: Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions*, ed. M. Laskier and Y. Lev (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 10–20.

[115] See S. Wasserstrom, "Recent Works on the 'Creative Symbiosis' of Judaism and Islam," *RSR* 16 (1990), 43–7, and S. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–12 and 206–37.

[116] See Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 9.

> self-legitimation. The other—whether as myth or as history, image or enemy, precursor or opponent—had its uses. The uses of the other, in the end, produced a kind of symbiotic interdefinition.[117]

In this novel application of the term, symbiosis ceases to correspond to concrete instances of social integration or cultural cross-pollination, but to the grey area of what Wasserstrom calls "modes of accommodation" and of social and literary constructs he describes as "imaginary worldmaking."[118] In this view, the very accommodation to the other and the traces of one tradition on the symbolism and psyche of the other constitutes a form of symbiotic connection—indeed, for Wasserstrom, the *primary* form of such connection present through the centuries. Such a working definition may provide sufficient latitude to warrant the continued use of the term, but only once it has been denuded of the primary connotation originally applied by Goitein. For Goitein, symbiosis was first and foremost a characteristic of mutually beneficial engagement, from economic association to intellectual cooperation. Goitein described this as an outgrowth of the intertwined culture of Mediterranean society—what he called "the physical and educational symbiosis between Muslims and Jews"—noting that the cultural cohesion and economic enterprise shared by both communities was at the same time a product and symbol of their very physical proximity to one another.[119]

In spite of their different conceptions of symbiosis, Goitein and Wasserstrom both viewed the encounter of Judaism and Sufism in thirteenth-century Egypt as the epitome of religious tolerance and of positive Jewish–Islamic symbiosis.[120] Goitein, as already noted, considered Abraham's synthesis of

[117] Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 11.

[118] See Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 10–12 and 207–10.

[119] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:9 and II:289–99. Goitein's emphasis on the dual factors of proximity and culture has been reformulated recently by Miriam Goldstein as the "combination of diachronic kinship and synchronic contiguity." See her introduction to D. Friedenreich and M. Goldstein, ed., *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 2. On the economic culture of the new multifaith bourgeoisie, see S. D. Goitein, "The Rise of the Near-Eastern Bourgeoisie in Early Islamic Times," *CHM* 3 (1956–7), 583–604. Goitein stressed that Jews, Christians, and Muslims tended not only to live in the same neighborhoods, but even in the same housing or apartment complexes. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, II:289–91. There are, nevertheless, a couple of mitigating factors when considering the physical integration of the religious communities. One is the presence of specifically Jewish quarters in some towns and cities in Egypt, noted by Goitein. The relevant documents include TS 12.166, *recto*, l. 7 (*bi-ḥaṭṭ ḥārat al-yahūd*), mentioned by Ashtor, "Number of the Jews" (first part), 18, no. 22, and Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, II:290; TS 12.254, *recto*, margin, ll. 10–11, but see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 589, n. 1; TS 8J 32.4, *verso*, l. 3, on which see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 291. The second mitigating factor is the presence of a Jewish ban on selling property directly to Muslims, a policy that appears to have been largely disregarded in practice. See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, e.g. I:10, no. 7, and 70, no. 44, and II:672, no. 394.

[120] Lazarus-Yafeh also took Abraham Maimonides and the Egyptian pietist movement as the crowning example of what she boldly called "a common Jewish-Muslim culture."

Islamic and Jewish traditions to be "the perfect realization of the religion of his forefathers" and the model of inter-confessional exchange unique to Mediterranean society, declaring that Abraham "stood for everything regarded as praiseworthy in the society described in this book."[121] Wasserstrom, too, found in "the joint mystical tradition of Jewish Sufism" the most striking expression of the ecumenical synergy of the age.[122] In this view, Jewish-Sufi pietism, together with the intellectual partnership of scientists and philosophers, marked the apex of religious symbiosis in the late medieval period.[123] This view, Wasserstrom asserts, constitutes the scholarly consensus and the ineluctable conclusion of anyone acquainted with the field of Jewish-Sufism.

Herein lies the paradox of Egyptian pietism for the history of Jewish-Islamic relations. By all estimations, the encounter of Judaism and Sufism is the most striking manifestation of the spiritual cross-pollination of the two religions. Nothing in the rich history of these two communities even resembles the conscious and forthright integration of Islamic religiosity exhibited by the Jewish pietist movement. Yet it raises important questions of reciprocity implicit in any conception of symbiosis. The bold synthesis and positively open stance to one's chief spiritual rival witnessed in pietist writings from the period under consideration is not paralleled in Islamic sources. Equally vexing is the question of documentation. Other examples of Jewish–Muslim cultural exchange during the medieval period—whether in the form of philosophical speculation, scientific inquiry, or literary expression—are known from a combination of Islamic and Jewish sources (albeit disproportionately Jewish) that provide information on these individuals, and occasionally on their ecumenical gatherings. By contrast, Egyptian pietism, the Jewish movement exhibiting the greatest measure of openness to Islamic religious practice, as opposed to merely secular Arabic culture, is not granted a single mention in the Islamic writings of the time. The information we do possess on the movement and its extensive literature comes exclusively from the Jewish sphere, primarily in the form of literary fragments and private documents emanating from the Cairo Genizah.

See Lazarus-Yafeh, "Judeo-Arabic Culture," 108: "Judeo-Arabic culture should not, therefore, be treated as a Jewish culture which merely expressed itself in Arabic, but as a common Jewish-Muslim culture cultivated by Jews who lived under the rule of Islam, spoke Arabic, and were deeply influenced not only by some spheres of Islamic civilization, such as Muslim philosophy, but by Islam as a religion in its widest sense."

[121] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:495–6 and 474. It should nevertheless be noted that Goitein had earlier suggested a different candidate for the "acme of Jewish-Arab symbiosis": "The most perfect expression of Jewish-Arab symbiosis is not found in the *Arabic* literature of the Jews, but in the *Hebrew* poetry created in Muslim countries, particularly in Spain." See Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, 155.

[122] See Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 233.

[123] See the latter's full discussion: Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 225–35.

All of this raises the thorny question: does the exclusively one-sided nature of "Jewish-Sufi" activity detract from the picture of cultural symbiosis described by Goitein and his successors? Given the multi-pronged complaints to the Sultan's court against Abraham's prayer reforms, it is difficult to believe that members of the Muslim elite and religious leadership were unaware of the spiritual affinity of the pietist movement with its Islamic environment.[124] We are, moreover, informed by no greater a source than Abraham himself that he "has seen" key Sufi rites in Egypt, which he not only described but encouraged his coreligionists to adapt in their own pietist circles.[125] Unfortunately, Abraham describes neither the occasion for, nor the local reaction to, his visit to Sufi devotional meetings, although he testifies elsewhere to theological discussions he personally conducted with local Muslim scholars.[126] While these visits must have made an impression on Muslim clergy and mystics alike, no record of them has been located in contemporaneous Muslim writings. A number of Sufi *shaikh*s are known to have been active in Egypt during the first half of the thirteenth century, one of whom, Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī'l Manṣūr of Fustat (1198–1283), penned a detailed account of the *shaikh*s he encountered during his lifetime. In spite of the personal nature of his treatise, replete with anecdotes and testimonials, the presence of a sizeable Jewish pietist movement active in his own city, closely associated with local Sufi rites and institutions and led by none other than the official head of the Egyptian Jewish community, passes without a single notice.[127]

If the case of Egyptian pietism testifies to the profound Jewish engagement with its Islamic environment, it is also a reminder of the need to exercise appropriate caution, so as to keep the movement within its proper historical perspective. It is highly unusual for Muslim scholars to take an independent interest in internal Jewish developments, let alone to grasp the subtleties of

[124] See esp. TS Ar. 41.105 and TS AS 182.291, published and translated by G. Khan, ed., *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1993), 291–4.

[125] See *HW*, II:322, ll. 5–6 (*wa-ra'aynā al-mutaṣawwifīn min al-islām*), and cf. 320, ll. 2–3 (*shibh al-mutaṣawwifīn fī ayyāminā*), and note also 418, 2–3 (*wa'l-mutaṣawwifīn min al-islām ysta'malūn al-khalawāt*). Encounters with Sufi practices may not always have been attendance at formal rites, but may have been experienced in more informal settings. For an interesting story of a Jewish philosopher, who meets and converses with a practicing Sufi on the role of music in Sufi praxis, see H. Ben-Shammai, "A Philosophical Study Circle on Scripture in Mosul in the Tenth Century" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 41 (1990), 24–5.

[126] See *Perush*, 309–11 (Ex. 19:19), and see my "Respectful Rival," 863, n. 18.

[127] This precious treatise—penned several decades before the organization of the Shādhilīyah, the first native Egyptian brotherhood to take root in the country—was published, with introduction and notes, by Denis Gril in *La* Risāla *de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Ẓāfir*. On Ṣafī al-Dīn and his Sufi activity, see *La* Risāla *de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Ẓāfir*, ed. D. Gril (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1986), 3–9.

theological and mystical musings composed in Judaeo-Arabic.[128] It was far more in keeping with the cultural and linguistic horizons of the religious minority to develop a meaningful, if dialectical, relationship with the spiritual traditions of the host community, rather than vice versa.[129] From all appearances, the spiritual revolution at work in the Jewish community did not, and was unlikely to, appear on the religious radar of the prevailing Muslim majority. If one were to speak of mutual influence at all, as Goitein and subsequently Fenton have argued, it would be in the diachronic interplay of religious traditions rather than the synchronic exchange of religious thinkers.[130] Symbiosis aptly captures the non-sectarian marketplace of ideas and goods, with partnership and exchange across diverse groups, but is less useful as a barometer of religious interaction and mutual influence. To be sure, such personal exchanges most likely did occur between Jewish and Muslim mystics, but the evidence strongly suggests that only one of the two communities actively sought out, and creatively adapted itself to, the spiritual traditions and rites of the other. As impressive as it is in the history of Jewish receptivity to Islamic civilization, Egyptian pietism cannot be taken as a barometer of Jewish-Muslim symbiosis in general, or of mutual interfaith activity in particular.

The conspicuous imbalance reflected in this state of affairs raises a number of methodological and terminological challenges. Methodologically speaking, we would do well to consider the appropriate framework within which to describe the creative, albeit unidirectional, synergy of religious traditions at work in Egyptian pietism. The questions facing us are not new in the burgeoning field of medieval Jewish–Islamic interactions, and they have been recently formulated by Miriam Goldstein in her schematic examination of the meaning and function of religious borders and border crossings. A number of her questions are quite relevant to our discussion in this context: "In what ways were boundaries permeable, and in what ways were they impermeable? In what ways did locally or temporally specific factors affect the nature of such

[128] The chief exception was Maimonides, who elicited a measure of interest among Muslim scholars. On the thirteenth-century Sufi, ibn Hūd, and his instruction of Maimonides' *Guide*, see I. Goldziher, "Ibn Hûd, the Mohammedan Mystic, and the Jews of Damascus," *JQR* (o.s.) 6 (1893), 218–20, and J. Kraemer, "The Andalusian Mystic ibn Hūd and the Conversion of the Jews," *IOS* 12 (1992), 59–73.

[129] This phenomenon has been discussed in the context of the one-sided competition of Iberian Hebrew poetry with its Arabic rival, despite the ignorance of the latter of the very existence of the competition. See A. S. Halkin, "The Medieval Jewish Attitude toward Hebrew," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Altmann (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 233–48.

[130] This is the approach taken by Fenton in his survey, "Judaism and Sufism," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 2003), 755–68, in which he argues for early Jewish influence on Islamic developments, followed by the reverse trend in the medieval period. See also the similar approach taken by Lazarus-Yafeh, "Judeo-Arabic Culture."

interactions?" Equally pertinent is her subsequent question: "[H]ow did individuals involved in these interactions understand or choose to represent their own identity and that of ideas and institutions that originated on the foreign side of the border?"[131]

Our study of thirteenth-century Egyptian pietism has brought these and similar questions home by demonstrating the profound permeability of interreligious borders, even as those borders were continually redefined and refashioned in the process. What was, by all appearances, not accepted Jewish praxis was recast as such by directly and brazenly engaging with Islamic norms. And, by a similar turn of the interreligious mold, what was perceived to be authentically and exclusively Islamic was reimagined as originally and essentially Jewish. While questions of identity and institutions remained firmly fixed on the outside, they were, in the hands of Abraham Maimonides and the broader movement of thirteenth-century Egyptian pietism, subject to internal upheaval and realignment.

The terminological conundrum facing a scholarly examination of Egyptian pietism is no less elusive. Even with the historical and methodological difficulties inherent in such a paradigm, a number of recent scholars have sought to reapply Goitein's concept of symbiosis to the medieval Jewish-Islamic context, or else have redefined the term so as to imply a more abstract framework of coexistence and mutual accommodation.[132] Others have pointed to alternative possibilities with which to describe and categorize the intercultural and interreligious matrix that was the medieval Islamic Near East. Marshall Hodgson's coinage of the term "Islamicate" over "Islamic" to describe the world civilization of the Near East and North Africa during this period has encouraged, in recent years, a more nuanced approach to the active role played by religious minorities in this cultural tapestry and the novel forms and norms that result from this engagement.[133]

[131] See her introduction to Friedenreich and Goldstein, *Beyond Religious Borders*, 2.

[132] Among the former, one can list the late Georges Vajda, who wrote of the "symbiose judéo-musulmane" as a process by which Jewish piety was enriched by the judicious integration of Islamic spirituality. See Vajda, "Mystique juive et mystique musulmane," 38. A more recent parallel is the title of Diana Lobel's important monograph on Baḥya ibn Paqūda, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue*. While Lobel does not explore the significance of dialogue as a paradigm in her work, she described Baḥya as "a key figure in what the great scholar of Genizah literature S. D. Goitein termed 'the Jewish-Arab symbiosis.' Baḥya shows the cross-fertilization of Islamic and Jewish culture at its most creative." Perhaps she has in mind, as she suggested in the case of Baḥya's integration of philosophy and mysticism, an "internal dialogue," rather than one that was in fact bidirectional. See D. Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda's* Duties of the Heart (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), xiii. The primary example of the redefinition of symbiosis is that of Wasserstrom, on which see pp. 31–33.

[133] For his coinage of the expression "Islamicate civilization," see M. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vol. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), I:57–60, and see Goldstein's discussion in Friedenreich and Goldstein, *Beyond Religious Borders*, 2–3.

A number of other terminological contenders have emerged to fill the void, each with a slightly different emphasis.[134] I will briefly address two in this context, each of which, coincidentally, borrows from the theoretical discourse of postcolonial studies. The first example, raised by Nathan Hofer in a recent dissertation on Sufism in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt, conceives of the Jewish pietists as "subaltern Sufis," alluding to their status as minorities "of inferior rank or station," who nevertheless exercise their spiritual agency in the social and intellectual sphere.[135] With the language of political domination and minority self-assertion as his frame of reference, Hofer goes one step further, arguing that the Egyptian pietists "were taking up these institutional models for a revolutionary end," aimed at "the liberation of the people of Israel from foreign rule."[136] Within this framework, the entire pietist project is reinterpreted as a "hidden transcript," harboring the secret ambition "to upend the political and social order."[137] Given that neither Abraham Maimonides nor anyone in his circle openly claimed such a revolutionary end in their writings, the hypothesis that they harbored such a hidden agenda remains just that. While intriguing, it appeals to the same spirit of esotericism applied in a very different vein to the elder Maimonides, to whom a number of medieval and modern scholars have attributed a covert intellectual agenda.[138]

Another approach, primarily associated with the work of Homi Bhabha, adopts the language of "hybridity" to address modes of acculturation and engagement with the dominant culture.[139] Even more than symbiosis, hybridity has recently commanded a strong cachet in Jewish cultural studies and has elicited a sustained response in turn.[140] According to Jonathan Decter, working on the medieval Andalusian context, the advantage of hybridity lies in its evocation of the power dynamics implicit between majority and minority cultures. As Decter put it, "the shortcoming of this reading [of *convivencia* in the Iberian context] lies in its failure to account for the role of power in the production of cultural forms," a problem that belies any effort to equate

[134] The passive versus active connotations of various terms of choice among scholars have recently been examined by James Montgomery in "Islamic Crosspollinations," in *Islamic Crosspollinations: Interactions in the Medieval Middle East*, ed. A. Akasoy et al. (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007), 148–93.

[135] See N. Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society in Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1309." Dissertation, Emory University, 2011, 223.

[136] See Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society in Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt," 220.

[137] See Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society in Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt," 224, and n. 25, on the language of a "hidden transcript."

[138] On the esoteric reading of Maimonides, see A. Ravitzky, "Maimonides: Esotericism and Educational Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. K. Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 300–23.

[139] See H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), e.g. 34–5, 110–11, 114–15.

[140] See the reflections of M. Rosner, *How Jewish is Jewish History?* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 94–110.

engagement with mutual respect and tolerance.[141] Hybridity, he argues, has the advantage of capturing the complex power dynamic, whether subversive (in the case of the colonized) or manipulative (in the case of the colonizer), in the production and propagation of culture. Despite its importation from the postcolonial to the medieval context, Decter maintains that hybridity "accounts for the new cultural forms that inhere in and emerge through the relationship between political bodies of disparate power, be they the colonizer and the colonized or the conqueror and the conquered."[142]

Decter's and Hofer's approaches, for all their differences, both seek to address the problem of power and powerlessness in the equation of interfaith engagement and estrangement. In the case of Egyptian pietism, it must be acknowledged, they address the subtle mechanism by which Islam was perceived as the historical foil to the messianic unfolding of events in Jewish sacred history. Islam, as we shall we see in Chapter six, was conceived as a mere (if vital) intermediary between the original state of Jewish religious life in antiquity and its ultimate restoration in the anticipated future epoch.[143] But, even as it seeks to resolve one set of challenges, the application of postcolonial theory to the medieval context raises still more vexing problems. Precisely because of the political undercurrent of this discourse, it threatens to reduce a rich and dynamic phenomenon in the history of religions to a struggle for political emancipation, on the one hand, or the political agenda of cultural expression, on the other.[144] As Moshe Rosner has observed, a consequence of applying the postcolonial discourse to the premodern Jewish context is that "Jewish culture is always [imagined] in a hierarchical relationship with the culture of the Other, with the Jew in the inferior position . . . [thereby] owing its evolutionary position to energy supplied by the encounter with the hegemony."[145]

In the pages that follow, I seek to address the extraordinary rise and inner life of the Egyptian pietist movement in the first half of the thirteenth century. The creative engagement with the dominant Islamic culture was always present, even when unspoken, and we shall frequently call attention to the Sufi subtext of Jewish pietism, while striving not to reduce its spiritual

[141] See J. Decter, "Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Fakhkhār al-Yahūdī: An Arabic Poet and Diplomat in Castile and the Maghrib," in *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. D. Friedenreich and M. Goldstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 104.

[142] See Decter, "Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Fakhkhār al-Yahūdī," 105.

[143] On messianism as a motivating factor or theological principle in Egyptian pietism, and the role of Islam in Israel's sacred history, see the discussion in Chapter 6, in which I also address Hofer's thesis of "sulbaltern" Sufism.

[144] It must be noted that Decter's primary interest in hybridity was in the cooption of a cultural form of the minority by those in a position of power. See Decter, "Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Fakhkhār al-Yahūdī," 104–6.

[145] See Rosner, *How Jewish is Jewish History?*, 97.

synthesis and religious renewal to a set of political calculations. In the end, no single term or concept can fully address the creative expression of pietism that so animated Jewish society and that left its mark in numerous manuscripts and fragments from medieval Egypt. A nuanced examination of the pietist sources on their own terms, drawing as far as possible on their own definitions and perceptions, has been my guiding principle throughout this work. Jewish society in thirteenth-century Egypt reflects the dynamic re-examination by a venerable community of its foundational texts and traditions, even of its very identity and institutions, viewed and reviewed in the full light of its Islamic environment. The historical legacy of this religious synthesis belongs at once to the realm of Jewish culture, in all its diversity and dynamism, as well as to the broader spiritual orbit of Islamicate civilization.

Part 1

Social Foundations

1

The Making of a Movement

The profound impact of Arabic civilization on Jewish society, from the tenth through the mid-thirteenth century, has been richly documented in nearly every domain of Jewish cultural creativity in the realm of Islam.[1] In contrast to the Jews of northern Europe of the same period, who generally speaking did not immerse themselves in the literary and intellectual life of Christendom, the Jewish communities of the Arab world engaged directly with Arabic literature and scientific trends, contributing to—and even competing with—the best of their cultural environment.[2] What makes this Judaeo-Arabic integration historically significant is not only the creative adaptation of intellectual trends in Islamic civilization, but the open posture of its leaders, a number of whom actively promoted a model of cultural receptivity in their respective communities. Moses Maimonides, who urged Jewish readers of his ethics to "listen to the truth from whomever utters it," and Moses ibn Ezra, who encouraged his coreligionists to read the Qur'an as a brilliant work of literature, are two outstanding examples of this open posture.[3]

[1] See the synopsis by Scheindlin on this topic, "Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets: Judeo-Arabic Culture in the Golden Age of Islam," in *Cultures of the Jews*, ed. D. Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), II: 11–84.

[2] For a balanced treatment of Jewish–Christian cultural exchange in Latin Europe beyond the confines of literary and intellectual life, see R. Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 158–92, and see I. Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," in *Cultures of the Jews*, ed. D. Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), II: 147–214. The extent of cultural integration was even more complex in Provence and Christian Spain. On the former, see the study by I. Twersky, "Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry," *JWH* 11 (1968), 185–207. On the latter, see Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, I: 236–42.

[3] For Maimonides' remark (*wa'sma' al-ḥaqq mi-man qālahu*), an allusion to his indebtedness to the philosophical and ethical writings of al-Farabi in his "Eight Chapters," see his introduction to the latter in *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Y. Shailat (Jerusalem: Ma'aliyot, 1992), 375. See H. Davidson, "Maimonides' 'Shemonah Peraqim' and Alfarabi's 'Fuṣūl Al-Madanī'," *PAAJR* 31 (1963), 33–50 on al-Farabi's influence on Maimonidean ethics, and S. Stroumsa, *Maimonides in his World: A Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 11–12, on the philosophical counsel to accept the truth from any source. For Moses ibn Ezra's comments on the Qur'an, see his treatise on Hebrew poetics, *Abū Harūn Mosheh ben Ya'aqov ibn 'Ezra: Kitāb al-Muḥāḍarah wa'l-Mudhākarah*, ed. A. S. Halkin

The first Jewish scholar to considerably extend the culture of receptivity beyond Arabic letters to include Islamic religious life was the eleventh-century judge of Saragossa, Baḥya ibn Paquda, who explicitly drew "from the saints and sages of every society" in a work bearing the deep imprint of Sufi pietism.[4] A turn toward the ascetic ideal has recently been observed in the poetry of the Iraqi Jewish exilarch, David b. Hezekiah, who flourished in the first half of the eleventh century, and it has been suggested that this is evidence for Jewish-Sufi expression in the east, predating Baḥya by several decades.[5] While it is still impossible to ascertain the extent to which the poetry ought to be taken as evidence of a burgeoning "Jewish-Sufi" literature or a more extensive pietist practice, it is quite suggestive of the receptivity to ascetic and pietist ideals, of which the Sufis were the chief exemplars in their time.[6]

In Iberia, ascetic currents were known in Jewish society even before Baḥya,[7] and continued to leave their mark on Andalusian Jewish literature for another

(Jerusalem: Mekīze Nirdamim, 1975), e.g. 36–8, 296. While there is little other information on Jews reading the Qur'an in Iberia, apart from the polemical asides of Ibn Ḥazm against Samuel ibn Naghrela, we do possess evidence of Jewish interest in the Qur'an from the Cairo Genizah, including a twelfth-century fragment of the Qur'an copied in Hebrew characters, TS Ar. 51.62.

[4] See Baḥya ibn Paqūda, *Kitāb al-Hidāyah ilā Farā'iḍ al-Qulūb, Maqor ve-Targum*, ed. Y. Qafiḥ (Jerusalem: Yad Mahari Qafiḥ, 1991), 36. On Baḥya and his Sufi sources, see *Al-Hidājah ilā Farā'iḍ al-Qulūb des Bachja ibn Jōsēf ibn Paqūda aus Andalusien*, ed. A. S. Yahuda (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1912), II:1–113, G. Vajda, *La théologie ascétique de Baḥya ibn Paquda* (Paris: Impr. nationale, 1947), D. H. Baneth, "Jehuda Hallewi und al-Ghazali," *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins zur Gründung und Erhaltung einer Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 5 (1924), 27–45, A. Goldreich, "Possible Arabic Sources for the Distinction between 'Duties of the Heart' and 'Duties of the Limbs'" (Hebrew), *Te'udah* 6 (1988), and D. Lobel, *A Sufi–Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda's* Duties of the Heart (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007)—the most complete treatment of Baḥya to date. The possibility of Baḥya's influence on Andalusian Hebrew poetry was discussed by A. Mirsky, *From Duties of the Heart to Songs of the Heart: Jewish Philosophy and Ethics and Their Influence on Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Spain* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992).

[5] See T. Beeri, *Le-David Mizmor: The Liturgical Poems of David Ha-Nasi Son of Hezekiah the Exilarch* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 2009), 67–76, and N. Ilan, "Reflections on the Beginning of Jewish-Sufi Literature" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 129 (2012), 148–9, 154–5, and his earlier remarks, "Jewish-Sufi Literature: Between Influence and Inspiration" (Hebrew), in *Turim: Studies in Jewish History and Literature Presented to Dr. Bernard Lander*, ed. M. A. Shmidman (New York: Touro College Press, 2007), I: 4–6.

[6] On the possibility that David ha-Nasi may have alluded to discrete practices known from the thirteenth-century Egyptian context, see Beeri, *Le-David Mizmor*, 102–7 (no. 8), and Beeri's reference to Friedman's observation on this poem, *Le-David Mizmor*, 76, n. 53. Ilan also raised the possibility that this may reflect an ascetic strain under the influence of Sufism, rather than Jewish-Sufism proper. See Ilan, "Reflections on the Beginning of Jewish-Sufi Literature," 148, 155. See also Beeri's remarks on the strong possibility of Sufi influence on the *zuhdīyāt* poetry of the east in her "Zuhdiyyot from the Cairo Geniza: The Poems of Judah Ha-Kohen ha-Rav" (Hebrew), *DI* 26–7 (2009–10), 364, 370, 373.

[7] See the letter of Se'adiah Gaon to what appears to have been an Andalusian community, published by B. Revel, "Epistle of Rav Se'adiah Gaon" (Hebrew), *Devir* 6 (1923), 183–8, including 185, 1, *verso*, l. 25 to 2, *recto*, l. 3, on fasting and prayer. The letter may have been a rebuke of Karaite practice or its influence in the Rabbinite camp, but it is just as likely that it was an indictment of Sufi-inspired pietism in the Jewish community. Assuming the tenth and last

century, not always with the explicit acknowledgement of Islamic influence exhibited in the latter's work.[8] This is particularly clear in the thought of Judah Halevi, whose striking use of Sufi terms for mystical experience was never attributed by its author to its original source.[9] Halevi's contemporary, Moses ibn Ezra, who, as already noted, advocated a literary–intellectual synthesis with the best of the Arab world, balked at receptivity to Islamic religiosity per se. In his view, religion was the one sphere deemed impregnable from outside influence: "From the time our kingdom was destroyed and our people dispersed . . . we followed in the ways [of other nations] and adopted their customs, assumed their manners and spoke their languages . . . The one exception is in matters of religion and in [observance of] the statutes of the Torah."[10]

Despite these reservations, Jews from Iberia to Iraq in the second half of the twelfth and first half of the thirteenth centuries increasingly drew from Sufi models of ascetic piety, including adopting supererogatory prayer, strict regimens of fasting, and solitary retreats in the desert and mountainside. An intriguing source for the Jewish attraction to Sufism appears in an early work of Maimonides. In the introduction to his commentary on Mishnah Avot (generally known as the Eight Chapters), Maimonides noted certain "saintly individuals," who adopt a discipline of "fasting, nightly vigils, abstention from meat and wine, separation from women, wearing wool and haircloth, dwelling in the mountains, and secluding themselves in the deserts." While acknowledging the genuine piety of those who adopt this discipline with the intention of curing their vices through a severe mode of therapy, Maimonides proceeded to mock those Jews of his day who merely "imitate the other nations . . . tormenting their bodies and renouncing pleasures as a

treatise of Se'adiah's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* is genuine, it too points to the author's critique of the extreme asceticism and devotionalism practiced by the Sufis of his day. See I. Efros, "Saadia's General Ethical Theory and its Relation to Sufism," *JQR* 57 (1967), esp. 172–7.

[8] The works of Joseph ibn 'Aqnīn, written in Fez, reveal the direct influence of Sufi ideas, and reference Sufi classics, although no more than other Arab authors and poets. See P. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 2003), 757, and A. S. Halkin, "Ibn 'Aḳnīn's Commentary on the Song of Songs," in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 405–6, 415. For the use of Sufi works on love of God by Jews of the period, see P. Fenton, "Deux traités musulmans d'amour mystique en transmission judeo-arabe," *Arabica* 37 (1990), 47–55. A debated example of Sufi influence is that of the liturgical love and ascetic Hebrew poetry of Solomon ibn Gabirol. See I. Levin, *Ha-Sod ve-ha-yesod: Megamot shel mistorin be-shirato shel Shelomoh ibn Gabirol* (Lod: Haberman Institute, 1986), 92–136, and R. Scheindlin, "Ibn Gabirol's Religious Poetry and Sufi Poetry," *Sefarad* 54 (1994), 109–41.

[9] See D. Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's* Kuzari (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), *passim*.

[10] *Kitāb al-muḥāḍarah*, 48. Ibn Ezra's sentiment echoes the classical rabbinic dictum regarding gentile influence (Lam. Rabbah, 2.13): "If you are told there is wisdom among the nations, believe it . . . [but if you are told] there is Torah among the nations, do not believe it."

regular discipline for the body's endurance . . . "[11] The extent to which Sufi asceticism had penetrated Jewish pietist ideals during this period, from one end of the Islamic world to the other, can be observed in Judah al-Ḥarizi's praise of 'Imrān al-Hītī, an Iraqi Jew from Karkh, who would "retreat [to] God in solitary devotion, spending all of his days in fasting (*bi'l-ṣiyām*) and his nights in prayer vigil (*bi'l-qiyām*)."[12]

The Jewish embrace of Sufi ideals began a new chapter in Egypt with the birth of a movement of Jewish pietism, led principally by Abraham, son of Maimonides, and his colleagues in Fustat and Alexandria. With the Egyptian Jewish pietist movement, the Judaeo-Arabic cultural synthesis that had flourished over the preceding two centuries reached its most intimate expression as the Jewish embrace not of Arabic letters but of Islamic piety. This chapter explores the early trajectory of Egyptian Jewish pietism, recently dubbed "Jewish-Sufism" on account of its adoption of Sufi models.[13] The history of Jewish pietism in Egypt must be reconstructed from the trail of available sources, both documentary and literary, which present two distinct challenges for such an undertaking. The first is the fragmentary nature of the source material, forcing the historian to proceed with caution. There are clear gaps in our information, where the realm of certainty ends and that of possibility and speculation begin. A great deal of our source material emanates from the famed Cairo Genizah, which offers a snapshot of developments in Egypt proper, with only the possibility (occasionally confirmed by other sources) that its fragments are indicative of developments in the wider Mediterranean or Muslim world.

The second difficulty thrust upon us by our sources concerns the chronological scope of a historical reconstruction. While a good number of primary

[11] *Haqdamot ha-Rambam*, ed. Shailat, 382–3. Maimonides critiqued those who adopt ascetic practices "thinking that . . . God hates the body, desiring its destruction and ruin" (*Haqdamot ha-Rambam*, ed. Shailat, 382). Maimonides' comments are especially interesting in light of his son's inclination toward this spiritual discipline. Abraham never referred to his father's qualified critique of asceticism in his extant writings. On the place of "piety" (*ḥasidut*) and "beyond the letter of the law" (*lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*) in Maimonides' writings, see the recent study by B. Septimus, "Structure and Argument in the Book of Knowledge" (Hebrew), in *Ha-Rambam: Shamranut, meqoriyut, mahapkhanut*, ed. A Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Institute, 2008), I: 227–9, 238–42. For a separate allusion to Jewish pietist practice in Maimonides' later writings, see my discussion of nightly prayer on pp. 102–3.

[12] See J. Blau, *Kitāb al-durar: A Book in Praise of God and the Israelite Communities* (Hebrew), ed. J. Blau, P. Fenton, and Y. Yahlom (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2009), 210–12, no. 38, ll. 1–10, esp. 3 and 9–10.

[13] Among the more historically credible etymologies of the term "Sufi" is its derivation from the Arabic term for wool (*ṣūf*), traditionally worn by early Sufis, on which see Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, 5, and A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 14. The designations "Jewish-Sufi" and "Jewish-Sufism" were coined by Paul Fenton, on which see p. 127, n. 199. In view of the nomenclature of the practitioners of the movement, who referred to themselves as "pietists" (*ḥasidim*), I generally designate the devotees not as Jewish-Sufis but as pietists.

sources on the pietist movement (written either by members or opponents) cannot be dated with certainty, those which can be dated (whether from an actual date or based on internal evidence) hail overwhelmingly from the first half of the thirteenth century, when the movement was rapidly expanding, reached its peak of creativity and productivity, and generated the greatest controversy in the Jewish community. I will occasionally refer to a fragment associated with the movement that bears the marks of the early thirteenth century but that lacks a clear date or other marker to anchor it securely in the period. Any reconstruction of Egyptian Jewish pietism must contend with the difficulty of achieving chronological precision, and this effort is no exception. But, as the Talmud reminds us, a judge can only render a judgment based on the evidence at hand.[14] With all the caveats just mentioned, the combination of documentary, literary, and juridical sources from the thirteenth century tell a compelling story that, while far from exhaustive, may point the way forward and provide a foundation for future efforts.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Individual Jewish pietists were active in Egypt in the late twelfth century, if not earlier, although the details regarding this early activity remain opaque. By the time information on Egyptian pietism begins to swell in the documentary and literary sources, from the turn of the thirteenth century, it is already depicted as a vibrant, popular, and multifaceted movement. Among the earliest information we possess on the movement already attests to a diverse assortment of practices and emerging mystical literature, together with a recognizable spiritual leadership. A key letter, which can be dated to the first or second decade of the thirteenth century, heaps praise on the leaders and practitioners of the nascent movement, whose commentaries reveal "the inner meaning of scripture" (*sod perush ha-miqra*),[15] and whose practices include "arising at night and fasting during the day as on the day of atonement . . . purifying their souls, polishing their bodies,[16] removing the chaff of their hearts, and purging the dross of their minds. How exalted is their state—these and many similar things

[14] See BT Sanhedrin 6b.

[15] A number of Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī'ʿ's commentaries were cited by his colleague, Abraham Maimonides, in the latter's commentary to Genesis and Exodus and in the *Compendium*. See, e.g., *Perush*, 377–81, and *HW*, II:418, ll. 6–10. Fragments of his lost commentary on the Song of Songs have been published by P. Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," *JSS* 26 (1981), 50–2, and P. Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary to Song of Songs in the Hand of R. David ben Joshua Maimuni" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 69 (2000), 580–3. For a further citation of this letter in connection with pietist practices, see p. 103.

[16] Lit. "rendering their bodies as pure as crystal," on which term see p. 103, n. 76.

are found among them! At their head is . . . Abraham the Pious . . . and [his brother] Joseph . . . "[17]

A number of signs point to a newly burgeoning movement from the early thirteenth century, with a leadership and activity emanating largely from Fustat. In the letter just cited, the group is described as performing certain common rites, which together came to define its ascetic orientation and indebtedness to Sufi practice—most notably prayer by night, fasting by day, and spiritual discipline under the guidance of one or more recognized masters. But other signs of the vibrancy of the nascent movement abound. Its creativity and productivity can be gleaned from the long trail of Genizah fragments (including some nearly complete manuscripts) emanating from the first half of the thirteenth century, including multiple copies of Sufi writings and original pietist works written by members of the circle in Egypt.[18] The social status of individuals associated with the pietist movement suggests that its influence could be felt in every level of Egyptian Jewish society, gaining critical acceptance not only among the poorer strata of the community but also among influential members of the establishment.[19]

Maimonides' remarks on Jewish ascetics in his Mishnah commentary, composed between 1161 and 1168, cannot be used to infer activity in Egypt with absolute certainty, as Maimonides composed much if not most of his commentary en route, and completed it after settling in Egypt.[20] As we do not know precisely when Maimonides arrived in Egypt, nor in what order he composed his commentary, it is impossible to verify which group of Jews Maimonides had in mind when writing these lines. Nevertheless, the autograph

[17] TS 20.148, *recto*, ll. 4, 10–15, 22, 30. In a reference to this letter, Fenton rendered some abridged lines to the effect that "many are their followers and at their head is Abraham the Pious." See Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 48, n. 3. If this reading is correct, it would indicate a wide following belonging to Abraham the Pious (and his brother) at the beginning of the thirteenth century. My own reading of these difficult lines is somewhat different. Following a long (though in the main rather vague) description of pietist practices, the letter writer observed: "These and many similar things are found among them (*ka-henah rabbot 'imam*)" (*recto*, ll. 15–22). I am led in this translation by the writer's choice of *rabbot* rather than *rabbim*. Even though *rabbot* is part of the rhyme scheme of the poetic prose (*maqāmah*), it is difficult to see how it can be rendered "many people." Fenton elsewhere wrote that Abraham the Pious was described as "the head of the pietists" in TS 20.44 (published by E. J. Worman, "Two Book-Lists from the Cambridge Genizah Fragments," *JQR*, o.s., 20 (1908), 460–3), although I could not discover this epithet in the original document. See P. Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqala al-Hawdiyya* (London: The Octagon Press, 1981), 57, n. 32. He may have intended 20.148 instead of 20.44.

[18] See Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 5–6, and cf. Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 69.

[19] As we shall see below, pp. 70–88, the nascent movement also had its share of powerful and outspoken opponents.

[20] See Maimonides' codicil to his Mishnah commentary in *Mishnah 'im Perush Rabbenu Mosheh ben Maimon: Maqor ve-Targum*, ed. Y. Qafiḥ (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1963–8), VII:737–8.

manuscript of the commentary bears much evidence of editing and revision by the author throughout his life. Given the importance of Egypt as the center of the pietist movement in the coming decades, there is good reason to assume that Maimonides had his Egyptian coreligionists in mind when alluding to a band of Sufi-influenced Jewish ascetics in his day. This would fit well with an organic model of development for Egyptian pietism, beginning with individual ascetics and only gradually organizing along institutional lines with discrete master–disciple circles.[21]

In light of these sources, the Egyptian pietist movement should not be viewed as the creation of any specific individual, but as a slow development originating in a groundswell of individual ascetics that only gradually organized into a unified movement under the direction of influential masters with defined discipleship circles. As the reference to the leadership of Abraham "the Pious" (ibn Abī'l-Rabī') and his brother Joseph illustrates, Abraham Maimonides was not the first pietist figure to emerge as a major leader and spokesman of the movement. It is significant, however, that while the Nagid described ibn Abī'l-Rabī' as his colleague (*ṣāḥib*), he never referred to the elder pietist as his master or teacher.[22] It is likewise clear that Abraham Maimonides had already established his own pietist circle by 1205, which met in his academy for worship and presumably pietist fellowship under his guidance.[23] As we shall see in our discussion of his efforts to revitalize synagogue worship, the Nagid did initiate a number of pietist practices of his own as he sought to give shape to a dynamic and increasingly diverse movement.[24] His dispute with Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah in the 1220s over the synthesis of pietism and rationalism is an example of the Nagid's efforts to define a movement that had grown too unwieldy for any single individual, no matter how influential, to mold in his own image.[25]

[21] Earlier references in the Genizah to Egyptian ascetics, both male and female, indicate that they acted on an individual basis and adopted the name "nazirite" rather than "pietist." See TS NS J 251 (*nazir*) and TS 13 J 8.11, *verso* (*nezirah*), and cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, II:461 and 429 respectively, and III:352–3.

[22] See *HW*, II:290, l. 17. In addition to Ibn Abī'l-Rabī', note also the pietist activity of his father-in-law, Ḥananel b. Samuel, discussed above, and possibly also Maimonides' brother-in-law, Mishael b. 'Uzziel, an admirer of the pietists, if not one himself. See MS Frankfurt a. M., published by J. Horovitz, "Ein arabische Brief an R. Chananel," *ZHB* 4 (1900), 155–6, and reproduced by S. D. Goitein, "R. Ḥananel the Chief Judge, Son of Samuel ha-Nadiv, Brother-in-Law of Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 50 (1981), 379–80, in which he referred to Ḥananel's residence as "one of piety and of asceticism" (*al-wari'ī al-zāhidī*), among other epithets.

[23] See TS 16.187, published by S. D. Goitein, "The Renewal of the Controversy over the 'Reshut' after the Appointment of R. Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, ed. S. Löwinger and J. Somogyi (Budapest: n.p., 1948–58), vol. II, 52.

[24] See *SM*, 79.

[25] For the pietist critique of Maimonidean rationalism in Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah's *Taqwīm al-adyān*, see P. Fenton, "Daniel Ibn al-Māšiṭa's *Taqwīm al-Adyān*: New light on the original phase of the Maimonidean controversy," in *Geniza Research after Ninety Years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 74–81, and my "Between Politics

Among the most intriguing theories on the early background to the pietist movement, made nearly half a century ago by S. D. Goitein, raises questions as to the meaning of the terms "pietist" and "pietism." Goitein argued that Abraham's interest in pietism may have originated from his mother's side of the family. The operating question behind Goitein's hypothesis was how Abraham became the most eloquent spokesman of a pietist revival so severely criticized by his father.[26] On the basis of a newly discovered Genizah fragment, Goitein suggested that Abraham was exposed to pietist tendencies by his maternal relatives or from a family tradition on his mother's side. The fragment in question consists of a genealogical list of Abraham's maternal line, in which many of the names were followed by the epithet "pious" (*ḥasid*).[27] In Goitein's estimation, "It follows that Abraham Maimonides' maternal side of the family was well known for its devotion to pietism, and we may infer that our [Abraham] continued this venerable tradition and gave both theoretical expression to it in his books and practical expression to it in his mode of conduct in his pietist circle."[28]

The genealogical list discovered by Goitein is identical to another list published over forty years earlier by Jacob Mann, with the exception that Goitein's list includes the pietist epithets.[29] Goitein's hypothesis rests on the assumption that the more detailed list is by definition the more authentic, and hence the original of the two. Its repeated mention of "pious" and "crown of the pious" (*pe'er he-ḥasidim*) is unlike any other genealogical list of its kind—another argument for its authenticity. According to this view, "pious" would be better read as "pietist" (the same Hebrew term), in so far as we are dealing not with a mere personal characteristic but with a conscious mode of living devoted to piety. Goitein's theory is an attractive explanation for Abraham's apparent deviation from his father's doctrine of moderation, but the chief

and Piety: Abraham Maimonides and his Times," Dissertation, Harvard University, 2009, 115–20. Ibn al-Māshiṭah's traditionalist critique and Abraham Maimonides' response requires a sustained analysis, to which I intend to return in a separate context.

[26] My personal contention is that Maimonides' remarks on Jewish asceticism in the Eight Chapters should not be interpreted as a generalized critique of asceticism or of pietism per se. This is, however, a larger and more complex topic than can be treated in a footnote. I intend to revisit this question on a separate occasion.

[27] The fragment, TS Box K 15.68, was published and discussed by S. D. Goitein in "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 33 (1964), 181–4.

[28] See Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 182. Goitein's proposal was accepted by M. A. Friedman, "Two Maimonidean Documents: A Letter from Maimonides to the Sage, R. Samuel, and an Epistle of Congratulations to Maimonides on the Occasion of His Wedding" (Hebrew), in *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, E. Fleischer et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), 206. See also M. Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought*, tr. J. Linsider (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 39.

[29] See TS 8 K 22.6, published by J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1970; reprint of 1920–2 London edition), II:319.

obstacle to its acceptance lies not in the Maimonidean family but in the manuscript in question. As Paul Fenton has shown, the scribe who wrote the fragment discovered by Goitein, Joseph b. Solomon ha-Levi, was active at the end of the thirteenth century.[30] Given that the genealogical list only extends to the end of the twelfth century, more than a century before Joseph b. Solomon, it stands to reason that the more minimal list was the original of the two. For the compiler of the original list, the term *ḥasid* (which appears only once) was a mere honorific for a pious individual and not a mark of affiliation with a movement that, at the time, was still in its infancy. By the end of the thirteenth century, after key members of the Maimonidean dynasty were known both as practitioners and proponents of Egyptian pietism, Joseph b. Solomon attached the newly significant epithets (*ḥasid* and *ḥasidim*) to previous generations.[31]

It is in this context that we ought to clarify the term "pietism" as a concept and as an indicator of social and religious movements. As has already become apparent, the term "piety" is easily confused with "pietist," particularly given that the two are translations of the same Hebrew word. The difference lies in the social construction of the two terms. When externally attributed to an individual as an expression of religious reverence, *ḥasidut* connotes piety. When it is self-described, designating for the individual an ideal way of life directed to the attainment of piety, it is better translated as pietism.[32] We may add that medieval Jewish pietism typically manifested itself in additional legal strictures and a maximalist approach to religious devotion.[33] But as Soloveitchik stressed in the German example, such common principles alone did not a pietist movement make. It is the manifestation of unique *forms* of pietism, expressed in outer bearing and special disciplines, typically though not always organized around a charismatic leadership and geographic setting, which gives a particular case the trappings of a social movement, rather than an interior orientation. It is precisely the social dimension, consisting of

[30] See Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 6, and *Deux traités de mystique juive* (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1987), 37. It is interesting, however, that Fenton accepts Goitein's theory despite the dating of the scribe. See also M. A. Friedman, "The ibn al-Amshāṭī Family, In-Laws of Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Zion* 69 (2004), 276.

[31] This is not to imply that there was not interest in pietism among the in-laws of Maimonides during his lifetime and that of his son. Maimonides' brother-in-law, Mishael b. 'Uzziel, for example, was an admirer of the pietists, on which see MS Frankfurt a. M., published by Horovitz, "Ein arabischer Brief an R. Chananel," 155–6, and reproduced by Goitein, "R. Ḥananel the Chief Judge," 379–80. As noted above, Mishael referred to Ḥananel's residence as one of "piety and asceticism" (*al-war'ī wa'l-zāhidī*), attributes indicating more than formulaic praise.

[32] See I. Marcus, "The Politics and Ethics of Pietism in Judaism: The *Hasidim* of Medieval Germany," *JRE* 8 (1980), 227–8, I. Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1, and H. Soloveitchik, "Piety, Pietism, and German Pietism: *Sefer Ḥasidim I* and the Influence of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz," *JQR* 92 (2002), 473.

[33] Soloveitchik emphasized this aspect of German pietism in "Three Themes in the *Sefer Ḥasidim*," *AJS Review* 1 (1976), 311–30.

spiritual masters and cadres of loyal disciples and bearing the unmistakable marks of its spiritual environment, that sets Egyptian Jewish pietism apart from parallel movements.[34]

In the social and spiritual realms alike, Jewish pietist leaders in Egypt followed the increasingly ubiquitous model of Sufism, which had already gained a strong foothold in the country despite the lack of an indigenous Egyptian order.[35] As already noted, the Cairo Genizah testifies to local Jewish interest in classical Sufi treatises from this time, but the pietists did not have to look far to observe Sufi institutions in practice. From the latter part of the twelfth century, the new Ayyubid government in Cairo led by Salāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin) lent its administrative and financial support to local Sufi institutions and brotherhoods, among other philanthropic projects.[36] By the early thirteenth century, as attested by the Fustat *shaikh*, Ṣafī al-Dīn, Egypt had become a center of Sufi activity not only in isolated circles but in the public sphere.[37] We have direct testimony of pietists personally observing Sufi rites in the first half of the thirteenth century and an explicit acknowledgement of adopting similar, if not identical, rites in their own circles.[38] In many instances, Sufi terms were adopted by the pietists in their original forms, while in others cases Hebrew terms were applied in novel ways, as with *derekh* roughly supplanting

[34] For a comparison of the German and Egyptian pietist movements, see P. Fenton, "Deux écoles piétistes: les *hasidei Ashkenaz* et les soufis juifs d'Égypte," *La société juive à travers l'histoire, Tome premier: La fabrique du people*, ed. S. Trigano (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1992), 200–25.

[35] Egypt in the early thirteenth century was home to a number of Sufi orders, as well as independent master–disciple circles, but it was not until the Shādhilites that Egypt was home to an indigenous order, organized and systematized by the energetic *shaikh*, Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309). On Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh and the Shadhilite order, see Nwyia, *Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance de la confrérie shâdilite: edition critique et traduction des Hikam, précédées d'une introduction sur le soufisme et suivies de notes sur le vocabulaire mystique* (Beirut: Dār el-Machreq, 1972).

[36] For an interesting report on Saladin's role in the establishment of numerous Sufi institutions in Egypt, see the remarks of Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī around 1204, only a decade after Saladin's death, in *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return (Merṣād al-ʿebād men al-mabdā' elā'l-maʿād): A Sufi Compendium*, tr. H. Algar (North Haledon, N.J.: Islamic Publication International, 2003), 429–30. On the date of composition of Rāzī's *Merṣād al-ʿibād* (1223), see *The Path of God's Bondsmen*, tr. Algar, 12. For recent studies on Saladin's philanthropic donations to religious institutions, see M. Winter, "Saladin's Religious Personality, Policy, and Image," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. J. Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 313–14, and Y. Lev, "Saladin's Economic Policies and the Economy of Ayyubid Egypt," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermeulen and K. D'Hulster (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), V: 334–40, and see also J. S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 9–10, 16–18, 44–6. On the rise of the *khanqah* in Egypt, which proliferated among the Shadhilites in the Mamluk period, see L. Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamluk Egypt: The Khanqah* (Berlin: Klau Schwarz, 1988).

[37] See *La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Ẓāfir*, ed. D. Gril (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1986), 26–31, 69–76.

[38] See *HW*, 266, ll. 4–5, 9–10, and 322, ll. 5–7.

ṭarīqah as a designation for the spiritual path[39] and, most significantly, the term *ḥasid* replacing *ṣūfī* as the chief appellation of the devotee.[40]

BETWEEN THE MARGINS AND THE MAINSTREAM

The rapid rise of a Jewish pietist movement in early thirteenth-century Egypt calls for explanation. Two distinct possibilities present themselves. According to the first view, the initial success of the pietist movement was a function of its novelty. Its mystical orientation, according to this interpretation, was a

[39] The correspondence of terms was first proposed by N. Wieder, *Hashpaʿot Islamiyot*, 33, rejected by G. Cohen, "The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni," *PAAJR* 35 (1967–8), 84, n. 24, and recently reasserted by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 54, n. 15, and see also Fenton, *Deux traités*, 70–2. For the Hebrew expressions, see *HW*, II: 80, l. 11; 82, l. 11; *Perush*, 177 (Gen. 46:12) (*derekh hashem*); *HW*, I:146, ll. 15–16 (*darkhe hashem al-khaṣīṣah allatī hiya derekh ḥaside yisraʾel u-vene ha-neviʾim*); *HW*, II:252, l. 19 (*derekh ḥaside hashem u-neviʾav*); *HW*, I:134, l. 13 (*al-sulūk al-k̲āṣṣ*), defined ad loc. as *al-sulūk bi-ghāyat al-miṣvot wa-asrārihā wa-mā yufham min maqāṣid al-sharīʿah wa-siyar al-anbiyāʾ waʾl-auliyāʾ wa-naḥwahum* (*HW*, ll. 13–15). See also Abraham ibn Abīʾl-Rabīʿ's expression, *tarīq al-sulūk*, in TS Arabic Box 43.108, 3, *verso*, l. 4, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 62, and cf. also the eclectic text of manuscripts belonging to the latter published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 70, ll. 1, 4, 8, 14, and TS Arabic Box 25.65, *recto*, ll. 13–14, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 71. It should be noted, however, that even if certain uses of these expressions carry a technical valence, this was not always the case. For the use of *darkhe hashem* with the connotation of *imitatio dei*, see *HW*, I:208, l. 19, and cf. ll. 1–8, 15. For *derekh hashem* in reference to a particular path, or *maslak*, see *HW*, II:44, l. 13. For Maimonides' use of the same expression to denote the path of ethical virtue, see MT, "Laws of Character Traits," 1:7. Compare "Laws of the Principles of the Torah," 7:4, for the expression *derekh ha-nevuʾah*.

[40] See, e.g., *HW*, I:134, ll. 13–18, and 146, l. 16. As already noted, the fact that the devotees of the movement referred to one another as *ḥasid* and not *ṣūfī* is the reason why they are described throughout this work as "pietists" rather than as "Jewish-Sufis." On the latter expression, see above, n. 13. In addition to designating the devotees as pietists, they are occasionally referred to by their elite status as "the remnant called by the Lord" (cf. Joel 3:5), as in *SM*, 126, and *MH*, 65. For Maimonides' use of the phrase, see his introduction to the *Sefer Mishneh Torah le-ha-Rambam*, ed. S. Frankel (Jerusalem: Hotzaat Shabse Frankel Ltd., 2001), I:3, *Guide*, I:34, ed. Qafiḥ, 78, and *Iggerot ha-Rambam: Ḥalifat ha-Mikhtavim ʿim R. Yosef b. Yehudah*, ed. D. H. Baneth (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985), 52. The Nagid also referred to the spiritual elite by other expressions, such as "the host whom the Lord touched in their heart," in *SM*, 128, based on BT Sanhedrin 34a, and as "devoted to inner religion" (*al-mutaʿabbidīn fiʾl-diyānah al-bāṭinah*), contrasted with those "devoted to outer religion" (*al-mutaʿabbidīn fiʾl-diyānah al-ẓāhirah*), in *HW*, II:68, ll. 13–14. Ordinary pietists were dubbed "wayfarers," as in *HW*, I:134, l. 15; II:74, l. 11, 78, l. 21; 306, l. 5; 342, l. 19; 406, l. 6; 412, ll. 13–14; and "seekers," as in *HW*, I:146, ll. 15–16; II:72, l. 3; 80, ll. 2–3; 82, l. 11; 306, l. 5, and cf. *HW*, II:86, l. 11. In other pietist works we find similar expressions, such as "seekers of God" (*mevaqeshe hashem*), in Bibliotèque Nationale, Strasbourg MS 4110.61b, published by P. Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Genizah," *HAR* 9 (1985), 161, n. 6; "gnostics" (*al-ārifīn*), in ENA NS 10a (laminated 46), l. 13, published by Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Genizah," 162; "seekers of His face" (*ṭālibī wajhahu*), in II Firk. I.1312, 69a.

reaction to the strident intellectualism of Jewish philosophical rationalism. Paul Fenton has articulated this view as follows: "Dissatisfied with the excessive rationalism professed by the peripatetic philosophical trend, there arose a pietistic elite whose search for mystical fulfillment led them to introduce into the framework of traditional Judaism a creative change that drew its inspiration from the nearest spiritual model—Islamic Sufism."[41] The dichotomy between philosophy and mysticism implicitly pits the peripatetic father against the pietist son and begs the larger question of how Abraham came to break with the philosophical legacy of his father. "Indeed," Fenton has argued, "distancing himself from purely philosophical issues, Abraham chose as his main pursuit the mystical path . . ."[42] The implication of this explanation is that many who rejected the "excessive rationalism" of philosophy welcomed the new mysticism of the pietist movement.

Another approach to the rise of Egyptian Jewish pietism, to which I subscribe in this book, attaches less importance to its doctrinal content than to its practical institutions. In this view, mysticism and philosophy need not be viewed in mutual opposition but may occasionally be complementary—a synthesis variously described as "intellectual" or "philosophic" mysticism by David Blumenthal, drawing upon the formulation of a number of earlier scholars.[43] The binary model opposing pietism with philosophy, best exhibited in Islamic Sufism in the thought of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), found its Jewish exemplar in the case of Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah, a traditionalist critic of Maimonidean rationalism and its pietist vanguard, best exemplified in the writings of Abraham Maimonides and his circle, which is best described as a form of intellectual illuminationism.[44] But what united the rationalists and anti-rationalists in the pietist camp was their mutual emphasis on the practical discipline of the spiritual life. The growth of the movement, in this view, was not due to its mystical doctrine (of which precious little is preserved in the sources) but to its pietist regimen.

Egyptian pietism did not invent a new doctrine or devise a new regimen previously unknown in the region. Its success was not a function of its novelty,

[41] P. Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237) : Founding a Mystical Dynasty," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, ed. M. Idel and M. Ostow (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 129.

[42] P. Fenton, "Maimonides—Father and Son: Continuity and Change," in *Traditions of Maimonideanism*, ed. C. Fraenkel (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 103.

[43] On the concept of philosophical mysticism, D. Blumenthal, *Philosophic Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2007), and H. Kasher, "Maimonides—Mysticism within the Limits of Reason Alone: Notes concerning the Approach of David Blumenthal" (Hebrew), in *Maimonides and Mysticism: Presented to Moshe Hallamish on the Occasion of his Retirement* (Hebrew) (Ramat Gan: University of Bar-Ilan Press, 2009), 37–43, and see the references in D. Lobel, "A Jewish-Sufi Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism", in *Baḥya Ibn Paquda's Duties of the Heart*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 21–2 and 249–50, n. 3–4.

[44] On Abraham's rejection of ibn al-Māshiṭa's anti-rationalism, see my "Between Politics and Piety," 118–20, a topic to which I intend to return in a separate study. See Abraham's comments, *HW*, II:130, l. 18 to 132, l. 10.

but of its deep affinity with common conceptions of piety throughout the Near East, shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike.[45] The diffusion of this form of piety among the Jewish public is evident from the fact that it is attested not only in the writings of pietist practitioners but in the correspondence of individuals with no immediate connection to the movement. In one letter preserved in the Genizah, we hear of a Jewish merchant from Fustat, whose lifestyle did not accord with the rigors of the pietist path but who nevertheless practiced some of its rites in the hopes of curing his wayward temperament and perhaps even earning himself a pious reputation. In the letter, the merchant wrote to his wife while on a business trip to India and Yemen. After describing some of his adventures, he observed:

> Day and night I was constantly drinking, not of my free will, but I conducted myself in an exemplary way and if anyone poked fun in foul speech in my presence, I became furious with him, until he became silent, he and others. I constantly fulfilled what God knows, and cured my soul by fasting during the days and praying during the nights. The congregations in Aden and in India often asked me to lead them in prayer, and I am regarded by them and regard myself as a pious man.[46]

The incongruity of the merchant's tumultuous lifestyle and his pious self-regard is a telling sign of the pervasive culture of piety at the turn of the thirteenth century.[47] Whatever the reason for his constant drinking bouts, it is hardly the lifestyle typical of one striving for a discipline of piety.[48] Yet when seeking the proper antidote or "cure" for his raucous life, the merchant adopted the quintessential mark of piety of his day, fasting by day and praying by night, the same rites that became the hallmark of the nascent pietist movement.[49] Equally significant is the fact that a recognizable culture of piety, initially cultivated by Sufi mystics, was shared by Jews across the Islamic world, from Egypt to Iraq to Yemen, and embraced universally as their own.

[45] See Judah Ḥarizi's praise of the Iraqi Jewish *shaikh*, 'Imrān al-Hītī, for his ascetic practices of fasting during the day and rising in the night for supererogatory prayer in Blau, *Kitāb al-durar*, 211–13, and on these practices, see Chapter two, p. 104.

[46] ENA 2739.17, translated by S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 223–4, and see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:217–18, who lists it as 2739.16, as noted by M. A. Friedman in S. D. Goitein and M. A. Friedman, India Book, IV/B (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2013), 546, n. 10. The manuscript is currently missing in the digital archives of the Friedberg Genizah Project. I thank Mordechai Friedman for his assistance regarding this fragment, which is to be published in India Book VII (no. 60). On this letter, see also M. A. Friedman, "Women and the India Trade" (Hebrew), in *From Sages to Savants: Studies Presented to Avraham Grossman* (Hebrew), ed. J. Hacker et al. (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Institute, 2010), 166, n. 19, 170, n. 45, 173, n. 54.

[47] Goitein dated the letter to *c.*1204, *Med. Soc.*, 220–1.

[48] Goitein speculated that it was his wife's absence that prompted him to the bottle (see *Med. Soc.*, 223, n. 13), though it may well have been a result of his participation in the social gatherings of fellow merchants.

[49] On this practice, see Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 13–14, and *Deux traités*, 57–8, and see my remarks on pp. 102–8.

The pervasive culture of piety among the Jews of the Islamic world contributed in no small way to the initial success of the Jewish pietist movement in Egypt. Documentary and literary sources point to a broad base of participation in the movement among Egyptian Jewish society, from those who considered themselves full-fledged disciples, to those who participated in pietist prayer circles, to others who adopted pietist rites and manners to differing degrees. On one occasion, we find Abraham Maimonides defending the participation of non-scholars, as well as that of women and children, in pietist prayer groups, suggesting that the movement included not only a coterie of devoted disciples but also drew on a wider circle of interested community members.[50] On another occasion, Abraham chided those who adopted pietist behavior without the sincerity and dedication of a true disciple, such as "one who spends a long time in prayer and worship, wearing fringes and phylacteries all the time, in the hope that people will view him as pious."[51] Even if Abraham's remarks exaggerated the state of affairs, they confirm the impression from other sources that the movement had grown to the point of including a fringe who wished to be associated with its outer trappings.[52] Equally important is the fact that a not insignificant number of pietists were unlearned individuals, a phenomenon that the Nagid lamented and even criticized as unbecoming of a pietist.[53] Even in its early years, interest in the movement had grown beyond the direct control of its most influential members.

The appeal of the pietist movement extended not only to Rabbanites but to Karaites as well. There is ample testimony of extensive Karaite involvement in the movement and no evidence whatsoever that the two camps operated

[50] See *SM*, 168.

[51] *HW*, ed. Rosenblatt, I:152, ll. 13–14 (*li-yanḍurahu al-nās bi-ʿain al-ḥasīdūt*).

[52] Charges of hypocrisy and simulation, contrasted with the virtue of sincerity (*iḵlāṣ*), are commonplace in Sufi literature. See al-Qushairī, *Al-Risālah al-Qushairīyah fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*, ed. M. al-Marʿashlī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī and Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1998), 283: *nuqṣān kull muḵliṣ fī iḵlāṣihi: ruʾyat iḵlāṣihi*. See also Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 108, and Lobel, *A Sufi–Jewish Dialogue*, 146–76. For Ġazālī's position on hypocrisy, see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 434–5, n. 30. But note the tradition quoted by al-Qushairī, Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali* (*riyāʾ al-ʿārifīn afḍal min iḵlāṣ al-murīdīn*). Abraham could be quite flexible on the question of sincerity, as seen in *SM*, 173, citing the rabbinic principle that "from an impure motive may come a pure motive" (e.g., BT Pesaḥim 50b). Yet elsewhere he placed great emphasis on this virtue. Abraham devoted a chapter of the *Compendium* to the topic of "sincerity in actions" (*iḵlāṣ al-aʿmāl*) in *HW*, I:152–60. He used both *murāʾah* (spelled perhaps *murāyah*) and *riyāʾ* for hypocrisy, as in *HW*, I:160, l. 1 (for the former), and 154, ll. 3, 5, and 160, l. 4 (for the latter). See also *HW*, II:420, l. 20 to 422, l. 5, an important passage on the half-hearted adoption of pietist practices, such as solitary meditation (*ḵalwah*). Other passages of the *Compendium* also caution against confusing outer training with inner training, e.g. *HW*, II:258, ll. 9–15. Note also the distinction drawn between *kufr ẓāhir* and *kufr bāṭin*, in *HW*, II: 108, ll. 2–15.

[53] See *HW*, I:132, ll. 13–19. There is a hint in a fragment of the final chapter of the *Compendium* that a significant number of pietists were not scholars, but "practice ascetic renunciation, humility, and devotion without a knowledge of the Torah," a phenomenon Abraham did not endorse. See II Firk. I.2924.1, *verso*, translated by P. Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment of R. Abraham Maimonides: Fragments from the Lost Section of *The Sufficient [Guide] for the Servants of God*" (Hebrew), *Daʿat* 50 (2003), 116.

independently with separate master–disciple circles. One must conclude that, while liturgical prayer was necessarily conducted separately, all supererogatory rites and ceremonies, not to mention guidance under a *shaikh*, were performed jointly. In many ways, the reformist ideal of Egyptian pietism was concerned far more with the rehabilitation of biblical models of piety than with rabbinic ones, especially with the insertion of prostration and kneeling in worship, the subject of Chapters three and four, and the revival of prophecy and prophetic discipleship, the subject of Chapters five and six.

The Karaite attraction to Sufism in general, and to Egyptian pietism in particular, may have had as much to do with the heightened scripturalism of the movement as with its emphasis on ascetic discipline and messianic anticipation. As Paul Fenton has demonstrated, numerous pietist writings of this period were either composed or copied by Egyptian Karaites.[54] Equally significant is the fact that most of the pietist manuscripts that have survived in near entirety and are currently housed in the St. Petersburg library were discovered by Abraham Firkovitch in the Karaite synagogue of old Cairo and perhaps other Karaite depositories in the region.[55]

Karaite participation in the pietist movement has revived interest in a seventeenth-century report by the Egyptian Jewish chronicler, Joseph Sambari, who told of a mass conversion of Karaites to Rabbanism under the auspices of Abraham Maimonides.[56] Sambari's brief report reads as follows:

> In the days of [Abraham Maimonides], a large number of the congregation of Karaites [in Egypt] converted[57] under his authority and accepted the terms of rabbinic law. Many Jews from good and upright families, including priests and levites, contracted marriages with them.[58]

Of the many Genizah papers documenting the history of the pietist movement and the Karaite involvement in it, not a single source has emerged that confirms Sambari's report of a Karaite conversion to Rabbanism in the early thirteenth century. As I have shown on another occasion, Sambari appears to have derived his information from an earlier source that erroneously

[54] See P. Fenton, "Karaism and Sufism," in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to its History and Literary Sources*, ed. M. Polliack (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 199–212. On Karaite interest in the writings of Abraham Maimonides, see Fenton, "Karaism and Sufism," 207.

[55] On the question of the location of Firkovitch's discoveries and their connection to the Cairo Genizah, see Z. Elkin and M. Ben-Sasson, "Abraham Firkovitch and the Cairo Genizah" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 90 (2002), 51–95, and M. Ben-Sasson, "On the Question of the Source of the Second Firkovitch Collection: Notes on Historical and Halakhic Sources" (Hebrew), *JS* 31 (1991), 47–67.

[56] For renewed speculation as to the veracity of the report, see Fenton, *Deux traités*, 96, "Karaism and Sufism," 207, and "Daniel Ibn al-Māshiṭa's *Taqwīm al-Adyān*," 77, n. 23.

[57] The term *nityahadu* means literally "to become Jewish," a sign that Sambari (or his source, as we shall see) considered Karaism to be a separate religion, warranting an actual conversion.

[58] J. Sambari, *Sefer Divre Yosef*, ed. S. Shtober (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1993), 223, and see A. Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles and Chronological Notes*, 2 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887–95), I:134.

attributed the conversion to the period (and persuasion) of Abraham Maimonides.[59] The Nagid, as we have seen, was quick to point to his successful reforms in the religious life of Egyptian Jewry, including his divisive unification of parts of the Iraqi and Palestinian liturgical rites, whenever he could legitimately take credit for the changes. The absence of any reference on his part to such a mass "conversion" of Karaites merely underscores the inaccuracy of the report. What is more, there is no evidence of any friction or controversy between the two camps during the period of Abraham's Nagidate. If anything, the pietist movement appears to have alleviated the differences between Rabbanites and Karaites by means of a fruitful partnership as members of a common mystical fellowship (*ṣuḥbah*).[60]

The attraction of pietism, among Rabbanites and Karaites alike, was evident in all economic strata of Egyptian Jewish society. Its known leaders were prominent and fairly well-to-do individuals, including physicians and members of the communal establishment, but its membership appears to have been quite diverse. The letter addressed to Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ and his brother, Joseph, cited earlier, was sent from an indigent pietist teacher named Joel, who sought financial assistance from two prominent and wealthy fellow pietists.[61]

[59] I explored this and the role of Maimonides and his son in Karaite–Rabbanite relations in my talk, "Karaites and Rabbanites in Medieval Egypt and Palestine: Between Law and Reality," at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (Jan. 2013).

[60] Pietists referred to one another as "fellows" (*aṣḥāb*), and expressed a sense of kinship to fellow disciples. In one letter, in which an anonymous pietist master instructed his disciple on spiritual matters, he closed by extending greetings "to anyone whom you know to be among [our] companions." See ENA NS 10 (laminated 46), *recto*, ll. 22–3, published by Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Genizah," 163. For the term *aṣḥāb*, see also TS 10 J 13.8, l. 16, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 187; TS 12.289, *recto*, l. 10, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 189 (translated above). For the term *ṣuḥbah*, see TS 10 J 13.8, l. 9, see Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 187. Abraham used a similar expression in the *Compendium* in referring to "the companionship of the pious" (*muṣāḥabat al-wariʿīn*), *HW*, II:82, l. 19. On *ṣuḥbah* as a term for the brotherhood of seekers in the Sufi tradition, see al-Qushairī, *al-Risālah*, ed. al-Marʿashlī, 371–5, and see al-Suhrawardī's discussion of *ādāb al-ṣuḥbah* in *Abū al-Najīb ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Suhrawardī: Kitāb Ādāb al-Murīdīn*, ed. M. Milson (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1978), 34–40 (III:76–90). It is interesting that Abraham used the same term when designating the laws pertaining to friendship in the third part of the *Compendium* (not devoted exclusively to pietist themes), called by him *Ādāb al-Ṣuḥbah* ("rules of companionship"), recalling the work of the same title by al-Sulamī (d. 1021), edited and published by M. J. Kister, *Kitāb Ādāb al-Ṣuḥbah by Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī* (Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society, 1954). See *HW*, I:200, ll. 1–2. Goitein understood this as Abraham's title for the entire third part (see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:479), but as the Abraham indicated in the relevant passage, it designated only the section dealing with friendship. Fenton provided a helpful outline of the known contents of the third part, including the chapter on friendship, in "Dana's Edition of Abraham Maimuni's *Kifāyat al-ʿĀbidīn*," (review) *JQR* 82 (1991), 198.

[61] Goitein and Fenton both suggested that the honorifics in the letter, such as *ha-sar*, indicate that the brothers were communal officials, although this and similar titles were most likely formulaic. See pp. 11–12 and n. 27. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, IV:399, n. 81, and Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 48, n. 3.

Abraham Maimonides' father-in-law, Ḥananel b. Samuel, was not only a prominent judge in Fustat but had family connections with the India trade and was himself petitioned on a number of occasions for charitable assistance.[62] The Nagid himself, the most prominent representative of the pietist movement, appears to have had considerable wealth through his work as physician in the Sultan's court.[63] By the same token, we hear of pietists such as Joel the teacher who struggled to earn enough to support their families. Another vivid letter, written by one Judah, judge of al-Maḥallah al-Kubrā in Lower Egypt, testifies to the fact that a fellow judge in dire straits, on whose behalf the letter was written, was a pietist and former disciple of the Nagid.

> Understand that the bearer of this letter, the great master, the judge, the God-fearing, the venerable and honorable, R. Ṭahor, the scholar, the wise, pious from his youth,[64] is one of the group of associates of our lord the Nagid (*min jumlat aṣḥāb sayyidinā al-nagid*), may his glory be exalted and his honor increase. Words are insufficient to describe him—a man who has renounced the world from his heart (*qad taraka al-wujūd ʿan qalbihi*) and seeks the Creator, may He be exalted . . . When he informed your servant that he owes the poll-tax . . . and that he does not possess money for his daily needs (*wa-mā lahu ḥayyē šaʿah*) except a number of dirhems that our lord, the *rayyis*, gave him for travel, I gathered for him 120 dirhems in secret . . . I now ask your grace's assistance in this duty (*miṣvah*) and it is a great duty . . . He also mentioned to me that he knows a little of the art of weaving,[65] but that he does not possess equipment or anything to assist him. On top of this, he is being pursued [by the government] for the poll-tax . . . May the Holy One, blessed be He, always make you a refuge to every troubled person . . .[66]

Biographical information on individual pietists, with the exception of a handful of associates of Abraham Maimonides, are as precious as they are rare. It is

[62] See TS 10 J 17.4 (petition by Joseph ibn ʿIwāḍ for clothing); cf. Goitein, "R. Ḥananel the Chief Judge," 377–8; M. R. Cohen, *The Voice of the Poor in the Middle Ages: An Anthology of Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 44–6; M. A. Friedman and S. D. Goitein, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza ('India Book')* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008), 544–9. See also Mosseri L 291 (petition for funds to travel to Palestine), published by J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (2 vols) (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1972; reprint of 1931 Cincinatti edition), I:463–4, translated by me in "Between Politics and Piety," 95–6. See also TS NS Box 321.13.

[63] The Nagid appears in many documents as a major, and sometimes the biggest, donor in charitable collections. See, e.g., TS 13 J 8.11, published by M. Gil, *Documents of the Jewish Pious Foundations from the Cairo Geniza* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 403–5, no. 109; cf. also Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, II:429, no. 146.

[64] These honorifics, by no means atypical in this period, were intended to strengthen the recommendation to support R. Ṭahōr in his petition.

[65] For this craft (*ṣināʿat al-qizāzah*), see J. Blau, *A Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 543, s.v. *qizāzah*.

[66] TS 12.289, *recto*, ll. 8–12, 16–21, 25, margin, ll. 1–2, *verso*, l. 3, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and His Pietist Circle," 189–90.

clear that Ṭahor was a part of the Nagid's inner circle in Fustat and had embodied the spiritual ideals of the group. It is not known how this poor judge earned a livelihood while in Fustat, as he could not afford equipment for the only profession for which he had training. It seems likely that poorer disciples of the Nagid were provided with basic subsistence while under his care by wealthier members of the group.[67] In this case, Ṭahor also served as judge, which would have earned him a modest emolument from the communal chest, although the amounts doled out to local officials were often quite negligible, and necessitated a supplementary income.[68]

In a commentary of Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī', preserved by the Nagid, there is a suggestive remark on the economic status of the majority of pietists in Egypt. While it is often difficult in sources such as these to draw a clear line between generality and historical allusion, the reference to the experience of "most" pious ascetics in this passage suggests that the commentator had in mind the historical situation of pietists in Egypt, with which he and the Nagid were intimately familiar.

> "You shall not privilege (lit. honor) a poor man in his judgment." Abraham the Pious, of blessed memory, had an interpretation as to why the verse expressed this prohibition with the verb "honor" as opposed to "take pity" or "have compassion," as Onqelos translated it.[69] He said that it alludes to a pious ascetic (*li'l-wari' al-zāhid*), who is for the most part poor (*alladhi huwa faqīr 'alā'l-akthar*), and is honored for his piety, just as great scholars are honored, of whom scripture forbids their honor in judgment, as it says (Lev. 19:15) "You shall not privilege (lit. honor) a great man." Here, too, it warns you not to show him honor in judgment on account of his piety, but to render the verdict that is fitting in his case. This is an excellent interpretation.[70]

For Muslim Sufis and Jewish pietists alike, poverty was not merely experienced as an economic reality but, in its hierarchy of inner virtues, valorized as a

[67] See TS 10 J 13.8, ll. 17–20, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and His Pietist Circle," 187. Based on this letter, and especially the reference to Abraham's court (*majlis*) where disciples would congregate (see TS 10 J 13.8, ll. 1–2, 5–7, 16–17), Ben-Zion Dinur proposed that the Nagid managed a *funduq* for students, much like the one attributed to his father. See B. Dinur, *Israel and the Diaspora* (Philadelphia, P.A.: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), II:3 and 331, n. 73. The idea of such a *funduq* was based on a legendary chronicle on Maimonides, published by A. Neubauer, "Documents inédits." *REJ* 4 (1882), 173–9.

[68] See, e.g., the pittance of four dirhems a month given to the judge, R. Jephtah of Fustat, in the document dated 1215, recorded in Bodl. MS Heb. d 66.59, *recto*, ll. 24–6, and *verso*, 3–4, 12–14. On this document, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, II:122 and 465, B 97, but see also on R. Jephtah (likely the same individual), *Med. Soc.*, 124. There is no indication that Abraham—who, as Nagid, made or confirmed appointments of local judges and officials—singled out pietists for these positions. Note that, of the resistance he faced to the movement, the most tenacious came from a number of Egyptian Jewish judges, who accused certain pietists in their communities of heretical tendencies. See Bodl. Heb. c 28.45–6, discussed on pp. 70–88.

[69] Onqelos, ad loc., translated "Do not take pity (*teraḥem*) upon a poor man in his judgment."

[70] *Perush*, 361 (Ex. 23:3).

spiritual ideal. The state of inner poverty, and its outer manifestation in tattered clothing, had become so characteristic of the Sufi path by the thirteenth century that certain masters, beginning with ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 1234), sought to distinguish between the mendicant (*faqīr*) and the genuine Sufi and to assign them different ranks within the cloister (*ribāṭ*) belonging to the order.[71] In a similar acknowledgment of the spread of mendicant ideals in Egyptian Jewish society, Abraham Maimonides distinguished between those "who wear tattered clothing and eat meager portions not by choice but out of necessity" and those who have renounced physical pleasures from their hearts and dramatize their spiritual poverty with an outer comportment of simple clothing and minimal food.[72]

The Nagid did not conceal the fact that the nearest model for the spiritual ideal of inner poverty came from the Sufi environment, although he made it clear that the source of the Sufi ideal was not Islam but the practice of the ancient prophets of Israel: "[The prophets'] lack of pride, as well as their renunciation and contentment, were such that they accepted whatever was given to them in the manner of alms given to the poor . . . This practice of eating what comes to hand is among those [customs] borrowed [from the prophets] by the Sufis of Islam."[73] And again: "[T]he customary dress of the genuine prophets was such that they would wear tattered garments and other clothing worn by the poor (*malbūs al-fuqarāʾ*), in the manner of the clothing of the Sufis in our day . . . But do not hold us in contempt for comparing this with the situation of the Sufis, because it was the Sufis who imitated the prophets and walked in their footsteps, not the prophets in theirs."[74]

Yet, apart from the spiritual ideal of poverty, the Nagid confirmed the general observation of ibn Abīʾl-Rabīʿ that many pietists were not only poor in spirit but also poor in fact, in some cases living "in extreme poverty."[75] As we shall see, he appears to have followed his father's injunction and encouraged his disciples to earn a livelihood so as not to be dependent on the handouts of the community.[76]

[71] See Suhrawardī, *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, A. Maḥmūd and M. Ibn al-Sharīf (Cairo: Maktabat al-Īmān, 2005), 181, and see E. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 226–7, and Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 122.

[72] See *HW*, II:240, l. 11 to 242, l. 2.

[73] *HW*, 220, ll. 20–21, and 222, ll. 16–17.

[74] *HW*, 320, ll. 1–3, 7–9. On Abraham's attempt to revive the legacy of the disciples of the prophets of old, see pp. 222–7, and my "Respectful Rival: Abraham Maimonides on Islam," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, ed. A. Meddeb and B. Stora (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 858–9.

[75] See *HW*, II:298, ll. 12–18, although he followed these remarks with examples of the poverty of poor, ascetic sages from the period of the Talmud.

[76] See TS 10 J 13.8, on which see pp. 97–100. On Maimonides' view, see MT, "Laws of Torah Study," 3.10.

PIETISM AND FAMILY LIFE

The impact of the nascent pietist movement on family life in Egypt is an intricate and important subject that has not yet merited significant study. We have already observed the interesting fact that Abraham Maimonides did not discourage, and perhaps even encouraged, the attendance of women and children in pietist prayer circles in Egypt. While it is possible that some women may have participated independently of any family connection and viewed themselves as pietists in their own right, as we know did occasionally occur in the Sufi sphere,[77] it is likely that many if not most of the women in attendance were spouses of pietist disciples, and that the children mentioned in this context were part of the same family units.[78] Assuming this to be the case, it is the only evidence we possess to suggest that affiliation with the movement may have become something of a family affair. Even more interesting is the possibility that pietists may have coalesced—as families and not only as individuals—in a cohesive social unit which resembled and reinforced the fellowship experienced in public worship. An interesting parallel to the familial experience of the Jewish pietists can be found among their Sufi counterparts in Egypt, who maintained a family culture in their cloistered residences throughout the country, for *shaikh* and disciples alike.[79]

[77] The well-known treatise by Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021), known as *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīyah*, originally included an appendix on Sufi women saints, called *Dhikr al-niswah al-mutaʿabbidāt al-ṣūfīyāt*, which bears witness to the important role of women in Sufi circles. The appendix was circulated separately from the main treatise and was lost for centuries, before it was recently rediscovered and published with an English translation, by R. E. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women: A Bilingual Critical Edition of as-Sulami's Dhikr an-Niswa al-Muta 'abbitdat as-Sufiyyat* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999).

[78] On the presence of women and children in pietist prayer circles, see p. 56 above. On independent female pietists, see p. 49, n. 21, and see Friedman, "Two Maimonidean Documents," 207, n. 74. Note the Nagid's interesting remarks on female ascetics in *Perush*, 491 (Ex. 38:8), and cf. *Perush*, 233 (Ex. 4:24), 277 (Ex. 15:20), and 301 (Ex. 18:22), and see A. Grossman, "Woman and Family in the Thought of Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Dine Yisra'el* 26–7 (1999–2000), 130–3. The testimony of women in synagogue attendance confirms the continued existence of a women's balcony in Egypt, as existed in Iraqi Jewish practice in Gaonic times. At least three major synagogues in Egypt at this time—the Palestinian and Iraqi synagogues in Fustat and the celebrated synagogue in Dammuh—included women's sections in an upper gallery. See TS 20.96 (Palestinian synagogue), TS 13 J 30.6 (Iraqi synagogue), and the text published by S. Assaf, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1946), 162 (Dammuh). All three were briefly described by S. D. Goitein, "The Women's Balcony in Synagogue Construction in the Gaonic Period" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 33 (1964), 314, and *Med. Soc.*, II:144, where he notes that the women's gallery, known as the *bayt al-nisā'*, was a feature of public worship which the Jews did not share with their Muslim counterparts. See also S. Reguer, "Women and the Synagogue in Medieval Cairo," in *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*, ed. S. Grossman and R. Haut (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 51–2. The Nagid's remarks in this context confirm that some (or at the very least one) of the smaller prayer circles of the pietists likewise reserved a space for women.

[79] Note the account in Ṣafī al-Dīn's epistle of the wives and children living in the *ribāṭ* of Abū Ḥasan ibn al-Ṣabbāgh of Qinā. See Ṣafī al-Dīn, *La Risāla*, ed. Gril, 81b (Ar. p. 57). The same

In this context, it is not surprising to discover that some pietist families sought to marry into one another, much as scholarly families or families with special lineage endeavored to do.[80] In one letter, the Nagid recommended a young pietist for marriage to the daughter of another prominent pietist, explicitly connecting this with the talmudic ideal of seeking brides from scholarly families.

> He remains steadfast in love and does not cease to make his request [in marriage] and has said, "By your grace, do not cast me out empty-handed from this house!" The Merciful One desires the heart, and [the young man's] intention is for the sake of heaven, for he wishes to join [a family of] scholars and pietists. He told me: "If it is their wish that I sell all that I have and give it to them, I am willing to do so, for the sages have taught, 'One should always sell all that one has [in order to] marry the daughter of a scholar' (BT Pesaḥim 49b). May the Holy One, blessed be He, adorn him with a good counsel from His presence and may you treat him according to your kindness . . ."[81]

Abraham's praise of the boy's wish to join in marriage with a family of scholars and pietists (*le-hidaveq be-ḥakhamim u-ve-ḥasidim*) was a subtle and deliberate departure from the rabbinic formulation, "to cleave to scholars and their disciples" (*le-hidaveq be-ḥakhamim u-ve-talmidehem*), suggestive of the new status pietists attributed to themselves in this period.[82] As Goitein once observed, the young man's steadfast love was not directed at the young woman he sought in marriage, but at the pietist family with which he longed to join.[83] It is worth noting that Abraham himself, who had already exhibited pietist leanings before he became Nagid, married a woman from a family that would become, and perhaps was already, strongly inclined toward pietism.[84]

treatise also includes a report of a young Sufi devotee, whose entire family became attached to the *shaikh* along with him. See Ṣafī al-Dīn, *La Risāla*, ed. Gril, 77b–78a (Ar. 53–4), and see Gril's remarks, Ṣafī al-Dīn, *La Risāla*, ed. Gril, 73. A number of medieval Sufi sources do indicate that women lived in Sufi establishments, many as wives of masters or disciples, while others were regarded as mystics in and of themselves. See S. Babs Mala, "The Sufi Convent and its Social Significance in the Medieval Period of Islam," *IC* 51 (1977), 46, 51.

[80] On marriage between scholarly and other illustrious families, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, III:58–60, and see *Med. Soc.*, 14–15.

[81] TS 10 J 30.11, ll. 5–16, and margin, l. 1, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 196.

[82] See Sifre Deut. 11:22 in *Sifre 'al Sefer Devarim*, ed. Finkelstein, 114–15. The phrase was cited twice by Maimonides. See *Sefer ha-Miṣvot: Ha-Maqor ha-'Aravi ve-Targum le-'Ivrit*, ed. Y. Qafiḥ (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971), 61 (positive commandment no. 6), and MT, "Laws of Character Traits," 6.1–2. In both passages, Maimonides also made mention of the rabbinic ideal of marrying a woman from a family of scholars, derived from BT Ketuvot 111b.

[83] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, III:59.

[84] On Abraham's father-in-law, Ḥananel b. Samuel, see Goitein, "R. Ḥananel the Chief Judge," 371–95, P. Fenton, "More on R. Ḥananel b. Samuel the Judge, Leader of the Pietists" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 55 (1986), 77–107, P. Fenton, "A Judeo-Arabic Commentary on the Hafṭārōt by Ḥanan'ēl ben Šĕmū'ēl (?), Abraham Maimonides' Father-in-Law," *MS* 1 (1990) 27–56, and Friedman, "The Ibn al-Amshāṭī Family," 271–97.

But, as we learn from other sources from the early and mid-thirteenth century, pietism could be as divisive a phenomenon for some families as it was cohesive for others. As attractive as the pietist ideal was for many in Egyptian Jewish society, there is ample testimony of the acrimony and animosity it engendered from other quarters. Beyond the opposition it received from traditionalists in the communal establishment, including judges and independent scholars, we also hear of resistance to the movement in the more intimate sphere of family life. In an anonymous pietist treatise on prayer and the spiritual life dating to the reign of al-Malik al-Kāmil (r. 1218–38), we hear of the need for utmost care not to reveal one's pietism to family members, lest they reveal their hostility to the movement and denounce it as heresy. As we shall see, a number of pietists designated a place in their homes for solitary meditation and private prayer, and the fear of discovery by family members must have posed both existential and practical barriers to the observance of the pietist life. After a lengthy description of meditative ecstasy, the author offers the reader a word of caution:

> Now it is essential for anyone who truly comprehends the discipline of this wondrous, noble, and exalted station (*maqām*) that he conceal himself in whatever way possible, so that no one find him out, not even members of his own family, if they are opposed to him. For these practices are unfamiliar to our contemporaries, the generations of the exile.[85] If they do find him out, they will zealously demand that he reveal [what he is doing] or hand him over to someone else in the midst of the exile. This is because his family denies any knowledge of his ultimate goal. They are so ignorant of it that when they see one of the practices leading to this noble goal, they declare it to be mere heresy and strictly forbidden. They will then bring proofs as to its prohibition with sayings the inner meaning of which they do not understand. This is the meaning of the hiding of the divine face (*hastarat panim*), regarding the likes of which Elijah, peace be upon him, said, "You have turned their hearts backward" (1 Kings 18:37). It is therefore essential for anyone who is mindful and astute to be vigilant and not be unaware, to practice without cease while concealing himself to the utmost extent (*wa-yutasattir ghāyat al-tasattur*).[86]

[85] Lit. "the people of the exile" (*ahl al-galut*). In pietist thought, the theme of the exile as a symbol of the spiritual diminishment of the Jewish people is a pervasive one. For some characteristic examples, see further on in this passage as well as TS 10 J 13.14, esp. ll. 14–19, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 185; *SM*, 104, 184, and many others.

[86] The term for concealment here is *tasattur*, but see pp. 179–80, for the use of the term *kitmān*. For a version of the original tract cited here, see the composite text of several manuscripts published by P. Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer and the Spiritual Quest from the Pietist Circle," *JSAI* 16 (1993), 145. The dating of the work is based on an internal reference to a courtier of al-Malik al-Kāmil: Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 160, and see n. 58. Fenton suggested Abraham the Pious as a possible author of the work (see Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 141), although certain interpretations of the author seem at odds with this hypothesis, e.g. 145, n. 20. For the importance of concealing the effects of illuminative experience from

The animosity directed at the pietists is attributed by our author to the imperfect state of religious life in the exile, in which the divine countenance remains concealed from the elect—a theme that emerges elsewhere in pietist polemics.[87] One wonders whether the author wrote from experience, if not of his own rejection by friends and family then that of his companions or disciples.[88] The fear of heresy-mongers was real and born from actual experience. At the end of this chapter, we shall consider the evidence for the effort to brand the pietists as heretics and the variety of pietist responses to this animosity. The testimony of the anonymous pietist in this treatise casts light not only on the delicate state of Egyptian pietism in its early years but, equally significant, the fact that such heresy-mongering had already become a force of division within families, adding yet another fissure in an already strained communal fabric.[89]

The impact of pietism on family life must be considered from yet another angle: the connection between pietist views on marriage and sexuality and intimate family relations. In a recent article, Avraham Grossman argued that Abraham Maimonides represents a shift toward a more positive view of women than his father, who was still beholden to the Aristotelian paradigm of female inferiority based on women's perceived materiality, while in other ways reflecting the stereotypical image of the status of women in society.[90] Grossman attributed the absence of the philosophical doctrine of inferiority

others in the Sufi tradition, see ibn Aṭā' Allāh al-Sakandarī (d. 1309); see ibn Sīnā, *Al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, ed. S. Dunya (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960–8), IV.9.11, and S. Inati tr., *Ibn Sīnā and Mysticism: Remarks and Admonitions* (Part Four) (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 86.

[87] Compare TS 10 J 13, 14, ll. 13–19, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and His Pietist Circle," 185. On the theme of the exile in pietist theology, see especially pp. 174– and n, 67.

[88] Note the author's observation that it is all but impossible to conceal everything (i.e. to remain self-conscious) in the midst of meditative trance. When this does occur, he reassured, the true adept should not be ashamed or diminished by being caught. See Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and His Pietist Circle," 146: "One's practices ought to be concealed from everyone and he should not reveal it to anyone except what is impossible to avoid. It is impossible to conceal his limbs when his interior overpowers his outside. For whenever the heart becomes filled with awe of the majesty of the Creator, may He be exalted, compared to the smallness of man and he his soul grows exceedingly humble, his emotional state (*al-infi'āl*) is manifest and cannot be concealed. Whenever a person is upright in his condition, absorbed in this state of possession, he is not diminished or embarrassed when people see him. He will not deny it then, as David, peace be upon him, said, 'I shall speak of Your testimonies in the presence of kings and I will be not ashamed' (Ps. 119:46)." The last citation may perhaps have been intended as an allusion to accusations of heresy by local judges and magistrates in Egypt before the intervention of the Nagid.

[89] For an overview of communal tensions in the first decades of the thirteenth century, a combined result of natural disasters and socio-economic turmoil, see my "Between Politics and Piety: Abraham Maimonides and His Times," 34–97.

[90] See Grossman, "Woman and Family in the Thought of Abraham Maimonides," 121–45, esp. 123–6.

to Abraham's pietist worldview, arguing that the positive views of women expressed by medieval Jewish pietists and mystics "far surpasses that found in the writings of Jewish philosophers."[91]

Grossman's remarks highlight the complexity and challenges of assessing the status of women and the institution of marriage in Egyptian pietism. Grossman is right in that the image of women adopted by the pietists, most importantly the affirmation of female prophecy as a mark of intellectual and mystical attainment, reflects the fundamental equality of male and female capacity in pietist thought.[92] Women, no less than men, are distinguished in Abraham's thought with the independent drive toward a life of asceticism and pietism.[93] Yet, in order to assess the overall viability of Grossman's remarks, it is important to distinguish between theory and reality. While we do have testimony of female attendance at pietist prayer circles, we cannot extrapolate from this an ideal image that women were active members of pietist fellowships, nor do we have explicit testimony of female pietists as we do of female Sufis, and even the phenomenon of female *shaikhāt*. To the contrary, pietist sources that describe a tension between religious devotions and the distractions of family life take for granted that it is the husband who is pursuing the religious life and the wife who is the distraction (in addition to children and the need to earn a livelihood).[94]

[91] See Grossman, "Woman and Family," 144, and cf. A. Grossman, *He Shall Rule Over You?: Medieval Jewish Sages on Women* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2011), and *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*, tr. J. Chipman (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2004), for a somewhat systematic treatment of rabbinic views on women in the Middle Ages.

[92] This view ironically underscores pietism's intellectual debt to the philosophical tradition. Grossman acknowledged the philosophical affirmation of the female capacity for prophecy, considered the most exalted attainment of a human being. See Grossman, "Woman and Family," 130–3.

[93] See *Perush*, 491 (Ex. 38:8), on which see N. Ilan, "Theological Presuppositions and Exegetical Principles: On the Nature and Distinctiveness of Abraham Maimonides' Commentary to the Torah" (Hebrew), in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Quran*, ed. M. Bar-Asher et al. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2007), 45–7, and M. A. Friedman, "The Ten *Baṭlanim* in the Synagogue According to Maimonides and Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), in *MiBirkat Moshe: Maimonidean Studies in Honor of Rabbi Nachum Eliezer Rabinovitch, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Birkat Moshe Maaleh Adumim* (Maʿaleh Adumim: Hotsaʾat Maʿaliyot she-ʿa. y. Yeshivat 'Birkat Mosheh', 2011), vol. II, 805–6.

[94] It is important to add that the Nagid's view of sexuality was quite unfavorable. He included sexuality among the shameful activities associated with matter. See *HW*, II:44, l. 18 to 46, l.1; 48, ll. 19–20; 60, ll. 5–6; cf. *HW*, 226, ll. 5–6; 242, ll. 11–18; 258, ll. 16–18; 310, ll. 10–11, 15; 312, ll. 14–15; 314, l. 1; 348, l. 18 to 352, l. 12; 378, l. 14. See also his remarks, *HW*, 370, ll. 16–19, as well as his exegetical comments in *Perush*, 59 (Gen. 24:62). It is likely that, contrary to Grossman's assumption, the relatively negative view of sexuality prevalent in Sufism and its legacy of strict asceticism exerted a considerable pull on Egyptian pietism. For the view of the thirteenth-century Egyptian *shaikh*, Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, see E. Douglas tr., *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili, Including His Life, Prayers, Letters, and Followers: A Translation of the Arabic of Ibn al-Sabbagh's* Durrat al-Asrar wa-Tuhfat al-Abrar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 33. See also Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 229–30.

Here we come to the crux of the problem facing a proper assessment of pietist family life. While women were by no means confined to the home during the classical Genizah period, the expectation was for the husband to earn the family's livelihood and for the wife to care for the maintenance and nourishment of the household.[95] What made pietist families exceptional in this milieu was the additional expectation that the husband would require extra time for religious devotions beyond the time already spent apart from his family. In the view of the Nagid, this situation gave rise to two distinct, but related, challenges. On the one hand, the Nagid counseled pietists (which is to say, male pietists) to focus on the essentials of the household and "to train [the members of his family] little by little, to the extent that they are able, to be content with the necessities [of life] and to do without excess . . . "[96] On the other hand, for those who were contemplating becoming disciples, he counseled them to avoid marriage until they had successfully advanced on the pietist path. The challenges facing an aspiring pietist, we are told, are not new but were confronted by the sages and prophets of earlier times.

> [It is vital that] one undertake the elevated path [of pietism] before one has become consumed with marriage and children, which interrupt one's religious devotion, as the sages said in surprise at one who thought that one should first marry and then learn Torah, "Shall he have a millstone round his neck and then learn Torah?"[97] One of [the sages], explaining why he avoided marriage, said, "My love is for the Torah."[98] Our father Jacob, too, did not marry until he reached the age of eighty-three years, while Elijah and Elisha never married . . . [99]

The question arising from passages such as these is whether Abraham or other pietist leaders encouraged some of their disciples not only to delay marriage but to avoid it altogether. This is a particularly vexing question from the perspective of the movement's normative status and perceptions of its antinomianism and heretical tendencies. The Nagid testified to the fact that "we have seen many ascetics of our nation and of other nations" abstain from marriage altogether, and added that this was the custom of numerous prophets and saints of previous generations.[100] Abraham himself never declared unequivocally that one need not marry, but he strongly implied

[95] On women's domesticity during the classical Genizah period, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, III:341–4. For the standard image of husband–wife divisions of labor, see *HW*, II:180, ll. 3–12.

[96] *HW*, II:264, ll. 7–8. [97] See BT Qiddushin 29b. [98] See BT Yevamot 63b.

[99] *HW*, II:264, ll. 12–19. See also *HW*, 320, ll. 10–18. For background to this idea in Maimonides, see MT, "Laws of Marriage," 15.3. Goitein speculated that Maimonides and his son were both reluctant to marry and only did so relatively late in life after devoting many years to study. See *Med. Soc.*, III:62, although note Goitein's error in the number of Abraham's children.

[100] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 278, ll. 6–7, and 248, ll. 10–17. Goitein noted a number of cases of unmarried men in the Genizah documents, although there is no indication that any of these instances was motivated by pietist or ascetic inclinations. See *Med. Soc.*, III:61–2.

that celibacy is a valid option for one who is wedded to uninterrupted Torah study or pietist devotions.[101] As the passage just quoted illustrates, the Nagid may have advocated a middle ground, according to which pietists would marry at a more advanced age after having progressed sufficiently on the spiritual path.[102] Yet by comparing the celibacy of contemporary Jewish ascetics with that of the prophets and sages of Israel's past, the Nagid gave his tacit support to those who make such a choice.[103]

The support for celibacy in individual cases can likewise be detected in the model of a special pietist cloister envisioned by the Nagid for a select group of devotees to live and worship uninterrupted in the synagogue precincts. Such a cloister was intended to function as a type of permanent devotion, modeled on the ancient priesthood in that its members would be supported by communal funds, without any external distractions from family responsibilities or the need to earn a livelihood. The only expectation for such individuals would be to serve as teachers and spiritual models for the community. There is no evidence that institutions of this type existed in fact, only that they were envisioned to stimulate the religious revival of the people for which the pietists would serve as spiritual vanguards.

> It is essential for the leadership of Jewish communities that a group of people be selected from each one who are all upright and virtuous, renouncing this world and longing for the world to come.[104] They should be permanently secluded in the synagogue for the recitation of the Torah and to practice solitary devotion (*al-tafarrug̱ li'l-'ibādah*). They should be exclusively occupied with this important religious work to the exclusion of any worldly occupations. Their basic requirements

[101] Note that Maimonides had already accepted the view of Ben Azzai as acceptable in unique circumstances. See MT, "Laws of Marriage," 15.3, paving the way for Abraham's more developed position. See Friedman's remarks on the influence of Maimonides on the question of marriage in the following note.

[102] Mordechai Friedman has suggested that Abraham's views on marriage in general, and on postponing marriage in particular, were informed by those of his father, who may have had these views in mind when deciding to postpone his own marriage. See the discussion in Friedman, "Two Maimonidean Documents," 203–8, esp. 206: "I do not believe that Abraham Maimonides developed a new approach [to marriage]. In essence, this was the approach of Maimonides in his writings, an attitude that [Maimonides] apparently implemented in practice in his personal life." See also the discussion in Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 34–7.

[103] In light of Abraham's son Obadiah's views on marriage, Fenton speculated that Obadiah may himself have avoided marriage. See Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 25. There is, however, a record of Obadiah having had a son, named Abraham, for whom he wrote the *Treatise of the Pool*, on which see A. H. Freimann, "The Genealogy of the Maimonidean Family" (Hebrew). *Alumah* 1 (1936), 25. No dates or biographical information have been preserved on Abraham b. Obadiah.

[104] In Jewish pietist thought (as in Sufism), the world to come was the spiritual world of pure contemplation and divine communion. We have already observed the idea of a taste of the world to come, in this world, in pietist thought. The discipline of the spiritual life was sometimes known as "the path of the world to come" (*ṭarīq al-ākhirah*) and "the practice of the world to come" (*'amal* or *a'māl al-ākhirah*). See, e.g., Baḥya, *al-Hidāyah*, 9:7, ed. Qafiḥ, 406.

> shall be provided for them, as God commanded regarding the [gifts] due to the priests and the levites. These individuals are the ones designated by the sages, of blessed memory, as the *baṭlanīm* of the synagogue . . . There ought to be ten people in the synagogue, who have no occupation apart from communal needs and the study of Torah, who are permanently attached to the synagogue as in the case of the Temple, which was to include secluded devotees . . . Just as there is a need to appoint judges to determine what is the law of the Torah in cases of personal dispute, so too there is a need to appoint groups of people who will be sources of instruction and models for every seeker of the Lord for the rectification of Jewish worship.[105]

The call for a cloister of pious individuals, secluded in the synagogue and supported by the general community, is the closest Abraham Maimonides came to advocating a monastic ideal.[106] As Paul Fenton has noted, it is particularly intriguing to compare this idea with the Sufi institution of the *zāwiyah* or *khānqāh*, an increasingly common feature of Sufi life in Egypt during this period.[107] As in the case of the Sufi institution, the Nagid envisioned a network of pietist synagogues across the land that would serve as vanguards of spiritual direction.[108] But rather than acknowledge the Sufi prototype of his ideal mystical cloister, Abraham asserted a direct continuum from the ancient institution of priesthood and the rabbinic phenomenon of ten permanent attendants in the synagogue to his own conception of a spiritual cloister. As Mordechai Friedman has recently observed, Abraham utilized the category of the ten *baṭlanim*, especially as formulated by his father,

[105] *SM*, 112–13. Abraham observed prior to this passage that his father had initially interpreted the role of the ten resident members of the synagogue (*'asarah baṭlanim*) as congregational and ritual officers, but later changed his interpretation to view these individuals as devoid of any occupation, engaged exclusively in communal responsibilities and the study of Torah. See his commentary to M. Megillah 1:3 in *Mishnah 'im Perush Rabbenu Mosheh ben Maimon*, Order Mo'ed, 345. It was along the lines of the latter interpretation that Abraham offered his own version here. Maimonides appears to have changed his mind once again, as can be seen in a responsum that appears to have escaped the attention of his son. See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1986), 219–20, no. 123, where he wrote that these individuals were not without work, but merely available to attend to the needs of the community and the synagogue at any time. For a comprehensive study of the *'asarah baṭlanim* in Maimonides' and Abraham's thought, see Friedman, "The Ten *Baṭlanim* in the Synagogue According to Maimonides and Abraham Maimonides," 796–835.

[106] Compare the even more radical vision of a community of cloistered ascetics in the anonymous *Ḥuqqe ha-Torah*, most likely dating to the thirteenth century, published in its different versions by S. Assaf in his *Source-Book for the History of Jewish Education from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment*, ed. S. Glick (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2002), I: 202–11.

[107] Fenton's remarks in "Maimonides—Father and Son: Continuity and Change," 120–1. On the *zāwiyah* or *k̲ānqāh*, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 231–4, and especially Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamluk Egypt* for the development of the *khānqāh* in Egyptian Sufism of the Mamluk period.

[108] Compare Baḥya's description of an elite group of ascetics, who serve as models for others and as physicians of the soul in *Hidāyah*, IX:2, ed. Qafiḥ, 388–9.

as "a framework which he [then] filled with new content" more suited to his unique brand of pietism.[109]

The permanent occupation of these "secluded devotees" brings the question of pietist celibacy into new focus. Though he does not address the question of celibacy explicitly, it is impossible to reconcile this type of monasticism with a functioning family life. It is in this context that we are to understand the precedent of priests and levites. Though not an example of celibacy in and of themselves, they underscore the fact that the ideal pietist cloister was intended to function as an exceptional group, whose exclusive devotion to the spiritual life was not to be emulated *in toto* by others.[110] They were, like the levitical tribe of old, to constitute a spiritual class unto itself.[111] Also like the idealized priests and levites of Temple times, this class of devotees would serve as religious leaders "for the rectification of Jewish worship," and would in turn be supported by the community for its service.[112] For the Nagid, the perpetuation of such an elite group in Jewish society was essential for the revitalization of religious life and the preservation of the community as a whole. "An arousal of the heart toward [God], may He be exalted, is something we cannot survive without. Were it not for the fact that it exists in a few of us, we would all perish."[113]

CONFRONTING COMMUNAL OPPOSITION

Despite its appeal to common conceptions of piety and its support from the Nagid and other prominent figures, Egyptian pietism faced considerable opposition from other rabbinic leaders, whose names remain anonymous,

[109] See Friedman, "The Ten *Baṭlanim*," 807.

[110] The Nagid noted that the nation as a whole could not sustain a renunciation of marriage without assuring its own destruction. See *HW*, II: 278, ll. 10–15.

[111] On the parallel with the tribe of Levi, see *HW*, II:280, ll. 5–20, in which Abraham cited his father's words in MT, "Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee," 13:13: "Not only the tribe of Levi, but any individual whatsoever who has dedicated himself and set his mind to separating himself and standing in the presence of God . . . who has removed himself from the many [worldly] calculations which most people pursue, such a person has become sanctified as the holy of holies. God shall be his portion . . . and will provide for his needs in this world, as [God] provided for the priests and levites . . . " What Maimonides described of an exceptional individual, Abraham sought to develop into a self-perpetuating institution that would be of spiritual benefit to the broader community.

[112] Note, e.g., the language of the following expressions in the passage above: *zuhhād fi'l-dunyā rāghibūn fi ḥayye ha-ʿolam ha-ba; al-tafarrugh li'l-ʿibādah; ʿubbād; kol mevaqesh ha-shem*. Blidstein has likewise argued that this ideal cloister was intended as a pietist enclave, pointing to the almost sectarian nature of the movement. See J. Blidstein, "Community and Communal Prayer in the Writings of Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Peʿamim* 78 (1999), 156, n. 33.

[113] See *SM*, 76.

and from segments of the community at large. Opposition to pietism is evident from a variety of Genizah sources, which consistently depict the Nagid as the chief spokesman responsible for replying to criticism on behalf of his fellow pietists. We read of juridical pronouncements against pietists, accusing them of heresy, which had a ripple effect in the community at large. It is occasionally possible to distinguish between popular and scholarly opposition, although it is not always clear where one ends and the other begins.

We likewise hear of prominent individuals, with influence in the community and even the government, making life difficult for members of the movement. Such was the opposition facing the pietists of Alexandria, who wrote to the Nagid in distress at "the tumult caused by the wicked, who seek to prevent us from engaging in our devotions by various contrivances and mischief."[114] We will concentrate on three major cases of criticism: the accusation of heresy and antinomianism, the condemnation of the imitation of Islamic religious practice, and the concern over the popularization of piety reserved for prophets and great sages. We will consider each of these criticisms and the responses they elicited in turn.

I. Heresy and Antinomianism

Accusations of heresy were well known to the world of medieval Sufism. Sufi masters, and occasionally entire orders, deemed heterodox or iconoclastic by members of the political establishment, were subject to waves of violent persecutions by the Islamic authorities.[115] Sufi masters occasionally took up the pen in defense of Sufism against juridical opponents.[116] Without a similar state apparatus or threat of capital punishment to buttress their authority, Jewish communal leaders resorted instead to the ban of excommunication whenever necessary and feasible to enforce communal norms. Yet the realities of heresy-mongering among the Jews of medieval Islam was a decidedly uneven

[114] TS 10 J 13.14, ll. 8–10, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and His Pietist Circle," 185. On the *nasi*, Hodayah b. Jesse, the nobleman behind the opposition in Alexandria, see below, and Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and His Pietist Circle," 184–5, and more recently F. Franklin, *This Noble House: Jewish Descendants from King David in the Medieval Islamic East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 47–51. On background to Hodayah's family, see M. Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages*, tr. D. Strassler (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 441–5.

[115] The most famous case, that of al-Ḥallāj, was described by L. Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, tr. H. Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), I:224–645. On antinomian trends in medieval Sufism, see A. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 17–23.

[116] It is noteworthy that the very Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī'l-Manṣūr who wrote the epistle on the Sufi masters of thirteenth-century Egypt also wrote a work in defense of Sufism and included such a defense in his epistle. See Gril's remarks in *La Risāla*, 9–10, and cf. *La Risāla*, ed. Gril, 3.

affair. In her study of Rabbanite–Karaite relations in the Fatimid period, Marina Rustow has recently shown how communal politics often trumped ideological divisions, while exposing the vulnerability of rabbinic modes of enforcement in the face of real or potential government interference.[117]

The situation in Ayyubid Egypt was equally complex, though for rather different reasons. During much of the tenure of Abraham Maimonides, the complexity of Jewish power structures was exemplified not in the underuse of excommunication and heresy-mongering but in its overuse. The controversy in Alexandria in the 1220s between the *nasi*, Hodayah b. Jesse, and the French judge, Joseph b. Gershom, erupted after the former issued writs of excommunication on his own personal authority as heir to the Davidic throne. On being challenged by Joseph as to his illegitimate authority, Hodayah proceeded to excommunicate him in turn. Rather than stop there, Hodayah branded Joseph and the entire French community in Egypt as heretics and corporealists. Joseph, for his part, argued that Hodayah's illegitimate charge of excommunication turned back on himself, thus effectively excommunicating Hodayah in return. In response to this affair, and in the hopes of putting an end to this state of communal anarchy, the Nagid issued a formal ban on any writ of excommunication not signed by a formal synod of local rabbinic authorities.[118]

An even more vivid illustration of the disparate use of communal authority during this period is evident in the controversy over Egyptian pietism. In response to the perceived excesses and heretical anomalies of some pietists, a number of rabbinic judges across Egypt (whose names are not preserved) initiated a campaign to excommunicate and brand these individuals as heretics. The original accusations have not survived, but we do possess the rejoinder issued by the Nagid in the form of a circular to the judges under his jurisdiction, urging caution and restraint. The circular is undated, but the handwriting of the Nagid is unmistakable.[119] Two distinct messages emerge quite clearly from the Nagid's letter. He was, first and foremost, unswerving in defense of his fellow pietists, openly rebuking the judges for exceeding their expertise and hence their authority to act. Those judges whose accusations were found to be unjustified, he cautioned, were to face the very penalty of excommunication they sought to impose on the pietists.

> Judges and adjudicators (*al-dayyanim wa'l-muftiyīn*) are not permitted to render judgment on ascetics and devotees (*al-zuhhād wa'l-'ibād*), without having attained an advanced level in their path and knowledge of its relationship and

[117] See M. Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 111–236 and 347–55.

[118] See *Teshuvot*, 13–26, no. 4–8.

[119] See S. D. Goitein, "A Treatise in Defence of the Pietists by Abraham Maimonides," *JJS* 16 (1965), 110.

> place within the law. Stories related in the Talmud bear witness to the fact that not every judge is pious and that pious individuals occupy a higher rank than judges . . . [120] Only those[121] should judge [in such cases] who take into consideration the state of the ascetics and devotees and others among the pietists (*al-ḥasidim*) and render an accurate account of their affairs. Whenever they hear a rumor that one of them has a fault or deficiency in their belief, they should not [. . .] affirm what they hear . . . since most people have an aversion to the adherents of these disciplined paths due to its being so different from what they are accustomed to . . . Rather [the judges] should proceed with caution and inquire with great discernment . . . and confer with them repeatedly on what he heard about them until their situation becomes clear . . . If the investigation should prove . . . that they are innocent of the slander and accusations of their opponents, the latter shall receive the punishment they sought, just as God commanded regarding a false witness: "You shall do unto him that which he planned to do unto his fellow" (Deut. 19:19).[122]

The situation underlying the Nagid's defense is of major importance for the history of the pietist movement, although many of the key details elude adequate reconstruction. It is evident that the judges did not initiate the accusations in each case, but sometimes responded to rumors of unorthodox practices circulating in the community at large ("whenever they hear a rumor . . . "). It is likewise clear from the Nagid's account that the cries of heresy took a variety of forms, including doctrinal deviation and heterodox behavior. Assuming the importance of the language of asceticism and ascetics throughout the letter, it is plausible that heretical doctrine and heretical behavior overlapped in the judges' accusations, including an emphasis on celibacy as a legitimate option and the encouragement of solitary prayer as an alternative to public worship, to name two controversial examples among many.[123] The Nagid hinted in response that, even when not immediately evident, most pietist practices are firmly rooted in Jewish tradition and that it is the task of each judge to assess "its relationship and place within the law." The Nagid added the backhanded barb that the pietist devotee occupies a higher spiritual rank than the learned judge before whom he stands accused. This polemic was something of a refrain for the Nagid, who elsewhere described the pietist path as "more elevated" than that of "scrupulous"

[120] This sentence and a damaged portion at the bottom of the page too difficult to decipher appear in the text as a marginal addition.

[121] I read *hā'ulā'i* after consulting the manuscript. Goitein's publication reads *tā'ulā'i*, apparently a *lapsus calami*, as his English translation reflects the correct reading. The forms of these two letters (*hā'* and *tā'*) are easy to confuse, especially in the difficult handwriting of the Nagid. "Those" here refers to a description of virtuous and God-fearing judges immediately preceding this paragraph though not included in my translation.

[122] Bodl. Heb. c 28.45–6, *recto*, ll. 8–10, 20–22, *verso*, ll. 5–6, 19–22, published by Goitein, "A Treatise in Defence of the Pietists," 113–14.

[123] On solitary prayer, see pp. 108–22.

scholars, suggesting simmering, if not open, tensions between the head of the Jews and other scholars and judges throughout Egypt.[124]

In light of this polemic, the second message of the circular is rather surprising. Without openly acknowledging the legitimacy of the judges' charges, the Nagid did not dismiss them outright, and left the door open for re-examination. As the public face of the movement, Abraham took a special interest in maintaining the orthodoxy of the groups under his influence and in responding to the more egregious cases of deviation. In a nod to the judges, the Nagid affirmed their jurisdiction to investigate suspected heresy at the same time that he cast doubt over their expertise in pietism. In a carefully worded clause, he admitted that there may be pietists who have deviated from the proper course, in deed or doctrine, but who can be brought back to the fold with patience and persuasion. While admonishing the judges for their undue zealotry with one breath, he acknowledged with the next that genuine cases of blasphemy and heresy require due vigilance on their part.

> Should inquiry and investigation prove [. . .], after patient deliberation and discussion, that there was nothing wrong with their ways other than lack of guidance or unrestrained, even blasphemous speech, have them restrain their tongues and limit their speech. Should [investigation prove] laxity in any of the religious requirements, due to inadvertence or error, they should be made to repent. But should inquiry and investigation prove, after the utmost deliberation, that there is doctrinal deviation (*fisād i'itiqād*), even of a single Jewish doctrine, or something that can lead to doctrinal deviation, should they not cease after being ordered to and not repent after being told to, they shall then be punished just like one who corrupts and leads astray.[125]

The acknowledgment of the existence of isolated heretics appears to have been part of a political calculation on the part of the Nagid, who may have sought to marginalize extreme cases so as to ensure that the majority of normative pietists were not swept up in a frenzy of condemnation. He likewise distinguished between genuine antinomianism and occasional utterances characterized by "unrestrained, even blasphemous speech"—a likely parallel to the Sufi tradition of ecstatic utterances, including the well-known cases of Bustāmī and al-Ḥallāj.[126] But if the latter can be controlled with moderate persuasion and admonition, the Nagid showed little patience for antinomian heresy within his ranks. An entire chapter of the *Compendium* was devoted to the principle that even the elect "remnant whom the Lord calls,"[127] those who have advanced in the pietist path, are never exempt from the minute dictates

[124] See *SM*, 105. [125] Bodl. MS Heb. c 28.45–6, *verso*, ll. 10–18.

[126] See C. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 9–52, 63–72, and Ghazālī's remarks in *The Niche of Lights*, ed. and tr. D. Buchman (Provo, U.T.: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 17–18.

[127] On this and related expressions, see p. 53, n. 40.

of the law.[128] The same consideration may have motivated his decision not to write a separate pietist work, but to make the latter the fourth and final part of a comprehensive work on Jewish law, as if to underscore that just as pietism is the capstone of the law, the law is the cornerstone of pietism.[129] The Nagid's words serve as a warning to all pietists not to deviate from the normative confines of the law.

> It is a grave error for a person to regard himself, or for another to regard him, as a pietist (*ḥasid*) by avoiding marriage or fasting continuously or eating very little or wearing wool (*ṣūf*), while being remiss in the commandments or committing transgressions . . . There is a saying by one whose sayings you ought to consider, namely: "Voluntary prayers . . . are like a gift, while the fulfillment of duties is like the payment of a debt. The creditor will not take the gift and relinquish his debt."[130] This is part of what is meant by the verse [enumerating] His attributes, "He will not take [a bribe]" (Deut. 10:17)[131] . . . You who seek to ascend to the level of the elect and to pursue the special paths of the Lord, the path of the pious of Israel and the disciples of the prophets . . . know that ten years of fasting through pietism (*ḥasidut*) is squandered by eating a single piece of food stolen or robbed! Wearing wool and other [clothing] out of asceticism for the majority of your life is squandered by wearing a garment requiring fringes but without fringes! Years of solitude in the mountains is squandered by [living in] a house requiring a *mezuzah* but without a *mezuzah*! By God, only if you [are remiss in any of these] by accident, by inadvertence, or by compulsion can you hope for forgiveness for what was neglected and protection [from punishment] in the future.[132]

The particular force with which the Nagid condemned the threat of antinomianism underscores its potential threat to the legitimacy of the movement, not unlike prominent cases of Sufi antinomianism that likewise set off a storm of opposition from the Islamic establishment.[133] In a number of passages later in the work, Abraham returned to this theme with an eye to uprooting the

[128] See *HW*, I:132–48.

[129] The parallel with al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā ʿulūm al-dīn* has been noted by a number of scholars. See D. H. Baneth "Review of Samuel Rosenblatt, *The High Ways to Perfection of Abraham Maimonides*," *KS* 8 (1931–2), 52, and A. Shussman, "The Question of the Islamic Sources of Abraham Maimonides' *Compendium for the Servants of God*" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 55 (1986), 229–51.

[130] I have not been able to identify the source of this saying, although its anonymity points to a Sufi origin.

[131] It is surprising that Abraham did not refer to his father, who interpreted this verse in a similar way in light of an earlier rabbinic tradition. See Maimonides' commentary to M. Avot 4:23 in *Perush ha-Rambam le-Avot*, ed. Shailat (Jerusalem: Maʿaliyot, 1994), 159, and cf. Sifre Deut. on Deut. 33:6 in *Sifre ʿal Sefer Devarim*, ed. Finkelstein, 404.

[132] *HW*, I:144, l. 20 to 146, l. 2, ll. 15–16, 20 to 148, l. 6.

[133] On Sufi antinomianism versus adherence to the law, see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Islamic Mysticism and its Approach to Law" (Hebrew), *Molad* 19 (1961), 485–8. See also her overview of this theme in the writings of al-Ghazālī in *Studies in al-Ghazzali*, 412–36.

antinomian fringe within the movement. He dismissed "those who adopt the paths of asceticism and piety and devotion without any knowledge of the law . . . who do not know what the master has required,"[134] insisting that the obligation to keep the law does not abate at any stage of the pietist path. Similar appeals to fidelity to the law were made by other pietist leaders, including Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ, who argued in a polemical context that the laws incumbent on all Israel were instituted for the sake of drawing near to God, and as such are indispensable to all pietists in their pursuit of the ultimate goal.[135]

II. Imitation of Islamic Worship

The biblical prohibition on following in the ways of the Canaanite (and Egyptian) nations became the basis for a series of early rabbinic strictures from the Greco-Roman period aimed at stemming the influence of "idolatrous" culture on Jewish life.[136] None of the warnings against following the ways of the gentiles concerned actual idolatry, which was considered a separate prohibition.[137] A distinction was traditionally made between idolatry proper and the fashions and amusements of the society classified as idolatrous. For this reason, the chief examples of the "imitation of gentile practice" (*ḥuqqot ha-goyim*) mentioned by the rabbis of late antiquity were those of popular Roman culture, such as the theater, the circus, and fashions of hair and dress,[138] although a few were aimed at distancing aspects of ritual life from

[134] II Firk. I.2924, 1v–2r, on which see Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment of R. Abraham Maimonides," 116.

[135] See TS Arabic Box 43.108, 3a, ll. 5–7, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 62. See also TS Arabic Box 46.71, 2r, ll. 1–12, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 63–4. A similar exhortation to keep the commandments and refrain from transgression in the context of the spiritual path can be found in the anonymous pietist work published by Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 149–50. See esp. 150: "According to the attainment of the commandments is the attainment of likeness unto God" (*fa-iḏā ḥaṣala al-insān fi'l-miṣvot hakaḏā ḥaṣala al-munāsabah*).

[136] The biblical prohibition derives from Lev. 20:23, but see also Lev. 18:3 and Deut. 12:30. The object of the verses in Leviticus was originally the sexual offenses of the Egyptians and Canaanites, whom the Israelites were exhorted not to follow. The verse in Deuteronomy is concerned with idol worship and idolatrous sacrifice that it attributed to Canaanite religion. For early rabbinic views of the prohibition, see especially *Sifra* on Lev. 18:3. The Tannaitic (and later Amoraic) tradition added to this the concept of "the ways of the Amorites" (*darkhe ha-Emori*), as in Tosefta Shabbat, chs. 7–8, and BT Shabbat 67a–b.

[137] See, e.g., Ex. 34:12–16. The prohibition of idolatry and subsidiary concerns regarding dealings with idolaters and wine produced by them are treated in tractate ʿAvodah Zarah and parts of the seventh chapter of Sanhedrin.

[138] The applicability of the rabbinic prohibition in hairstyle was raised before Maimonides in a responsum. See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, II:445–7, no. 244.

the common practice in general society.[139] The same distinction held in the medieval period, in which the prohibition against assimilating gentile customs was generally not concerned with religious practice per se.[140]

Against this background, the accusations of "imitating the gentiles" leveled against Egyptian pietists in the thirteenth century mark a significant shift away from concern with symbolic imitation toward alarm over religious appropriation. It is, to my knowledge, the first recorded case in which a group of Jews stood accused of imitating the rites of another religion. It is evident from the Nagid's account that rebutting these accusations was critical to legitimating the movement from within the tradition. The accusation of imitating gentile worship was even more weighty when leveled at the head of the Jews, constituting an open challenge to his legitimacy as religious authority of Egyptian Jewry. The Nagid devoted two sections of the *Compendium* to refuting these claims, the first as one of seven preambles on controversial topics in the work as a whole, which sadly has not survived, and the second in a separate unit responding to anti-pietist criticism, from which the following passage is drawn:[141]

> [I]t has been said that the gentiles worship in this way and that it should therefore be prohibited so as not to imitate the gentiles (*laylā' yatashabbiha bil-goyim*) . . . This specious claim has been stated and misconstrued by one of those considered scholars in our time in his prohibition of facing the ark (*qiblah*) while sitting, whose obligation and proofs I have explained, on account of the fact that the gentiles sit thus in their prayers. He likewise [prohibited] the congregation from standing in prayer in orderly rows, according to my explanation on the basis of the Mishnah, "standing one next to the other,"[142] on account of the fact that the gentiles stand thus in their prayers. He likewise [prohibited] prostration during the glorification of His great name, may He be exalted, during the *qaddish* and other [prayers], on account of the fact that the gentiles are accustomed to prostrate thus when they glorify His name, may He be exalted, and magnify Him in their prayers. [He] especially [objects] that the form of prostration is

[139] See, e.g., BT Ḥullin 41a.

[140] For a general discussion of the theme of *ḥuqqot ha-goyim* in relation to gentile practice, see *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, v. 17 (Jerusalem, 1983): 316–21.

[141] He also included a separate chapter (not extant) on the general prohibition on following in the ways of idolatrous nations (which would not include Islam as a monotheistic religion). See *Perush*, 55 (Gen. 24:12).

[142] See M Avot 5:7, a list of ten miracles that occurred regularly in the Jerusalem temple. The seventh miracle enumerated was that, in spite of the tight quarters in the temple, the people were able to prostrate without impinging on one another's space: "They stood close together yet bowed comfortably" (*'omdim ṣefufim u-mishtaḥavim revaḥim*). On the basis of a linguistic parallel with the Arabic verb *ṣaffa* (to line up), Abraham Maimonides interpreted the Mishnah to mean that the worshipers in the Temple stood in orderly rows (*muṣtaffīn ṣufūfan*), shoulder to shoulder and one behind the other.

> kneeling with one's face to the ground,[143] whose aspect I have explained, on account of the fact that this is the form of gentile prostration or resembles the form of gentile prostration . . .[144]

The scholarly objections described here pertain to three pietist practices with clear roots in Islamic worship: facing the ark while sitting, standing in orderly rows, and prostration to the ground. What appears at first to be three practices, however, turns out on closer inspection to be four. The requirement to face the direction of prayer, or *qiblah*, while sitting is bound up with the sitting posture more generally—what Abraham Maimonides termed "devotional sitting" (*julūs ta'abbud*).[145] According to this view, sitting was to be performed not only in the proper orientation but in a kneeling position. Together, these practices constitute the core and most visible components of the Nagid's devotional reforms, those most conspicuously indebted to the Islamic environment. It was these reforms more than the others that aroused the greatest opprobrium and generated the most opposition in the community.[146]

The marked refrain in each of the scholar's objections, "on account of the fact that the gentiles do thus in their worship," reflects something of the rhetorical force of the original accusation, one the Nagid in his official position could not afford to take lightly. While he belittled his challenger as "one of those considered scholars in our time," the dismissal itself testifies to the fact that the individual in question was, in the eyes of the community, a scholar of some standing and repute. This impression is confirmed by what follows after the passage just quoted. The Nagid acknowledged wryly that the scholar's objections were known to the public and had an impact on communal reactions to the reforms. "This specious claim [of the scholar] has prejudiced the ignorant among the community and those of similarly weak mind who are deceived with the slightest of specious claims."[147] As it turned out, while the scholar in question was equally opposed to all devotional reforms suspected of foreign influence, the community as a whole was particularly agitated over the introduction of prostration, the most visibly Islamic of the postures.[148]

Abraham Maimonides' primary challenge in the *Compendium* was to substantiate the antiquity of the practices associated with Islamic rites in classical Jewish sources. He was at pains to illustrate, with the support of biblical and rabbinic prooftexts, that each of these devotional rites was not new at all but "an ancient mode of worship in Israel"[149] and "among the ancient

[143] Or: "bowing with one's face to the ground" (*keri'ah 'al apayim*). The translation here is based on BT Berakhot 34b (*keri'ah—'al birkayim*) and other passages in the Nagid's corpus.

[144] *SM*, 147–8.

[145] See *SM*, 74.

[146] On the synagogue reforms of the pietists, see Chapter four.

[147] *SM*, 148.

[148] See *SM*, 148–9. The reason for the special opposition in the case of prostration was attributed by the Nagid to its greater unfamiliarity in the eyes of the masses.

[149] *SM*, 149: *muta'abbad fi yisrael qadīman*.

practices of Israel."[150] The status of prostration, to which these expressions referred, was of particular importance to the Nagid, one to which he devoted the lengthiest argument of all the controversial postures.[151] His effort to utilize biblical or even rabbinic exempla as a traditional basis for prostration, in the absence of an explicit halakhic norm, illustrates the particular challenge of reintroducing long-obsolete forms of worship. This can be observed in his method of building normative readings upon circumstantial sources. A classic example is his frequent use of the Psalms as a source for normative practice. Consider the following example: "The most appropriate places to prostrate as an expression of God's majesty in our prayers, that is in communal prayer, is during the *qaddish* and *qedushah*, as David . . . exhorted, 'Glorify the Lord our God and prostrate yourselves.'[152] This is obligatory and necessary and is the purpose of the *qadish* and *qedushah*."[153]

The appeal to biblical and early rabbinic models was an important strategy in his answer to the challenge of *ḥuqqot ha-goyim*, as when he wrote concerning the kneeling posture: "[O]ne who sits in the state of prayer in a kneeling position facing the *qiblah* because this is how Daniel and Solomon acted shall not be prohibited [merely] because this is the way in which the gentiles sit in their prayers. And one who has prostrated in the *qadish* and the like because thus David commanded, 'Glorify the Lord our God and prostrate,'[154] shall not be prohibited from this [merely] because the gentiles prostrate thus."[155] It goes without saying that the ancient postures of Daniel and Solomon and the exhortations of David had no normative force either in their own contexts or for future generations. With the sole exception of prostration, which survived in an altered form during the medieval period,[156] the classical rabbinic tradition did not continue these biblical postures but developed new ones in keeping with its new cultural environment and sociopolitical etiquette.[157] In the creative hands of Abraham Maimonides, however, both the exempla and the exhortations of the biblical saints were no mere spontaneous or poeticized prayers. They were, in the first case, normative precedent and, in the second, direct commands to the individual and community in worship to

[150] *SM*, 150: *min qadīm siyar yisrael*.

[151] Abraham attached a special importance to prostration out of all the postures, calling it "the highest form of exertion in outer worship" (*nihāyat al-ijtihād fi'l-'ibādah al-ẓāhirah*), and "the most elevated posture in devotion" (*nihāyat marātib hay'at al-ta'abbud*). See *SM*, 134 and 129 respectively. Note also the important use of *'ijtihād* and *tawarru'* with regard to extra prostrations, *SM*, 119, and the notion that prostration is *'iqar 'avodah*, *SM*, 131–2.

[152] See both Ps. 99:5 and 9.

[153] *SM*, 137.

[154] See p. 177.

[155] *SM*, 158–9.

[156] On the practice of "falling on the face" (*nefilat apayim*), see pp. 154–5 and 174.

[157] For devotional postures in classical rabbinic literature, see U. Ehrlich, *Non-Verbal Language of Jewish Prayer* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999).

prostrate at every liturgical reference to God's grandeur.[158] Perhaps the best articulation of the principle that his devotional reforms were in fact nothing more than the restoration of ancient custom are the following words of the Nagid, in which he turned the tables on his detractors:

> Be careful in this matter not to confuse a new idea and custom with ancient [ones] that have been neglected to the point of being forgotten and [only] later brought to the attention [of the community], restored, and revitalized. This is the case in the matter concerning us here, that of prostration, which we are now discussing. For prostration is an obligation of the law and ancient custom of the people, a fact neglected over the course of many years in exile. And when one has been made aware that it is an obligation and puts it into practice, it appears to the deluded and ignorant as if it is a religious innovation.[159] It is an innovation only in relation to the intermediate time [in which it was defunct], not in relation to the time of the original community.[160]

In this brief passage, the Nagid effectively reversed the accusation of innovation by describing the community, in their own eyes staunch defenders of ancient custom, as having introduced unwarranted change into the ancient canon, while recasting the pietists as the restorer of authentic and orthodox practice.[161]

Developing this idea further, the Nagid asserted that it is the gentiles who have imitated the Jews in adopting parts of the Torah, such as fundamental principles and beliefs in the case of Islam and the acceptance of the sanctity of scripture in the case of Christianity. In this respect, there is a distinct echo of his father's notion, articulated in the *Mishneh Torah*, that these religions have served to prepare the world for the Bible and the idea of monotheism and the messiah.[162] Abraham Maimonides connected this doctrine with the biblical ideal of becoming a "kingdom of priests" and a beacon of light for the nations of the world:

[158] Note Abraham Maimonides' use of "David commanded" (*amara David*) in his citation of Ps. 99.

[159] The charge of innovation was a serious one as much for Islam as for Judaism during this period. The usual term for innovation in the Islamic sources was *bid'ah*, which Goitein wrote was used in the context of the pietist debates as well. See S. D. Goitein, "New Documents from the Cairo Geniza," in *Homenaje a Millás Vallícrosa* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1954), I: 712, and "A Treatise in Defence of the Pietists," 108. Although this term was in fact not used in the sources at our disposal, a point already made by Fenton, the concept and accusation of innovation were very much present in this context. See Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237): Founding a Mystical Dynasty," 147–8. The expressions used in the present context are *amr mustajadd fi'l-dīn* and *istijdād*.

[160] *SM*, 161.

[161] See also *SM*, 130, in which he described current practices that have developed "in the crucible of exile" (*bi-maḥan al-galut*) as newfangled innovations unknown to the generation of King David.

[162] See MT, "Laws of Kings and their Wars," 11:4. See *Mishneh Torah le-ha-Rambam*, ed. Frankel, XII:626, and cf. *Mishneh Torah le-ha-Rambam*, ed. Frankel, 582–3.

> The purpose of [the law] is that the nations imitate us and follow our law, as a single nation follows its leader, [according to the verse] "And you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests [and a holy nation]" (Ex. 19: 6). They could either follow [us] in the entire law as will be the case in the revelation of the longed-for [messianic] days . . . or in part of the law, as has occurred with some nations that have arisen after the [giving of the] Torah . . . So it has in fact transpired . . . such that our wisdom[163] and beloved customs have been hidden from us and reappeared in other peoples on account of our sins . . . [164]

The association of ancient customs with Islam, such as prostration and kneeling, was for the Nagid one more proof of Israel's neglect of its own laws to the point of no longer recognizing its original possession. This is identical to the Nagid's claim later in the *Kifāyah* that his "restoration" of Sufi practices was justified on the grounds that they originated as the ancient path of the prophets of Israel before being abandoned by the latter's descendants to the foreign nations, who proved more faithful in their preservation to the present day.[165]

In addition to the challenge leveled against the Nagid's use of "newfangled" rites and his contention of their true antiquity, another accusation was raised that required quite a different, though equally forceful, response on his part. Another anonymous scholar was cited, this time described as "a legal decisor, one of the famous Byzantine scholars and elders,"[166] apparently with some influence in the community in spite of his immigrant status. The argument here was quite different from the former. While the Byzantine scholar openly conceded that these practices were used in antiquity, as recorded in numerous biblical narratives, he contended that they were later prohibited once they became adopted by gentiles in their worship. Basing his argument on the rabbinic proscription of stone altars once they became incorporated into idolatrous worship, he maintained that their use by Muslims had tainted these forms for Jewish worship and may no longer be performed as a result.[167]

In his lengthy retort, the Nagid declared that were it not for the reverence in which this scholar was held and the widespread use of his argument by scholars and non-scholars alike, he would have considered it beneath him to

[163] I read *milḥunā* according to the original reading of the manuscript rather than Dana's emendation to *millatunā*.

[164] See *SM*, 152. Compare *Perush*, 303, where the Nagid interpreted Ex. 19:6 to refer to the nation's imitation of the Jews in following the seven Noahide commandments, rather than of laws and customs unique to the Jews.

[165] See especially *HW*, II:323. Note also the fact that Abraham elsewhere singled out the Muslims as "the nation that imitates us and follows our lead" in making religious duties obligatory for the entire nation rather than for its spiritual elite alone. See *Perush*, 303.

[166] *SM*, 149: *baʿḍ al-muftiyyīn wa-huwa min mashāhir talmide ḥaḥme al-rūm wa-mashāʾikhihim*.

[167] For the same argument found in a Tosafist discussion of *ḥuqqot ha-goyim*, see Tosafot ad BT ʿAvodah Zarah 11a.

even venture a response. But respond he did, with a full display of the barbed rhetoric familiar from other polemical passages of the *Compendium*. His address to the anonymous reader—"whoever you may be"—confirms the fact that his response was as much to the general as to the scholarly community, both of whom "highly esteemed" the Byzantine scholar's argument.[168]

> If you, whoever you may be, make an analogy to the fact that the law prohibited and forbade that which had been practiced prior to [the giving of the law], and you too prohibit and forbid what had been performed in worship after [that point] on the basis of your analogy—in spite of its being among the ancient practices and revealed law of Israel—you will then be forced on the same analogy [to prohibit] many [other] things [beside this]. For it could be asked of you: 'Why do you prohibit prostration but not standing during prayer in so far as the gentiles also stand in their prayers? Neither should you face the direction of Jerusalem, whether sitting or standing, in so far as the Christians, who are not only gentiles but idol worshipers, face [Jerusalem]. Why do you likewise abhor prostration from the knees because it resembles gentile prostration (*sujūd al-goyim*) but not bowing from the waist, defined as bowing until the loosening of the joints of the spinal column,[169] in the exact same manner as gentile bowing (*rukūʿ al-goyim*)? Your logic also compels you not to pray or fast or give charity, for all these, although they are commandments, were praiseworthy [only] before they were practiced by the gentiles, after [which] they are to be despised and abandoned so as not to resemble them in this way! The same would apply to every commandment adopted and integrated by the gentiles, to the point that many of the commandments of the Torah would be abrogated, as the gentiles wish.[170] Except that the gentiles say, "Everything that is in their law that is not required in our law has been abrogated," while we say to them, according to the logic of these legal decisors (*ʿalā qiyās hāʾulāʾi al-muftiyīn*), "Only that which has been adopted by you from our Torah has been abrogated!" Such [an argument]—God knows and is a sufficient witness—is laughable and worthy of ridicule from the standpoint of reason and is not worthy of response or even mention were the individual who made the legal pronouncement not renowned and the community not deceived through him and his specious claim.[171]

If Abraham Maimonides' answer to the charge of innovation was to demonstrate the rituals' antiquity and obligatory legal status, his reply to the second argument was to illustrate its absurdity if followed to its logical conclusion. His

[168] See *SM*, 150: *wa-hadha al-dalīl samiʿtu annahum yustaḥsanūhu.*

[169] See BT Berakhot 28b.

[170] On the Muslim claims of *naskh* and other polemics directed at Judaism and the Bible, see M. Perlmann, ed., "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, M.A.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 103–29, and H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19–49.

[171] *SM*, 150–1. On the prohibition of altars with no connection to gentile practice, see *Perush*, 87 (Gen. 28:18).

repetition of the term *qiyās* in its various forms reinforced this idea with each mocking, rhetorical question. If the opponents of the rites acknowledged their basis in the law and yet abandoned them for having been tainted by association with the gentiles, logic compels them to forsake a good many other commandments and principles of the Torah shared by Jew and gentile alike. The rhetorical effect of the Nagid's onslaught was to demonstrate the absurd implications of his challenger's claim. The use of the charged idea of "abrogation" (*naskh*) as a polemical device was all the more effective as a way of imputing that the scholar's arguments went even further than gentile rejection of the Torah. In the Nagid's *reductio ad absurdum*, the gentiles abrogate only a portion of the law, while their Jewish counterparts would go even further in eliminating a majority of commandments!

Abraham Maimonides went even further, however, in attempting to exclude Islam from the prohibition of *ḥuqqot ha-goyim* itself. Referring to the practice of ablution, he observed that, "Whatever . . . is not required or encouraged in the law, but is a well-known practice and statute of the gentiles while not of the traditions of Israel, shall be prohibited if its purpose is to imitate them . . . " Such would be the case, he continued, if one were to go beyond the washing of the hands and feet to wash the arms, behind the ears, the fore-hair, or nostrils in the Muslim fashion. Nevertheless, he insisted, "I do not apply to this [the category of] *ḥuqqot ha-goyim*, in so far as those who practice such [things], namely the Ishmaelites, are monotheists (*muwaḥḥidūn*) and prohibit idolatry. All the same, there is no need for an imitation of this sort, for what is contained in our law and customs is sufficient."[172] It is noteworthy that Abraham Maimonides described this intriguing view as his own, yet there is precedent for such an exception in the case of Islam in the Gaonic period.[173] As for his acknowledgement of Islam's strict monotheism, he closely followed his father's views on the subject, though such a position was unlikely to have aroused much controversy among the majority of Jews living under Islam.[174]

It is interesting to observe that, in spite of his exception of Islam from the prohibition of imitation, Abraham appears to have accused others of a similar violation. His accusations include cases of imitating both Muslims and Christians, although it is the former that occupy us here in light of the apologetic context of the *Compendium*. The first and most important of these,

[172] *SM*, 157–8. Compare *Perush*, 43, and see M. A. Friedman, "A Note on Abraham Maimonides' Commentary to the Torah" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 114 (1994), 103.

[173] See N. Wieder, *Islamic Influences of the Jewish Worship* (Hebrew) (Oxford: East and West, 1947), 8.

[174] For his father's views on the monotheism of Islam, see MT, "Laws of Forbidden Foods," 11:7, and especially *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, II:548–50, no. 293. At the same time, there is no direct indication that Maimonides himself excluded Muslims from being an object of the prohibition of *ḥuqqot ha-goyim*. See MT, "Laws of Idolatry," 11:1.

from a chapter on the adornment of the synagogue, provides a fascinating window into the material dimension of Jewish synagogue life in Islamic Egypt, a subject for which only scanty historical information is preserved.

> It is . . . necessary that the light fixtures, the candelabra or saucer lamps,[175] the iron chains[176] and the candles, be the most beautiful possible, made of silver or copper and pure glass, and cleaned regularly with water from the oil, dust, and anything else that sticks to it. [It is likewise necessary] that the oil kept in the immediate vicinity of the ark[177] be olive oil and that [all] the lighting in the rest of the synagogue likewise be made from the purest and most illuminating of oils, and that the extent of the candelabra or the candles be enough to illumine the [entire] space completely and thoroughly. But one should not be excessive in this as we observe [people] doing with exorbitant amounts of lighting by setting numerous candles in imitation of the lighting of the gentiles (*muḥākātan li-waqīd al-goyim*) in their places of worship. On some occasions, this amusement reaches the point of selecting the orderly arrangement of the candles and varying the colors of the waters between red, green, and yellow, according to patterns more befitting the places for the festivals of the gentiles (*'alyaq bi-mawāḍi' afrāḥ al-goyim*) than [those] of Israel's worship, called "holy" and consisting of pious and religious people, on the whole. This should be lamented and prevented as far as possible.[178]

Abraham Maimonides was in general accord with his coreligionists on the special importance attached to the quality of light fixtures in the synagogues. I know of no other halakhic manual from this period, including his father's comprehensive code, that so much as mentions the particulars of synagogue maintenance, let alone goes into such minute detail on the subject.[179] His rejection of extravagance in this area is all the more important as a result. One can only imagine that the excessive lighting was noticeable to all and commonly compared with that found in neighboring mosques. The Nagid's charge of "imitating the lighting of the gentiles," however, is more comprehensible in the case of the special arrangements of lighting and colored water reserved by both communities for holy days.[180] On another occasion, the Nagid accused

[175] On this type of lamp (*atbāq*) in medieval Egyptian synagogues, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, II:150.

[176] The *salāsil* referred to here are the chains by which the light fixtures hung low from high ceilings, much as in neighboring mosques.

[177] Lit. *al-hekhal*. [178] *SM*, 107–8.

[179] Maimonides' treatment of the laws of the synagogue in MT, "Laws of Prayer," ch. 11 does not touch on the subject of synagogue lighting.

[180] The obvious correlation to Islamic practice in color, array, and occasion made the suspicion of imitation, and even competition, a natural one. Equally significant for the entire controversy of *ḥuqqot ha-goyim* is the fact that both the imitation and its accusation strongly suggest an intimate knowledge of the interior adornment of mosques on the part of the general Jewish population and its Nagid. Whether or not the Nagid's assertion, already noted, that additional (supererogatory) ablutions would constitute imitation of the gentiles was directed at specific Jews of his own day remains an open question. This was the opinion of Wieder, *Islamic*

fellow Jews of imitating the Muslim custom to bury their dead in the direction of the *qiblah*, "something that is definitely an imitation of the gentiles (*min ḥuqqot ha-goyim davqa*), with no tradition among the customs of Israel."[181] The accusations that others were guilty of imitating Islamic practice take on added significance in light of the Nagid's effort to repudiate the allegations of fellow scholars and to underscore his position as religious authority in the community.

III. The Problem of Inclusion

Abraham Maimonides' appeal for synagogue and devotional reform was intricately linked with his efforts to encourage others in the community to join in pietist worship. As shown earlier in this chapter, pietist prayer circles included a cross-section of the Egyptian community, including scholars and laymen, men and women, adults and children alike. The objections to the scope of the pietist reforms were therefore directed as much at their theoretical ambitions as at their implementation in practice. Once again the challenge came from rival scholars with some influence in the community at large. These scholars accepted prostration and the like as praiseworthy in and of themselves, but feared their vulgarization in the hands of the masses. Rather than encourage unworthy individuals to adopt the ways of the saints, they viewed prostration as something "to be kept secret [such that] not anyone whatsoever undertake it but only a highly learned individual . . . imbued with religiosity and correct belief, in such a way that only a prophet or great pious man or someone resembling them may approach it, and even then only in secret and not in public view." As the Nagid attested, "I have seen this argument wielded many times by those who have the audacity to issue legal pronouncements, saying 'Not all who make a claim to greatness may do so.'"[182] As a result, he added, "the gullible community has been deceived [by the scholars] in their poor ignorance . . . to the point that some of them deprecate the practice of prostration as suspect . . . "[183]

Influences, 17, though this cannot be determined with certainty on the basis of the source in the *Compendium* alone.

[181] See *SM*, 159.

[182] *SM*, 167, citing from M Berakhot, 2:8. The Mishnah reflects the opinion of R. Simeon b. Gamaliel that even one who wants to recite the *shema'* (i.e. to take hold of the divine name) on his wedding night ought not to do so on account of his distraction. My translation of the phrase follows Maimonides' commentary to this Mishnah. See *Perush ha-Rambam le-Avot*, ed. Shailat, 66. The phrase was adapted quite freely in this polemical context. For the Nagid's use of this phrase in a critique of Daniel ha-Bavli's audacity in assuming greater understanding than an earlier master, see *Sefer Birkat Avraham*, ed. B. Goldberg (Lyck (Ełk): n.p., 1859), 31, no. 9.

[183] *SM*, 168.

Rather than restrict its membership to the spiritually adept, the Nagid encouraged the participation of a broad spectrum of the community. His answer to the skeptics was twofold. His first approach was to underscore the non-elitist teachings of the biblical and rabbinic traditions. There is, he admitted, an esoteric body of knowledge known as "the mysteries of the Torah" (*sitre Torah*), associated in rabbinic lore with the account of creation and the vision of Ezekiel.[184] He cautioned against drawing a false connection between this esoteric tradition and other domains of the religious life.

> They are not mysteries because they have an underlying or misleading or dubious meaning, such that we are afraid of their becoming known, may God shield us from such a thought! Nor is it [due to] a niggardly attitude toward most Jews and the intention that the elite be superior to the community. For this would be a vile trait, condemned by reason and prohibited by law, since the law commanded precisely the opposite: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). It is rather that most minds have difficulty grasping the mysteries of the Torah, such as the account of creation, the account of the chariot, and other matters that are similarly abstruse and subtle, without intellectual training . . . But there is nothing so exalted about the posture of prostration that should keep it from being taught, as if only someone with powers of perception and immense learning should approach it. If someone says this, let this be their answer: O fool! It is even more appropriate to apply this idea to prayer! For prostration only cultivates meekness and humility in the one prostrating through [physical] enactment, [downward] movement, and placement [upon the ground]. Prayer, on the other hand, consists of language and speech, the mention of God's attributes, glorification, supplication, intercession, thanksgiving, and confession. And how many majestic and exalted matters and great mysteries did I allude to when I explained the meanings of the blessings of *shema'* and the *'amidah*![185] Yet not a single [sage], whether ancient or modern, claims that only one who is religiously virtuous and perfect in knowledge should pray, as if the community should not utter these prayers because they are not worthy of them![186]

The many forms of speech in prayer enumerated by the Nagid in this passage constitute "a form of audacity," in contrast with the simplicity of prostration, directed solely at "the glorification of the One before Whom one prostrates and the aim of humility and a posture of awe in the one prostrating. All of these are matters which logic and reason enjoin upon everyone alike."[187] According to the description in the passage cited above, prostration "cultivates meekness and humility" through the physical gestures themselves. The very act of lowering one's body to the ground in humble submission not only

[184] See BT Ḥagigah 13a and Maimonides' introduction to part two of the *Guide*. For an application of the principle of *sitre Torah* by Abraham elsewhere, see *Teshuvot*, 47, no. 43.

[185] The section of the *Compendium* dealing with the meanings of these prayers is no longer extant.

[186] *SM*, 168–9.

[187] See *SM*, 174–5, and cf. *SM*, 87, 126–7.

testifies to a prior state of reverence in some, but actually creates such an attitude in others. It embraces the most experienced of pietists and the uninitiated in a single community. To those who objected that these postures were too demanding for all to perform, the Nagid spoke of their spiritual and ethical benefits for combating inner vices, and thus their benefit to worshipers of all levels. "Of the [religious] obligations and recommendations I have described, there is no great physical exertion. To the contrary, they are exceedingly easy! The great exertion in them is entirely aimed at one's lesser nature, which leads to arrogance, envy, baseness, and vice."[188]

Abraham's second answer to the skeptics on the question of inclusivity is equally important for an appreciation of the social make-up of pietist prayer. The very premise of the pietist reforms was the expectation that they would lead to a revitalization of religious life. Yet in the eyes of its opponents, the inclusion of non-adepts was a sign of the vulgarization of the movement. In response to this challenge, the Nagid invoked the rabbinic principle that, though one must ideally study Torah for its own sake, one is bidden to study even in the absence of pure motivation, in the hope that study will itself transform the student. By the same token, the outer devotions have the intrinsic power to transport the worshiper in the absence of a purer motivation.

> While it may be true that some [worshipers] do not have full mental concentration in prayer or stand like a learned and pious person or understand the reason for facing the sanctum like one who is learned, it is nevertheless incumbent on all people without exception to prostrate, even if one is not aware—in the very act of prostration—of the majesty of the One before Whom he is prostrating, [even if]—at the moment of outwardly throwing one's face to the ground—one's heart is not broken and trembling within in the presence of God . . . A true confirmation of this is [the talmudic tradition that] "One should always immerse oneself in the Torah even if not for its own sake, for from an impure motive may come a pure motive . . . "[189] The prostration of an ignorant person or a young child and their imitation of one who is older or nobler in disposition is therefore essential, for even from an impure motive one may come to a pure motive. The basic point is that worship is shared by all alike. Neither scripture nor reason justifies limiting it to the select few.[190]

[188] *SM*, 185. See, however, *SM*, 125, where the Nagid described these postures as being of "some difficulty." His purpose in this source was not so much to persuade his readers as to describe the practice.

[189] See, e.g., BT Pesaḥim 50b. On this important topic, see C. Cohen, "'Not for its Own Sake': The Value of Divine Worship 'for an Impure Motive'," *Me'aliot* 18 (1997), 129–36. Note the use of this phrase in a similar vein by Abraham's grandson, David, in *Doctor ad Solitudinem et Ductor ad Simplicitatem*, ed. P. Fenton (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1987), 57. A similar principle is invoked by Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (n.e.). (Cairo, 2009), II:373–4.

[190] *SM*, 172–3.

What worshipers lacked in purity of devotion could be overcome through continuous practice and the living model of more experienced pietist members in their midst. It was the Nagid's conviction, reinforced throughout his writings, that the rites he promoted and helped introduce were not the prerogative of the elite but the calling of all Israel. His efforts at a broad revival reflect his concern for the religious potential of the general community rather than a self-selected group of devotees. This in itself helps explain his formidable efforts to draw as many people as possible, of all ages and capacities, into his circle. His goal was nothing short of a spiritual renewal at every level of society. For this reason, the connection between his two public roles, as communal and pietist leader, was a natural and necessary one, not only to defend the movement from its opponents but to bring the fruits of religious revival to the community at large. His words speak eloquently for themselves and are the most explicit statement of the Nagid's social aspirations for the broad reach of the pietist movement.

> There is no question that a select group of pietists are capable of [these devotional rites] and more still on their own [initiative]. But on this subject I declare that my overarching goal is not the rehabilitation of the worship of the pious of Israel. I seek rather the rehabilitation of the entire community, in accordance with the words of scripture, "Gather the nation unto Me that I may instruct it as to My words so that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they live upon the earth and that they may teach [the same] to their children" (Deut. 4:10). I have promoted nothing more than the fear of God.[191] For this reason it is imperative: It must not remain exclusive [to the pietists], but is the possession of all alike.[192]

[191] The allusion is to the verse just cited, "that they may learn to fear Me . . . "
[192] *SM*, 186.

2

Ideals and Institutions

The Egyptian pietist movement of the early thirteenth century manifested itself in two distinct yet complementary ways. It was marked, first and foremost, by a demanding regimen of supererogatory devotion and ascetic discipline, only to be undertaken by the most sincere devotees, who thereby earned the epithet *ḥasidim*.[1] Abraham Maimonides' role as spiritual director of a conventicle of pietist "companions" (*aṣḥāb*) in Fustat was dedicated to the training of individual devotees by means of a regimen of strenuous practices, from fasting and nightly prayer to solitary retreats and meditation. Abraham referred to this discipline as the "special path" of the pious "remnant whom the Lord calls," not to be undertaken casually or without total devotion to an ascetic way of life. In addition, Egyptian pietism was distinguished by a concerted effort to reform and revitalize public worship from what was perceived to be generations of corruption and decay over the course of the exile. Its pursuit of synagogue reform, unlike its ascetic regimen, was intended for the renewal of religious worship in the community as a whole. It viewed itself as a spiritual vanguard and a model for others to follow. As in the previous case, its novel features were depicted as a return to origins, yet bear the unmistakable impact of the Islamic environment. But, if the latter sought to revive long obsolete customs of biblical and talmudic worship, the former looked for inspiration from the tradition of the ancient prophets and the contemporary practice of Sufi mystics. The Nagid's efforts to reform the prayer life of the people will occupy our attention in Chapter three. We turn at present to the ideals and institutions that distinguished Egyptian pietism among the community as a whole dedicated to a life of voluntary prayer and spiritual discipline.

The emphasis on practical discipline over theosophical doctrine, which characterized Egyptian pietism from its inception, bears an interesting resemblance to the early development of Sufism. Long before Sufism developed a coherent system of doctrines and common spiritual ideals, it was distinguished

[1] For the epithets by which the pietists were known, see p. 53, n. 40.

by a spirit of strict asceticism and renunciation of worldly goods.[2] Its earliest exponents were known as "those who renounce the world" (*al-zuhhād fī al-dunyā*) and "those who constantly weep" (*al-bakkā'ūn*) in fear of divine judgment. Theirs was a practical spirituality, uninterested in theological speculation or mystical secrets. As one of the foremost modern scholars of Sufism put it, "the first ascetic tendencies in Basra and its environment," best exemplified in the school of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) and his disciples, "were almost exclusively devotional and lacked any interest in speculative thought."[3] A similar impulse animated the early pietist movement, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, found its strongest expression and its earliest activity in the realm of ascetic praxis.[4] A doctrinal literature did develop over the course of the thirteenth century and beyond, but much if not most of this was devoted to an elaboration on, and exhortation toward, pietist practice.[5] All indications suggest that when pietists were enjoined to embrace a life of "practice and knowledge" (*al-amal wa'l-'ilm*), knowledge of the pietist path was understood, first and foremost, as a gnosis oriented toward a life of practical discipline.[6]

An interest in devotional praxis is less immediately apparent, but just as fundamental, in the Sufi-inflected Jewish pietism of Baḥya ibn Paquda, which predated the Egyptian movement by at least a century. Following on the heels of the Judaeo-Arabic rationalist tradition of Iraq and al-Andalus, Baḥya exhibited an overriding interest in the theoretical foundations of his subject, even as his ultimate purpose was to implement the fruits of his speculation into a life of spiritual virtue. In his introduction to the *Duties of the Heart*, Baḥya laid the foundations of rational inquiry and scholarly investigation into the demands of the religious life, from which the imperative of the inner duties emerges as the necessary conclusion. "I inquired regarding the duties of the

[2] For an overview of this transition conceived as a linear development, see I. Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1910), 154–5, and C. Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E," *SI* 83 (1996), 51–70. On the ascetic ideal in the early Sufi path, see S. Sviri, "Self and its Transformation in Ṣūfism, with Special Reference to Early Literature," in *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions*, ed. D. Shulman and G. Stroumsa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 195–215. For a classic study on the technical terminology of early Sufi asceticism, see I. Goldziher, "Arabische Synonzmik der Askese." *Der Islam* 8 (1918), 204–13.

[3] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 31.

[4] See pp. 47–9.

[5] Classic examples from this period include the anonymous pietist treatises published by P. Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Perfection, Providence and Prophecy from the Jewish Sufi Circle," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 301–34, and "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer and the Spiritual Quest from the Pietist Circle," *JSAI* 16 (1993), 137–75. See also the pietist treatise of uncertain provenance built on the model of Baḥya's *Hidāyah*, discussed and published by N. Ilan, "*Beginning of Wisdom*—The Remains of a Sufi Composition in Judaeo-Arabic Inspired by *Duties of the Heart*" (Hebrew), in *Alei Asor: Proceedings of the Tenth Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies* (Hebrew), ed. D. Lasker and H. Ben-Shammai (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2008), 21–103.

[6] See, e.g., TS 10 J 13.8, l. 17, on which see below, pp. 98–9.

heart from the standpoint of logic, scripture, and tradition . . . and I discovered that they are the foundation of all the duties."[7] Yet, for the persevering reader, Baḥya's lengthy disquisitions on the duties of the heart give way toward the end of the treatise to the implementation of these ideals in a practical spiritual discipline. He advised his reader to undertake "voluntary fasts during the day, if one's body is capable of enduring it, and voluntary prayer each night . . . and solitary meditation in remembrance (*dhikr*) of God,[8] may He be glorified and magnified, and intimacy (*uns*) in His presence during the time when every lover is alone with his beloved . . . as scripture says, 'My soul desires You at night' (Is. 26:9), and 'Upon my bed each night [I have sought the one my soul desires]' (Song of Songs 3:1)."[9] To this end, Baḥya included two lengthy prayers of his own composition at the end of his work, one a rebuke to the soul (*tokhaḥah*) and the other verses of praise and petition (*baqqashah*), which he recommended be recited as part of the voluntary prayer of the pietist.[10] But he added the following prescription for the interested devotee: "One who takes upon himself [to read these prayers], should take upon himself to pray the *tokhaḥah* in a seated position . . . and afterwards pray the *baqqashah* while standing and prostrating until the end,[11] then he should rise and recite any other supplications he chooses, after which he should follow this with 'Happy are the upright . . . ' (Ps. 119: 1),[12] and 'Song of ascents' (Ps. 120:1), until the end."[13]

The core of Baḥya's ascetic regimen, based on the medieval Sufi ascetic ideal of daily fasting and nightly prayer (*ṣiyām wa-qiyām*), may have served as the foundation for private pietist devotions in Andalusia and North Africa, of which some evidence has survived.[14] The same core elements were later to

[7] See *Kitāb al-Hidāyah ilā Farā'iḍ al-Qulūb, Maqor ve-Targum*, ed. Y. Qafiḥ (Jerusalem: Yad Mahari Qafiḥ, 1991), 18.

[8] On dhikr in Egyptian pietism, see below, pp. 105–6, n. 91.

[9] See *Hidāyah*, ed. Qafiḥ, 423–4.

[10] The prayers can be found in *Hidāyah*, ed. Qafiḥ, 432–41. A separate collection of Baḥya's other poetic compositions have been published by Y. Peles, *Baḥya ben Yosef ibn Paqudah: Shire Qodesh* (Tel-Aviv: University of Tel-Aviv Press, 1977). For a discussion of Baḥya's poetry, see H. Schirmann, *Toledot ha-Shirah ha-'Ivrit bi-Sefarad ha-Muslimit*, ed. E. Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Ben Zvi Institute, 1995), 373–9, and see Y. Tobi, *Proximity and Distance: Medieval Hebrew and Arabic Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 356–62. For a valuable overview of eastern *baqqashot* and their pre-dawn recitation, from their medieval beginnings to their modern development, see P. Fenton, "Les Baqqāšōt d'Orient et d'Occident: Aperçu Historique et Descriptif," *REJ* 134 (1975), 101–21.

[11] Perhaps this is to be understood as an injunction to stand during the verses of praise and then prostrate during the verses of petition.

[12] This is shorthand for the entire psalm (consisting of 176 verses).

[13] *Hidāyah*, ed. Qafiḥ, 424, implying the recitation of Psalms 120–34. Compare these devotions with Baḥya's words earlier in the same gate: "Whenever you become aware of the greatness of His power and the glory of His majesty, fall down before Him and prostrate in fear, trembling, and awe . . . " See *Hidāyah*, 411–12.

[14] See Y. T. Langermann, "From Private Devotion to Communal Prayer: New Light on Abraham Maimonides' Synagogue Reforms," *GQ* 1 (2005), 32–41.

become the cornerstone of the Egyptian pietist movement, even as it acquired novel rites and a unique institutional character all its own. In this new environment, the solitary devotee addressed in the abstract by Baḥya[15] had become a formal disciple in a pietist conventicle, required to heed the guidance of an experienced master to oversee his gradual progression on the pietist path. In a letter sent from a member of Abraham Maimonides' inner circle of pietists to a lapsed member of the group, the latter is chastised for having "abandoned the service of the master, Rabbi Abraham, which is incumbent on everyone who comes [to him] from distant lands."[16] The same disciple wrote of the duty to "attend the conventicle of the head and the companions (*majlis al-rayyis wa'l-aṣḥāb*) for the [attainment of proper] practice and knowledge (*fī'l-ʿamal wa'l-ʿilm*)."[17] What emerges before our eyes from the Genizah sources and the extant writings of the Nagid is a complex system of mystical fellowship and discipleship that had all the trappings of an established movement. As this chapter illustrates in some detail, the heart of the movement was to be found not so much in speculative theology as in practical discipline.

Our survey of the social and intellectual background of the pietist movement in the previous chapter may now be rounded out with a description of the key principles and practices of its devotional regimen, some of which were conducted within the Nagid's conventicle, while many continued to be performed in isolation. As already noted, I have set aside our consideration of the Nagid's devotional prayer reforms, which he did not view as part of the ascetic discipline of the pietist elite but as part of the spiritual renewal of the people as a whole, for a separate analysis in Chapters three and four. While the subjects of these two chapters are conceptually distinct and require separate treatment, it must be borne in mind that they are practically and institutionally linked, in so far as they were each exclusively found within the pietist movement. For ease of reference, I have arranged the present chapter according to the major institutions of Egyptian pietism, beginning with the role of the spiritual master, known in Arabic as the *shaikh* or *maulā*, and culminating with the distinctive dress associated with members of the movement. The numerous parallels with Sufi institutions and rites, some of which appear in classical Sufi literature while others were still in their infancy in early thirteenth-century Egyptian Sufism, serve as the socio-religious backdrop vital to our historical examination of the Jewish pietist movement in its formative stage.

[15] Consider Baḥya's words, *Hidāyah*, 424: "If one chooses to pray with other compositions [or: verses] and in a different order, it is up to him (*fa'l-amr ilaihi*) . . . "

[16] TS 10 J 13.8, ll. 5–7. This letter is translated in full and discussed on pp. 97–100.

[17] TS 10 J 13.8, ll. 16–17.

SPIRITUAL GUIDE

The changing face of Sufism from a loose association of ascetics and mystics into a system of formal brotherhoods organized around a spiritual master is of major importance in the consolidation of the movement.[18] In a recent dissertation on Egyptian Sufism in the thirteenth century, Nate Hofer challenged the prevailing terminological and conceptual framework within which the history of Sufism in this period has been cast, arguing for a redefinition of what constitutes an institution. Hofer suggested that Sufi institutions should be conceived not as the physical structures (such as the *zāwiyah*, *khānqāh*, *ribāṭ*, or *madrasah*), but as "the systematization and formalization of doctrine, terminology, and practices" that had developed as early as the tenth or eleventh centuries.[19] Hofer therefore identifies the thirteenth century not as a period of institutionalization but of organization and expansion, viewing the Jewish pietists as yet another example of self-identified Sufis in Egypt who sought to utilize preexisting doctrines and practices toward their own ulterior ends. In so doing, Hofer maintains that the pietists viewed themselves as not only Sufis, but the only authentic Sufis.[20] Given the fact that the pietists studiously avoided designating themselves as Sufis, whether authentic or otherwise, I am reluctant to read such a bold claim into the sources. Yet Hofer is no doubt correct that the Jewish pietists creatively appropriated a variety of preexisting Sufi institutions—perhaps the most symbolic example, representing the broader shift toward a formal organizational structure, being the place of the spiritual guide at the head of a dedicated circle of disciples.

The process of consolidation or organization in Sufism received a major boost with the ascendency of Saladin in Egypt and the Levant, whose policy of generous endowments for legal academies and lodges for Sufi brotherhoods ensured the ongoing stability of the latter in Ayyubid society.[21] The Jewish pietist movement, from its origins in Andalusia to its growth in

[18] For this development in Sufism, see J. S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 166–93, and A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 228–58.

[19] See N. Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society in Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1309," Dissertation, Emory University, 2011, 8, and see his methodological argument, Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society," 21–40, esp. 28–33.

[20] See Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society," 222, and my remarks in the Introduction, p. 37. Hofer further suggests that the ulterior ambition of the "Jewish Sufis" was none other than "an overtly political goal" to subvert the Islamic hegemony over Jews and assert a Jewish dominion with the dawn of the messianic era. See Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society," 20–1. I will respond briefly to this assertion of political and even revolutionary ambitions among the pietists in the context of my discussion of messianism and redemption in pietist thought in Chapter 6.

[21] See Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society," 41–91, and Y. Lev, "Saladin's Economic Policies and the Economy of Ayyubid Egypt," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermeulen and K. D'Hulster (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), V: 334–40.

thirteenth-century Egypt, underwent a similar transition from an individually oriented system to an organized association of pietists trained under the spiritual care of a distinguished master. Here the discontinuity of Egyptian pietism from the earlier activity of Baḥya ibn Paquda is particularly evident. For all his emphasis on the ladder of ascent and the systematization of a spiritual–ethical discipline and doctrine, Baḥya never once advocated a format of training under the guidance of a *shaikh*, nor did he cite at any point from the famous dictum from Mishnah Avot to "acquire yourself a master," an injunction that was to become fundamental to later developments in Egypt.[22]

The parallel with Sufi developments of mystical discipleship is largely self-evident, but the formation of an organized system of fellowship must be considered as part of a complex historical evolution. The pietist movement, not unlike its Islamic counterpart, incorporated the model of a spiritual guide as increasing numbers of pietist seekers of varied levels of training began to coalesce around charismatic and venerated leaders. The development of pietist brotherhoods, known collectively as "fellows" (*aṣḥāb*) and "fellowships" (*ṣuḥbah*) after their Sufi counterparts,[23] should be viewed as a sign of the maturation of the movement in Jewish society, whose main lines of development we traced in the previous chapter. It is not unlikely, given what we know of the diversity of Egyptian pietism, that multiple, and even competing, circles of masters and disciples proliferated in this environment.[24] A *shaikh* was expected to have undergone considerable training on the spiritual path and be recognized as a moral paragon before consenting to impart something of his experience to his willing disciples.[25] Apart from regular devotions performed in common, pietist fellowships were primarily a series of independent relationships between a single master and multiple disciples, each of whom pursued separate trajectories and specialized training from the *shaikh*.[26]

[22] See M Avot, 1:6 and 1:16.

[23] On these and related terms, see TS 10J13.8, l. 16 and TS 12.289r, l. 10, and cf. *HW*, II:82, l. 19. See also G. Makdisi, "Ṣuḥba et riyāsa dans l'enseignement médiéval," in *Recherches d'islamalogie: Recueil d'articles offerts à Georges Answati et Louis Gardet par leurs collègues et amis* (Louvain: Editions Peeters, 1978), 207–21, and see the references in E. Russ-Fishbane, "Between Politics and Piety," 109–10, n. 42. The term *ṣuḥbah* rarely occurs in the only Egyptian Sufi compilation roughly contemporaneous with the height of the pietist movement, the epistle of Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī'l-Manṣūr. See Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī'l-Manṣūr, *La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Ẓāfir*, ed. D. Gril (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1986), esp. 75a (Ar. 51, Fr. 143), and 78a (Ar. 54, Fr. 146), which speaks of it in terms of a formal bond (*ʿaqd al-ṣuḥbah*), and rule (*ḥaqq al-ṣuḥbah*), respectively.

[24] On the Sufi *shaikh*s of Fustat during this general period, see Gril's description, *La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr*, 24–6.

[25] On the moral character of the Sufi *shaikh*, see D. Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 96–102.

[26] In a now classic study, Fritz Meier argued that a major shift from classical Sufism to its later institutional form was due to the shift in the role of the *shaikh* from mere teacher to director or trainer of the inner life. See F. Meier, "Hurasan und das Ende der klassischen Sufik," in *Atti del*

The following description by Abraham Maimonides in the *Compendium* should be viewed in light of the diverse and individualized direction of pietist training.

> It is essential in this special type of spiritual striving (*al-mujāhadah al-khāṣṣah*)[27] that efforts [to diminish] eating and sleeping and other things be made in stages and according to the capacity of each one making the effort to endure it. And [it ought only to be undertaken] under the direction of masters who have cultivated these [practices] and who have striven to achieve them and have reached their destination . . . When one embarks on the special type of spiritual striving in stages and under direction and guidance (*ʿalā tadrīj wa-takrīj wa-tadbīr*), determined and defined in its particulars for each and every person according to his condition by one of the masters in learning and religion, in whom are combined fear [of God], humility, wisdom, understanding, and piety, who has grasped spiritual striving from experience, has traversed its broad expanse, emerged safe from its hazards, and reached his destination, then will [the disciple] be safe in traversing the hazards of spiritual striving . . . Know that this is as the bearers of tradition, peace be upon them, have said with regard to theoretical learning (*fī taʿallum al-ʿilm*): "Acquire yourself a master and remove yourself from doubt" (M. Avot 1:16). [The same process] is equally vital in practical learning (*fī taʿallum al-ʿamal*).[28]

Behind the principle of master–disciple relationship in this passage was the perception that the rigors of the pietist path, described here as "spiritual striving" (*mujāhadah*), were fraught with frequent pitfalls and perils. As a spiritual master in his own right, Abraham Maimonides repeatedly preached a measured and graded abstinence, "by removing your habits and weakening your ties [to this world] little by little in stages (*ʿalā tadrīj*). But do not go and plunge in all at once lest you go astray and lose your balance!"[29] The *shaikh* is

Concengo internazionale sul Tema: La Persia nel Medioevo (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1971), 131–56. For a reassessment of Meier's schematization, see L. Silvers-Alario, "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier's Definition of the *shaykh al-tarbiyya* and the *shaykh al-taʿlīm*," *Muslim World* 93 (2003), 69–72. See also the discussion in Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety*, 48–54, 104.

[27] For the concept (and practice) of *mujāhadah* in classical Sufi thought, see al-Qushairī, *al-Risālah al-Qushairīyah fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*, ed. M. al-Marʿashlī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī and Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1998), 164–9. For *mujāhadāt* used for spiritual exercises in the plural in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Egypt, see Ṣafī al-Dīn, *La Risāla*, fol. 77b.

[28] *HW*, II:322, l. 20 to 324, l, 2; 326, ll. 5–11, 19–21. The use of *ʿamal* for spiritual discipline and practical training, in contradistinction to speculative study (*ʿilm*), can also be seen from the pietist letter cited below, TS 10 J 13.8, *recto*, ll. 1, 16–17. For another example of *ʿamal* as part of the pietist regimen leading to *qurb*, see the composite text published by Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 154: . . . *tuʿraf [al-nafs] bi-ṣūrah turshiduhā ilā ʿamal yuqarribuhā min bārīhā* . . . Compare al-Suhrawardī's words in *Abū al-Najīb ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Suhrawardī: Kitāb Ādāb al-Murīdīn*, ed. M. Milson (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1978), 16 (II:39): "The beginning of Sufism is learning, its middle is practice, and its end is [divine] grace" (*awwal al-taṣawwuf ʿilm wa-ausaṭuhu ʿamal wa-ākhiruhu mauhabah*).

[29] See *HW*, II:252, ll. 20–1.

described as one who has learned the hazards of the path through painful experience and has emerged safely on the other side.[30] But, more importantly, the master does not prescribe the same regimen to all disciples equally.[31] A close and formidable bond is established between the initiator and the initiated.[32] Much like the Sufi model on which it was based, spiritual direction among the pietists consisted of a deeply personal relationship cultivated between the "master" (*shaikh*) and his "servant" (*khadīm*).[33] Also like its Sufi counterpart, an aspiring disciple (*murīd*) seeking admittance to the pietist fellowship was patiently tested by the master before being accepted for initiation (*irādah*).[34]

As in other rites and models adapted from the Sufi environment, Abraham Maimonides did not deny the parallel with Sufism, even if he denied the charge of outright imitation of the gentiles.[35] To bolster this claim, the Nagid provided numerous precedents for the institution of discipleship in biblical and talmudic *exempla*. It is for this reason that the biblical model of "the disciples of the prophets" (*bene ha-nevi'im*) was so vital to the Nagid and his colleagues, a subject tied to the revival of prophecy among the pietists, to which we shall return in Chapter six.[36] Seen in this light, Sufi *models* were transformed by Egyptian pietists into Sufi *imitations* of the ancient prophets of Israel: "Consider, then, these wondrous traditions and grieve at how they were removed from us, appearing in a different nation while disappearing among us!"[37]

In the previous chapter, we observed that Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ and his brother Joseph functioned as early leaders of the nascent movement and were

[30] See the above description of the master, *HW*, II:326, ll. 9–10: . . . *wa-sabara al-mujāhadah tajribatan wa-qataʿa ʿurūḍahā wa-salima min akhṭāriha wa-waṣala ilā nihāyatiha* . . .

[31] The Nagid used the term *tafāʾut* to describe the variations among the disciples of the pietist path. See esp. *HW*, I:138, l. 5 to 144, l. 10; 186, ll. 7–9, 19. The result was a highly specialized relationship between the *shaikh* and his followers.

[32] For a hint of the pietist rite of initiation, see my discussion of the *khirqah* below.

[33] For this terminology, and the explicit acknowledgement of the Sufi model, see *HW*, II:422, l. 15. The disciple was a "servant" insofar as he was in spiritual service under the direction of his mentor. See the pietist letter cited below, TS 10 J 13.8, *recto*, ll. 5–6. In the epistle of Ṣafī al-Dīn, the language of service is central to the master–disciple relationship. See Ṣafī al-Dīn, *La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Ẓāfir*, ed. Gril, 107a–b (Ar. 76, Fr. 174), and see 81a–b (Ar. 58, Fr. 150). See also Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety*, 100–1.

[34] See II Firk. I.3870, 6a, on Song of Songs 2:7, published and translated into Hebrew by P. Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary to Song of Songs in the Hand of R. David ben Joshua Maimuni" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 69 (2000), 557, and translated into English by P. Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs in the Hand of David Maimonides II," in *Esoteric and Exoteric Aspects in Judeo-Arabic Culture*, ed. B. Hary and H. Ben-Shammai (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 38–9, and see n. 44 and 45.

[35] It is noteworthy, however, that there is no explicit evidence of such an accusation by his Jewish opponents in this case, as there had been in the devotional reforms.

[36] For the Nagid's reference to the ancient model of "the disciples of the prophets," see *HW*, II:324, ll. 2–3; 422, l. 7 to 424, l. 9. For its use as a distinct reference to contemporary adherents, see *HW*, I:146, l. 16, among other places. See my discussion in Chapter six, and see P. Fenton, *Deux traités de mystique juive*. (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1987), 75, n. 158.

[37] *HW*, II:322, ll. 15–17.

both described in an anonymous letter as models of piety and teachers of aspiring devotees.[38] While there is no direct testimony to the effect that either of the two served as a spiritual mentor to a formal circle of disciples, there are indications of a personal acquaintance with the institution of discipleship. In his mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs, ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ alluded to the relationship between the master and his disciples in such a fellowship.

> "As an apple among the trees of the forest, [so is my beloved among the young men]" (Song of Songs 2:3): The reference to the plural[39] is an allusion to all those who join in association [with others] in their quest of the [ultimate] objective (*kull al-muṣṭaḥib fī ṭalab al-ma[qṣū]d*), namely the disciples of the prophets.[40]

While the literal meaning of this gloss speaks to the act of joining a mystical fellowship with other devotees, the indirect but obvious allusion is to the formal acceptance of discipleship under a spiritual guide.[41] This is precisely the purpose of the gloss, which compares the relationship of the master to his disciples with the contrast of "an apple among the trees of the forest." It is, to the interpreter, the same analogue as the difference between the prophets and their disciples, the key model to which the pietists appealed in their quest for biblical precedent.[42]

In a now classic article written almost half a century ago, S. D. Goitein published a number of key documents pertaining to the circle and variegated activities of Abraham Maimonides in his unofficial capacity as head of the pietist movement.[43] The documents unambiguously portray the Nagid as the preeminent spokesman and leader of a loose association of disciples from Fustat to Alexandria. One source in particular confirms that, in addition to his general role as figurehead of the fledgling movement, Abraham did in fact serve as the formal spiritual master, or *shaikh*, of a circle of disciples in Fustat,

[38] See TS 20.148, *recto*, esp. ll. 3–31, and see my earlier remarks on this letter in the previous chapter. The two were called *sare ʿam segulah ve-ṣirehah* (l. 3). Josef was dubbed "head of the pietists" (*rosh he-ḥasidim*) and "banner of the Jews" (*degel ha-yehudim*) (l. 30).

[39] i.e. the plural of "young men".

[40] TS Arabic Box 1b.7, 2, *verso*, ll. 1–3, published by P. Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," *JSS* 26 (1981), 51.

[41] Fenton translated the phrase (*kull al-muṣṭaḥib*) in precisely that sense ("those who choose a master"), Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 55. Fenton subsequently published another manuscript version of the same text, II Firk. I.1124, 113, which has the slightly different reading, *al-muṣṭaḥib li-ṭalab hadha al-maqṣid*. See Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary to Song of Songs" (Hebrew), 580, and cf. Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs" (English), 44. See also M. A. Friedman, "The Ten *Baṭlanim* in the Synagogue According to Maimonides and Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), in *MiBirkat Moshe: Maimonidean Studies in Honor of Rabbi Nachum Eliezer Rabinovitch, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Birkat Moshe Maaleh Adumim* (Maʿaleh Adumim: Hotsaʾat Maʿaliyot she-ʿa. y. Yeshivat 'Birkat Mosheh', 2011), vol. II, 807, n. 215, who prefers the latter version.

[42] See Chapter six.

[43] See S. D. Goitein, "Ambraham Maimondes and His Pietist Circle" (Hebrew) *Tarbiz* 33, 1964.

which met regularly in his private residence that served as the conventicle (*majlis*) for the group.[44] The letter in question, translated below, is missing the opening lines, but provides the most vivid portrait currently available of the inner workings of the pietist fellowship. It was composed by a disciple of the Nagid named Abner, who wrote part chastising and part pleading to a lapsed former member of the group.[45] The information provided by the letter testifies to a vibrant group of close devotees living in Fustat, and describes a number of key practices unique to the group, each of which will be taken up in more detail later in this chapter.

> . . . and the practice (*wa'l-'amal*),[46] by which I mean the conventicle of our lord, Rabbi Ab[raham], [u]nique in the generation (*yeḥid ha-dor*), and the community of those who occupy themselves [with devotion], spend[ing] their nights in prayer, fasting, and standing [in prayer] (*wa'l-jamā'ah al-mushtaghilīn wa'l-mutahajjid[īn] al-ṣā'imīn al-qā'imīn*), may God, may He be exalted, grant them favor. You have attached yourself to those who covet worldly things (*ahl al-dunyā*) and have renounced, poor thing, fasting and vi[gils], abandoning yourself to all manner of dainties. And you have abandoned the disc[ipleship] of the master (*khi[dmat] al-maulā*), Rabbi Abraham, which is incumbent on everyone who [arrives] from distant countries. As for me, I beseech the Creator, glorious be His praise, that He lead you and lead us toward salvation (*al-maṣlaḥah*). And I request from you, sir, according to what the circle of companionship demands (*wa-ḥaqq al-ṣuḥbah*), not to mention me anymore. For both of you—you in Fustat and the other one in Syria—have already caused me damage from this. And I pray to God that He may help [me] in His grace—"May I never enter into their council!" (Gen. 49:6) . . . Nothing has come to either of you in this whole affair except for a desecration of God's name. For this you must beg forgiveness for the rest of your lives.[47] My advice to you is for you to hold tight to what you have and occupy yourself with God's Torah day and night and attach yourself to the conventicle of the *rayyis* and the companions both in practice and in learning (*wa-tulāzim majlis al-rayyis wa'l-aṣḥāb fī'l-'amal wa'l-'ilm*). Engage in a worldly occupation so as not to make your companions support your asceticism (*wa-lā taj'al zuhdaka 'aun 'alā aṣḥābika*). Take as a model that which the master, [King] Solomon said: "Take hold of this, yet do not let go of that" (Eccl. 7:18)[48] . . . The

[44] For this term among the early Sufis as a "conventicle for divine remembrance" (*majlis al-dhikr*), see Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, 106. It appears, however, that the term used for the company of a *shaikh* in thirteenth-century Egypt was *julūs* rather than *majlis*. See *La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn*, ed. Gril, 77a (Ar. p. 53).

[45] Goitein found a rough draft of an address, which he took to be a reference to the writer of the letter rather than its recipient, "to the honorary elder, the venerable, ascetic, devout, God-fearing." It is also possible that this was written by Abner as an attempt to honor his lapsed companion with his former credentials as part of the Nagid's intimate circle of pietists. See Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 189.

[46] For the use of *'amal* for the spiritual discipline of the pietists, see p. 95, n. 28.

[47] Note Maimonides' formulation of the law that "desecration of God's name" is not entirely forgiven until the sinner's death, MT, "Laws of Repentance," 1:4.

[48] Cited with a slight change.

> master, the *rayyis*, has sent me a letter . . . telling me about your state in a general fashion. "When all is said and done, fear [God and perform His commandments, for this is the end of man]" (Eccl. 12:13)![49]

Of all the correspondence preserved from Abraham Maimonides' pietist circle, this letter is unique in its candid reaction to current controversies within the movement, which had clearly spilled out into the broader community. Although the details remain obscure, a rough outline of the dispute is not difficult to decipher.[50] Abner, a loyal pietist disciple, was informed by the Nagid of a former member of the fellowship, still living in Fustat, who had not only defected from the group but appears to have been stirring up some controversy for the embattled pietist circle. This is in addition to the slander of another individual, perhaps also a lapsed pietist and connected with the first, now residing in Syria or Palestine.[51] In what is certainly the most interesting detail of the letter, Abner pleaded with his former colleague not to mention him any longer, while the damage already caused by both individuals was a desecration of God's name, requiring them to "beg forgiveness from him" for the rest of their days.[52] The specification "from him" suggests that the damage done by these individuals, presumably both lapsed disciples, was directed against Abraham Maimonides and his circle.[53]

The details of the letter are equally revealing of some of the inner workings of the pietist conventicle (*majlis*) belonging to the Nagid. The latter is described as the director of a center of spiritual activity, in which a "gathering" (*jamāʿah*) of pietists followed a rigorous discipline of nightly vigils and fasting, among other common endeavors. Most significant is the role of the conventicle in the collective experience and formal rites of the fellowship. Precious details remain elusive, but the description of a group of people "striving" and "training" in the path of renunciation points to a formal regimen practiced

[49] TS 10 J 13.8, *recto*, ll. 1–20, 21- margin, ll. 1–2, published by Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 187.

[50] The obscurity is no doubt compounded by the fact that the letter is acephalous, the beginning having likely contained, among other details, the name of the recipient.

[51] For the translation of *al-shām* in the letter, see Bacher, "Schām (שאם) als Name Palästina's," 564–5, and cf. J. Blau, *A Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 322. Goitein speculated that the other individual mentioned in the letter may have been a student at the Palestinian academy, located in Damascus at the time, although this is impossible to verify. See Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle," 186–7.

[52] See TS 10 J 13.8, *recto*, ll. 13–14: . . . *yajibu ʿalaikum al-istighfār minhu baqīyat aʿmārikum* . . .

[53] The allusion to the "duty of the circle of companions" (*ḥaqq al-ṣuḥbah*), See TS 10 J 13.8, l. 9, is especially intriguing as an indication that members of the group, known as "the companions" (*al-aṣḥāb*), vowed a form of loyalty to one another as part of the initiation into the brotherhood. It is especially noteworthy that such a "duty" be invoked in the context of seeking to stifle slander leveled against the pietists.

with regularity.[54] The letter would suggest that some of these rites were performed in common, including the possibility that the *majlis* may have been used for nightly meditation and prayer.[55] The relationship of the pietists in the *majlis* to the Nagid is described as that of a "service of the master," required of all disciples who travel to greet him from far and wide.[56] Disciples were expected to exhibit allegiance to the master as part of their training.[57] We are likewise informed that the circle of the Nagid was encouraged to seek worldly professions so as not to be supported by others in their spiritual endeavors. The context suggests, moreover, that poor members were supported by other companions with more means, while those able to pursue an occupation were expressly bidden to do so.[58] It is clear that, in his capacity as spiritual director, Abraham Maimonides had not forgotten the cardinal rule of his father not to make one's occupation with Torah a source of worldly income.[59]

Perhaps the most striking fact of Abraham Maimonides' public life is his dual role as head of the Jews and head of a pietist following of disciples.[60] It is

[54] In addition to "striving" (*mujāhadah*) and "training" (*ʿamal*). Another ubiquitous term for spiritual discipline, is *al-riyāḍah*, as in *HW*, I:150, ll. 1–4; 174, ll. 12–18; 182, ll. 15, 18; 186, l. 21 to 188, ll. 1, 4, 10; 190, ll. 3; 208, l. 15; II:12, ll. 20–1; 14, ll. 2, 20; 16, l. 1; 70, l. 20; 74, l. 16; 82, l. 14; 216, l. 6; 236, l. 18; 240, l. 19; 242, l. 3; 248, l. 16; 250, ll. 4, 8; 252, l. 11; 254, l. 19; 256, ll. 7, 16–17; 306, ll. 18–19; 308, ll. 4, 14; 312, l. 21; 314, l. 3; 340, ll. 9, 11; 348, l. 16. For yet another term, *taʾaddub*, see *HW*, I:186, l. 16; 208, l. 1; II, 68, l. 3; 70, l. 10; 80, l. 9. Note also the use of *takhrīj adabī*, *HW*, II:12, l. 19; 14, l. 19, and *taʿwīd al-nafs*, *HW*, II:16, l. 6. For *taʿwīd* toward prophetic attainment, see *Perush*, 325.

[55] See TS 10 J 13.8, n. 38, ll. 2–3, 16–17.

[56] See *HW*, ll. 5–7. On the language of "service" (*khidmah*), see the letter cited above. This letter is, remarkably enough, the only reference currently known on Abraham Maimonides' following beyond Egypt. It is to be hoped that further research into the Genizah will unearth further details about the Nagid's spiritual leadership in the broader Judaeo-Arab world. It is possible that the recipient of the letter had neglected to pay due honor to his former master on his arrival in Fustat. One is reminded of the Nagid's reference, in a letter dated to 1232, to the fact that he had dispatched parts of his *Compendium* to interested readers in "distant lands." See the letter published by A. Neubauer, "Mittheilungen aus MSS," *Israelitische Letterbode* 3 (1877–8), 53: *ve-neʿetaq le-arṣot reḥoqot miqeṣato.*

[57] See the use of *tabʿīyah* to express this ideal, *HW*, II:422, l. 20; 424, l. 3.

[58] See *HW*, l. 18: . . . *wa-lā tajʿal zuhdaka ʿaun ʿalā aṣḥābika* . . .

[59] For this idea in Maimonides' thought, see his commentary to M Avot, 4:6, in *Perush ha-Rambam le-Avot*, ed. Y. Shailat (Jerusalem: Maʿaliyot, 1994), 152–4, and see MT, "Laws of Torah Study," 3:10–11. Note, however, that Abraham did not consider work to be a positive commandment. See *Perush*, 319 (Ex. 20:9) and 365 (Ex. 23:10). Note also Abraham's remarks on a secluded group of pietists supported by community contributions, on which see *SM*, 112, and the previous chapter. On the critique of dependency in early Sufism and the encouragement of gainful employment, see Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety*, 27–8.

[60] In one letter, Abraham was given the epithet "head of all the pietists" (*rosh kol he-ḥasidim*). See CUL Or. 1080 J 281, *recto*, l. 9, published by M. A. Friedman, *Jewish Polygyny in the Middle Ages: New Sources from the Cairo Genizah* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1986), 327. This is the only occurrence of this title and it appears in a chain of titles that give the impression of more formulaic praise. It will be recalled that Abraham ibn Abīʾl-Rabīʿ's and his brother, Joseph were also called "heads of the pietists." See pp. 47–8. Goitein took this title applied to Abraham

not only noteworthy for the sheer amount of time devoted to both (aside from his medical duties to the Sultan), but for the seemingly conflicting roles played in each different capacity.[61] The role of public administrator, he conceded, demands a dignified demeanor that befits the honor of the position, leading necessarily to "a departure from outer humility."[62] His bearing with his fellow pietists and disciples, however—"seekers of piety through the paths of piety" (*qāṣidīn ḥasidut fī darkhe he-ḥasidut*)[63]—is another case entirely. One who guides others in piety, he maintained, must "adopt external humility in the company of those whom he guides, in order for them to be trained through him (*li-yuta'addabū bihi*) and for them to follow his path by learning from him and imitating him. In this way, he will instruct them in the path of the Lord and help them to progress in it."[64]

According to the therapeutic model of "spiritual striving" (*mujāhadah*) and "discipline" (*riyāḍah*), developed in large part from the ethical theory of Maimonides,[65] Abraham stressed that one must continue to combat the worldly attachments of the soul "until the spiritual perfections become preferable, desirable, [and] pleasurable, while the physical pleasures of the body are despised and scorned, so that one is disturbed by them, becoming like a characteristic (*ka'l-malakah*) of the soul. At this time, one can dispense with extreme spiritual exertion (*yustaghnī 'an mujāhadah qawīyah*)."[66] The *shaikh* on his own, according to the Nagid's model, no longer requires the discipline of outer humility beyond the basic requirements of the law.[67] As a leader and guide of his disciples, on the other hand, he must adopt (*yu'tamid*) this outer demeanor to serve as a model for his followers to imitate in their own quest to attain the spiritual virtues.

Maimonides as more significant, when he wrote: "I have no doubt that . . . this title was mentioned in every public announcement in which his name occurred." See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:483. There is no evidence from other sources that this was the case. It should also be noted that Abraham's father-in-law, Ḥananel b. Samuel, was called "the greatest of the pietists" (*gedol he-ḥasidim*) in TS 8 J 10.5, partially translated by S. D. Goitein, "R. Ḥananel the Chief Judge, Son of Samuel ha-Nadiv, Brother-in-Law of Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 50 (1981), 385. His son David was likewise called "the diadem of the pietists" (*'aṭeret he-ḥasidim*) in TS 13 J 9.12, l. 46 (likewise buried in a list of honorifics), published by E. Ashtor, *History of the Jews of Egypt and Syria under the Rule of the Mamluks* (Hebrew), 3 vol. (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1944–70), III:30. These examples support the interpretation that the epithet *ḥasidim* in these letters may be better translated as "pious" rather than "pietists."

[61] For an overview of Abraham's career, see the Introduction.

[62] See *HW*, II:80, ll. 18–19. [63] See *HW*, l. 3. [64] See *HW*, ll. 8–11.

[65] In "Eight Chapters," ch. 4, Maimonides described the asceticism of some virtuous individuals (*al-fuḍalā'*) as a therapeutic measure. See *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Y. Shailat (Jerusalem: Ma'aliyot, 1992), 382, and compare MT, "Laws of Character Traits," 1:5.

[66] *HW*, II:314, ll. 3–7.

[67] As we shall see later in this chapter, antinomianism among some early pietists was the object of anti-pietist polemic and a subject of concern for the Nagid.

FASTING AND NIGHTLY VIGILS

The early Sufi ascetics of the eighth century were famous in their own time and to later generations as those who "rise [to pray] at night and fast during the day" (*qā'im al-lail wa-ṣā'im al-dahr*). Sleeplessness and hunger became basic elements of spiritual training in Sufi literature, with a wide variety of customs arising according to individual temperament.[68] The two practices of self-denial were considered intertwined and are known in classical Sufi sources as a pair: "fasting and nightly vigils" (*ṣiyām wa-qiyām*).[69] As we observed earlier, Baḥya ibn Paquda was the first Jewish pietist to incorporate these classic Sufi practices into his brand of Jewish spirituality, although it appears from his own account that a practice of early morning or pre-dawn hymns was observed in a number of Andalusian Jewish communities, as when he referred to "the customary hymns" (*al-zemirot al-muʿtādah*) familiar to his reader in this context.[70]

A hint of this early practice is also found in a Gaonic responsum, which describes "a pious custom" (*middat ḥasidut*) of rising at midnight to recite supererogatory hymns of praise before morning prayers in the synagogue.[71] Traces of this ideal in rabbinic literature are quite old, although precise information on the origin of the practice is lacking.[72] The first attestation of such a practice in Egypt comes from a query posed to Maimonides: "Instruct us concerning one who rises during the night to recite supererogatory prayers or [hymns of] praise or [biblical] verses or chapters of Psalms[73] until dawn or until the time for the recitation of the *shemaʿ*. Is one obligated to make the blessing on the Torah beforehand or not?"[74] Maimonides' reply does not add any new information on the ritual, although the question confirms both the existence of this practice in twelfth-century Egypt and Maimonides' awareness

[68] See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 114–17.

[69] See the discussion of fasting and nightly vigils in Suhrawardī, *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, A. Maḥmūd and M. Ibn al-Sharīf (Cairo: Maktabat al-Īmān, 2005), 346–54, 369–83. Note also the use of the term *tahajjud* for *qiyām* in al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, I:85–6.

[70] See *Hidāyah*, ed. Qafiḥ, 424.

[71] See *Teshuvot Ge'one Mizraḥ u-Maʿarav*, ed. Müller (Berlin: Etsel P. Deutsch, 1888), 34b, no. 141.

[72] Babylonian tradition attributes the practice of rising to sing hymns during the night to King David, an ideal that does not seem to have crystallized into concrete praxis in late antiquity. See BT Berakhot 3b–4a, based on Ps. 119:62 and 147. See also Ps. 92:3 and 134:1.

[73] This is the most likely meaning of *mazāmīr*, in contrast to *shevaḥ* (hymns of praise).

[74] See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1986), II:342, no. 187. Compare *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, II:490–1, no. 261, on the custom of reciting the prayers composed by Seʿadiah "before the statutory prayer" (*qabl ṣalāt al-farḍ*). Seʿadiah referred to his prayers, or rather one prayer in two versions, as a *duʿā'*—i.e. a non-canonical prayer. See *Siddur R. Saadja Gaon: Kitāb ġāmiʿ aṣ-ṣalawāt wat-tasābīh*, ed. I. Davidson et al. (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 2000), 45. It is clear, however, that some Jews in Egypt treated Seʿadiah compositions as more canonical. See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, 366–70, no. 208.

of it. The question should most likely be viewed in light of the custom described by his son in the *Compendium* of reciting the "morning blessings" on waking, whether it is already morning or in the pre-dawn hours as part of the nightly vigil. As he described it, "These blessings . . . are to be recited only once a day, either at daybreak or toward the end of the night (*fī . . . ākhir al-lail*), when one has arisen from slumber."[75]

The earliest testimony on nightly prayer and daytime fasting from thirteenth-century Egypt suggests that they had become symbolic of pietist dedication. In the Hebrew letter addressing Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ, which I have cited on a number of occasions, he and his brother were praised with the crown of piety: "[They are] zealous in the service of the Creator of all. Their nights they spend standing [in prayer] and their days they fast as on the day of atonement . . . purging themselves of sin, purifying their souls, and rendering their bodies as [luminous as] crystal."[76] It has already been observed that vigils and fasting are known to have been adopted by anyone seeking a reputation of piety on account of their well-known association with the movement.[77] The practice of nightly prayer vigils, in particular, came to be considered a defining practice of pietism.[78] Among the truly devout, nightly vigils could be performed in solitude as a form of meditation or among fellow pietists in gatherings for supererogatory prayer, distinguished by frequent bowings and prostrations.[79] Much like what we learn from the query to Maimonides, pietists would rise in the middle of the night and spend the final hours before dawn in voluntary prayer and meditation.[80] Here, too, Abraham acknowledged the indebtedness of the pietists to Sufi practice, but only insofar as the

[75] See *SM*, 247.

[76] TS 20.148, *recto*, ll. 10–13. The last phrase (*ve-ha-geviyot mesapperim*) is a wordplay from *sapir*, usually translated "sapphire," as by Fenton in his translation of the last line, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 48, n. 3. I follow here the translation suggested by Y. T. Langermann, "The True Perplexity: The 'Guide of the Perplexed,' Part II, Chapter 24," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. J. Kraemer (Oxford: Littman Library, 1991), 162–3, n. 16, who showed that Maimonides likely followed Seʿadiah's translation of Ex. 28:18. This translation was further confirmed by Septimus in his comments on MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 3:1, in his forthcoming translation of the Book of Knowledge, on the basis of *Guide*, I:28 (see *Rabbenu Mosheh ben Maimon: Moreh ha-Nevukhim (Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn), Maqōr ve-Targum*, ed. Y. Qafiḥ (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1972), I:63), where Maimonides used *billaur* to translate *sapīr*, in addition to other sources. I am grateful to Septimus for allowing me to read an advanced copy of his translation. For the identification of *sapir* and *billaur* in Abraham's *oeuvre*, see *Perush*, 381–3 (Ex. 24:10), and cf. *Perush*, 37 (Gen. 2:12), 389 (Ex. 25:7), and 423 (Ex. 28:20).

[77] See my remarks in Chapter one, p. 55.

[78] See the list of the characteristics of pietism, including "rising in the night" (*wuqūf al-layl*), in Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah's *Rectification of Religion*, II Firk. I.1312, 67b.

[79] For *qiyām* in solitary meditation (*khalwah*), see *HW*, II:416, ll. 16–17, and my remarks on *khalwah* below; for *qiyām* in what may have been a private or communal ritual (with a description of spontaneous bowings and prostrations), see *HW*, II:82, ll. 16–19. See also the letter analyzed above, TS 10 J 13.8.

[80] See *HW*, II:416, ll. 16–17, mentioned in the previous note.

latter preserved an ancient prophetic tradition, only now reclaimed by the latter-day pietists as an authentic Jewish practice: "We observe the Sufis of Islam engaging in spiritual striving to combat sleep (*mujāhadat al-naum*), and perhaps this [practice] was taken[81] from the words of David, 'I will not give sleep to my eyes nor slumber to my eyelids' (Ps. 132:4), and his words, 'At midnight I arise to give thanks to You' (Ps. 119:62), and similar [sayings]."[82]

The custom of rising in the pre-dawn hours for the recitation of hymns, known in Iraq since at least the tenth century,[83] was still in vogue in the thirteenth, according to the testimony of Judah al-Ḥarizi (d. 1225) who, as already noted, visited Baghdad in his travels to the Near East.[84] Moved by the piety of a local elder named 'Imrān al-Hītī, known to "retreat [to] God in solitary devotion" (*wa-huwa munqaṭi' [ilā] 'llah bi-'ibādatihi*), Ḥarizi composed a poem in which he praised the Iraqi *shaikh* for his vigils and fasts: "Throughout his days he does not cease to fast and his nights [are spent] in solitude and standing in prayer" (*bi'l-tahajjur wa'l-qiyām*).[85] Although it is highly unlikely that Ḥarizi practiced such devotions himself, his praise of the *shaikh* is further indication of the general respect held for those who did practice these rites. In another poem attributed to Ḥarizi, but which could just as likely have been composed by a contemporary pietist, we read the following exhortation to vigils and fasts:

Hold back your eyelids from tasting sleep,
let your tears stream[86] down over your cheeks,
To God belong all who are sincere in love,
whom He has chosen to be His own servants,
Who, when darkness has fallen all around,
rise to prostrate and stand in place.
They delight in mentioning His name, and
do not cease to fast the entire day through . . .[87]

[81] The term "taken" (*ma'khūdh*) here recalls the phrase by his father-in-law on the practice of placing the head between the knees in solitary meditation. See BM Or. 2583.38a, published by Fenton, "Some Judeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 49: . . . *wa-akhadhū al-goyim minnā hadhā al-ṣūrah wa-intaḥalūhā* . . .

[82] *HW*, II:322, ll. 5–9. The Nagid went on to elicit Moses as a model for nightly vigils, based on his (twice) forty days and nights atop Mount Sinai.

[83] As shown by the responsum of Sherira Gaon, noted above.

[84] See Chapter one, where the same poem is cited.

[85] See S. M. Stern, "A New Description by Rabbi Judah al-Ḥarizi on his Travels to Iraq" (Hebrew), *Sefunot* 8 (1964), 153, and see J. Blau, *Kitāb al-durar: A Book in Praise of God and the Israelite Communities* (Hebrew), ed. J. Blau, P. Fenton, and Y. Yahlom (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2009), 210–12.

[86] The printed edition reads *shijāman*, presumably a *lapsus calami* for *sijāman*.

[87] See Bodl. MS 2745/26.104, *recto*, ll. 1–4, published by S. M. Stern, "Some Unpublished Poems by al-Harizi," *JQR* 50 (1960), 357, no. 3, ll. 1–6.

Beyond the standard reference to *ṣiyām wa-qiyām*, the poet added an interesting detail on the inducement of tears, a theme that occupies a prominent place in pietist meditation.[88] There is no indication that pietists of this period practiced any mourning rites for the destruction of the Temple, as earlier Karaites and later Qabbalists were known to do. Nightly vigils were viewed as occasions for spiritual inwardness and solitude, not for lamenting the exile or the destruction of Jerusalem. A passage from *The Treatise of the Pool*, the pietist tract of Abraham's son Obadiah, may suggest another way to understand the inducement of tears. Obadiah encouraged his readers to cast aside their attachment to worldly matter that has separated them from the Lord, and to seek repentance and supplication in nightly prayer.

> We have turned aside from the soul so that it has become tarnished like a mirror that no longer reflects any light, because of its sin in forsaking [its own] improvement (*al-iṣlāḥ*). Therefore I recommend to you that you seek His face, may He be exalted, when you are free from the burdens of matter. When Satan rests, rise in the dark of night to greet Him (*tawājuhahu*), may He be exalted, in supplication and submission (*bi'l-taḥanun wa'l-taḍarru'*).[89]

Obadiah's exhortation for the practice of the vigil in the *Treatise of the Pool* suggests that it may have served, for some if not a majority of pietists, as a time of repentance from the attachments to the world and a private supplication of divine grace from past transgression.[90] The praise of weeping as a sign of sincerity would be perfectly in keeping with the introspective and supplicatory goal of the nightly ritual.[91]

[88] On solitary meditation in pietist practice, see below, esp. pp. 114–122.

[89] Bodl. MS Or. 661.10, *verso*, ll. 4–6, published by P. Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqala al-Hawdiyya* (London: The Octagon Press, 1981), n.p.; my translation differs slightly from that of Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 87.

[90] For the notion that the soul is engrossed in matter during the daytime as a reason for the importance of the *minḥah* prayer, see the composite pietist text published by Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 154: *wa-ju'ilat minḥah ma'a awākhir al-nahār . . . limā kāna shaghala al-insān bi'l-umūr al-ḥassīyah innamā huwa fi'l-nahār.*

[91] For another passage from the Treatise of the Pool on weeping in a context of repentance and submission, see Bodl. MS Or. 661.10, 27, *recto*, ll. 22–4, translated by Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 116. Compare the Nagid's remarks on weeping, in my discussion of solitary meditation. In one passage from the *Compendium*, weeping expresses sadness over time not spent in communion with God as well as the joy in the present experience of attainment. See *HW*, II:404, ll. 4–14. It is worth noting in addition that the final two sources cited on the vigil mention the constant remembrance or mentioning (*dhikr*) of God. Obadiah cited the verse from Isaiah 62:6: "... take no rest, all you who mention the Lord" (*... ha-mazkirim et ha-shem al domi lakhem*). See also ENA NS 10 (laminated 46), 1, *verso*, ll. 3–5, published by P. Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Genizah," *HAR* 9 (1985), 162. Another key source is the composite text published by Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 156, in which meditation on divine majesty and the remembrance of His name (*dhikr ismihi*) leads to love that brings one to spiritual union (*al-tauḥīd 'alā al-ḥaqīqah*). As suggestive as these and other passages are, however, there is nevertheless no evidence of a pietist ritual of *dhikr* parallel to that prevalent among the Sufis. See Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 17–19; Fenton, *Deux traités*, 66–8. But see II Firk. I.2499.8 on a place

A final word should be said on fasting as a spiritual discipline. Very little in the way of practical guidance to the practice is conveyed in the extant sources other than the most general exhortations to fast. It is striking, however, that the chief model cited by the Nagid for abstinence from food was that of the talmudic sage, R. Ḥanina, who was known to consume no more than a single dry measure (*qav*) of carobs from one sabbath eve to the next.[92] The Nagid's discussion of fasting leaves room for speculation as to whether the pietists made an exception to their rule of abstinence on the sabbath or viewed the holy day as no different in this respect. On a number of occasions in the Nagid's writings, there is an allusion to what appears to have been the ideal sabbath observance toward which fellow pietists ought to strive. Beyond the practical observance of the sabbath prohibitions, the Nagid mentioned three gradations by which "individual pietists" (*ashkhāṣ min ḥaside yisrael*) may experience "the special way" (*al-sulūk al-khāṣṣ*) of the sabbath, from intellectual meditation on the natural world and the wisdom of creation in all its details to the point of becoming thoroughly absorbed by means of this speculation into the realm of "true sanctity" and divine illumination. The pietist, who has achieved this third level of the sabbath, becomes in the process oblivious to all feelings of physical hunger and insensitive to all other bodily functions.

> He becomes absorbed in this intellectual reflection until he is transported to true sanctity (*intaqala li'l-qedushah al-ḥaqīqīyah*)[93] and rejoices in the Creator for

in one's home set aside for *dhikr*, discussed below. See also my "Physical Embodiment and Spiritual Rapture in Thirteenth-Century Sufi Mysticism," in *Les mystiques juives, chrétiennes et musulmanes dans l'Égypte médiévale: Intercultualités et contextes historiques*, ed. G. Cecere et al. (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2013), 324–5.

[92] See BT Ta'anit 24b. It is interesting that the plain sense of the talmudic passage may simply be a reference to R. Ḥanina's abject poverty. For other references to the basic sustenance to which the pietists should aspire—ideally plain bread without relish—see *HW*, II:186, ll. 10–15; 276, l. 19.

[93] See also the Nagid's expression, "he becomes withdrawn in inner sanctity" (*wa-munjami' ilā al-qedushah al-bāṭinah*), also in the highest level of sabbath observance, *HW*, I:136, l. 17, and see also l. 19: . . . *wa-murtaqin li-qedushah ḥaqīqīyah bāṭinah* . . . On the use of the seventh form of *j-m-'*, see Blau, *Dictionary*, 94, where "contract" is given as one of several meanings. The use of the seventh form was used even more emphatically by Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī' in his description of the tremendous awe and terror that overtakes an individual as part of the *maqām* of *yir'ah*. See TS Arabic Box 46.71, *verso*, ll. 3–4, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 63: . . . *wa-'inda dhalik yushā[hid min al-'uḍmah] mā yaqḍī khaufuhu wa-tahawwuluhu wa-injimā'uhu wa-taḍajjuruhu*. The obscurity of this term is most likely why Fenton left it untranslated, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 67. Ibn Abī'l-Rabī' also used the expression *al-qedushah al-ḍāhirah wa'l-bāṭinah* in his commentary on Song of Songs, TS Arabic Box 1b.7, 2, *recto*, ll. 2–3, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 51. Note also Maimonides' use of *qedushah*, MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 7:7. Ḥananel b. Samuel wrote of *al-qedushah al-ḥaqīqīyah* as "the perception of the Creator of all." See MS Hunt. 447.43, *recto*, ll. 28–9, published by P. Fenton, "More on R. Ḥananel b. Samuel the Judge, Leader of the Pietists" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 55 (1986), 98.

> what He has illumined within him (*ashraqa ʿalā bāṭinihi*) from the lights of His majesty from his reflection on Him, deducing the proofs of His greatness from the greatness of His creation. He perceives the nobility of the intellectual and religious bond[94] between him and [God], as is the purpose of the sabbath, from the verse of the law, "It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever" (Ex. 31:17). He decreases that which would diminish the [intellectual and religious] bonds, and therefore refrains from eating and drinking on [the sabbath], lest it cut him off from what he had attained . . . By this means he attains the highest point of the inner path—fear, love, and passion (*wa-ḥashīqah*)[95]—with the result that his bodily members are in need of sustenance, yet he feels no hunger, due to the satiety of his soul in what it has attained, as David said, "My soul is satisfied [as if] with marrow and fat" (Ps. 63:6).[96] Sounds reach his ears, yet he is too preoccupied to notice them. His eyes strike sensible objects, yet he is like one who cannot see. He has, in this way, arrived in his path upon his goal and aspiration: "[My] soul yearns for Your name and Your remembrance" (Isaiah 26:8).[97]

This passage raises numerous issues of great importance for the pietist path, some of which will be explored subsequently, in the discussion on solitude and meditation.[98] It speaks to the attainment of a level of sanctity, according to which the bond with the divine is grasped and enhanced through a mystical illumination of the intellect. In a fragment identified by Paul Fenton as emanating from Abraham's pen, "the special obligation of [the sabbath] is solitude and devotion" (*waʾltizāmihā khalwah waʾnʿikāfah*).[99] As he articulated this ideal elsewhere, the added illumination on the sabbath constitutes a

[94] This pairing (*al-ʿilāqah al-ʿaqlīyah waʾl-sharʿīyah*) is reminiscent of Abraham's expression in a remaining fragment of his chapter on *wuṣūl*, in which he stated: "Communion (*wuṣūl*) is of two sorts, intellectual (*ʿilmī*) and religious (*sharʿī*)." See TS Arabic Box 43.327, and cf. Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," 59, n. 42. See also *HW*, II:382, l. 5 (*waʾl-maʿārif . . . al-sharʿīyah waʾl-ḥikmīyah*). The distinction appears to be between intellectual attainment or areas of knowledge independent of tradition versus those ostensibly derived from it.

[95] This Hebrew word is clearly a calque from *ʿishq*, a word with obvious resonance in the Sufi lexicon, as well as in that of key representatives of the philosophical tradition, including Abraham's father. On this and other words for love in Judaeo-Arabic, see S. Harvey, "The Meaning of Terms Designating Love in Judaeo-Arabic Thought and Some Remarks on the Judaeo-Arabic Interpretation of Maimonides," in *Judaeo-Arabic Studies: Proceedings of the Founding Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. N. Golb (The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 175–96. Note also Abraham's use of the epithet "the True Beloved" (*al-maḥbūb al-ḥaqīq*) in reference to God. See *Perush*, 45 (Gen. 21:14).

[96] The words "as if " appear in the original but not in the citation.

[97] *HW*, I:142, ll. 1–16. For other references in his writings to this third and highest level of spiritual attainment on the sabbath, see *Perush*, 319; 453–5.

[98] See immediately below.

[99] See TS NS 186.46r l. 5, on which see Hunter ed., *Published Material from the Cambridge Genizah Collections*, 254. This passage is cited and discussed by Friedman, "The Ten *Baṭlanim*," 805, although note the mistaken citation in n. 198 (*verso* instead of *recto*). On the special meaning of *iltizām* in Abraham's thought, see my discussion in Chapter three.

deeper understanding of the bond between the human and divine realms. "When it says '[For it is a sign between Me and you for your generations] so as to know [that I am the Lord who sanctifies you]' (Ex. 31:13), it alludes to the highest of the three levels of the sabbath, so as to allow you to empty your mind so as to grasp (*li'l-yedi'ah*) the meaning of 'I am the Lord who sanctifies you,' as I explained in detail in the *Compendium*."[100] Among the most noteworthy and unexpected features of the illumination associated with meditation on the sabbath is the diminishment of food and drink that is the result of the total sublimation of the soul in the moment of illumination. Despite its surprising implications, I see no reason not to take the Nagid's words on the diminishment of food and drink on the sabbath as perfectly sincere. Given that food, like all other bodily requirements, is an impediment to the soul's quest for "inner sanctity," its diminution on the sabbath is most consistent with the special bond with the divine, the very attainment of which is the inner purpose of the holy day.[101]

SOLITARY PRAYER AND MEDITATION

It has already been observed that, while a number of pietist rituals were performed in a common gathering (*jamā'ah*) connected with a master's conventicle (*majlis*), such as that belonging to the Nagid, the majority consisted of solitary exercises and extensive individual training under the tutelage of an experienced master. The emphasis on solitude (*khalwah*)[102] for private devotions and meditations was not self-explanatory and required some explanation on the part of the pietists, as the general thrust of traditional Jewish piety was a communitarian one. There is a definite preference for communal prayer expressed in classical rabbinic sources, a view echoed and reinforced by Maimonides, who articulated this preference in his codification of the laws of prayer as follows: "Communal prayer is always heard and the Holy Blessed One

[100] *Perush*, 453–5 (Ex. 31:13), and see *Perush*, 319 (Ex. 20:10).

[101] Abraham's words need not necessarily be interpreted as advocating fasting on the sabbath so much as a diminution of food intake conducive to intensive contemplation.

[102] This is the most common term for solitary meditation in the pietist sources. Note, however, the use of *wird* used to describe what appears to be the identical practice in ENA NS 10 (laminated 46), *verso*, ll. 7, 9, published by Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Genizah," 162. On *khalwah* in the classical Sufi tradition, see al-Qushairī, *al-Risālah*, ed. al-Mar'ashlī, 169–72. Fenton has provided valuable discussions of the Sufi and Jewish (pietist and Qabbalistic) practice of solitary meditation in a number of studies. See *The Treatise of the Pool*, 15–16; *Deux traités*, 58–66; "La 'Hitbōdedūt' chez les premiers Qabbalistes en Orient et chez les Soufis," in *Prière, mystique et judaïsme*, ed. R. Goetschel (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), 133–57; "Solitary Meditation in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism in the Light of a Recent Archeological Discovery," *ME* 1 (1995), 271–96.

never spurns public prayer, even when sinners are in its midst. A person ought therefore to join to a community and should not pray alone whenever it is possible to pray with the community."[103] Abraham's coda to his affirmation of the priority of public prayer, to which we shall presently return in greater detail, provides an indication of the new direction initiated by the pietist movement: "The teachings of [the sages] on the special status of communal prayer are numerous . . . including the saying that 'communal prayer is always heard.' Their intention is that this is most often the case (*ya'nūn 'alā al-akthar*)." As he subsequently added in explanation, "It is altogether possible . . . that an individual may find increased sanctity and purified concentration in solitary prayer, such that it is far preferable to communal prayer."[104]

As is well known, Maimonides' position on solitude is more complex than the above citation from his code would initially suggest. In his laws of prayer, Maimonides never went so far as to invalidate private prayer and may have even preferred private prayer with appropriate concentration to public prayer lacking the requisite concentration.[105] It should moreover be recalled that, in the *Guide*, Maimonides advocated a regular regimen of solitary contemplation conducive to intellectual apprehension. Although Maimonides' subject in this section of the *Guide* refers to "intellectual worship" rather than statutory prayer, his language foreshadows that used subsequently by his son in the *Compendium*. "[W]hen you are alone with your soul (*fī waqt khalawātika bi-nafsika*), with no one else present . . . take great care then not to turn your thoughts during those precious moments to anything other than this intellectual worship (*al-'ibādah al-'aqlīyah*), namely closeness to God and being truly in His presence . . . "[106] Maimonides' comments throughout this important chapter reflect his own genuine longing for such moments of solitude and true worship, free from the company of society. Yet, as already noted, Maimonides' ideal of "intellectual worship" was never intended as a substitute for communal prayer, nor did he condone (let alone encourage) the fulfillment of statutory prayer in solitude.

Among the most intriguing developments of Egyptian pietism is the value attached to individual prayer over and above that of communal prayer in the synagogue. To be sure, the pietists formed their own prayer circles and maintained regular public worship as discrete communities. But pietist literature, beginning with that of the Nagid, encouraged private prayer and even devoted sections of their legal writings on prayer to the requirements of the

[103] MT, "Laws of Prayer," 8:1. See the rabbinic sources for the preference for communal prayer in BT Berakhot, 7b–8a.

[104] *SM*, 188–9.

[105] On Maimonides' nuanced approach to public and private prayer, see G. Blidstein, *Prayer in Maimonidean Halakha* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1994), 153–61.

[106] *Guide*, III:51 in *Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn*, ed. Qafiḥ, III:679. For Maimonides' reference to solitude in his discussion of prophecy, see MT, "Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah," 7:4.

solitary devotee. As we shall see in greater detail in Chapter three, an anonymous pietist treatise on prayer, composed for the benefit of fellow companions or disciples, urges its readers to follow the example of the "early pietists" (*ḥasidim ha-rishonim*) as described in the Mishnah, by devoting an hour before and an hour after prayer for private meditation.[107] Stressing the importance of the preparatory hour for freeing the mind of all worldly distractions, the author calls us to attention: "[See] what importance [the early pietists], peace be upon them, attached to the benefits of this hour for emptying one's mind (*tafarrugh*) of thoughts and imaginings and removing all that is hidden in the recesses of one's heart, whether harmful things one has heard or destructive things one has seen, from the preoccupation with the world and the gossip of people and their doings."[108] The hour after prayer is both a "return of the person to himself" and for reflection on the audacity of having stood in the presence of God. "[Let him consider] with what legs he stood, with what arms [outstretched] he made his request, with what tongue he spoke, with what eyes he contemplated, with what head he prostrated."[109]

As both public and pietist leader of Egyptian Jewry, Abraham Maimonides was divided between traditional ideals of communal prayer and pietist demands of devotional solitude. He confirmed the rabbinic ideal of the prayer quorum, while allowing a measure of flexibility for those drawn to solitary prayer for the greater concentration it affords. In the passage from the *Compendium* cited above, Abraham justified the ideal of public prayer not in terms of the needs of the community but on account of its tangible effects on the concentration of each individual within the quorum. As Gerald Blidstein has observed, Abraham was unique in his emphasis on the psychological impact of prayer, whether public or private, on the individual.[110] "Whenever the concentration of ten individuals who have joined together for prayer . . . are combined, it is greater than the concentration of each of the ten praying individually. These are mysteries revealed by intuition (*asrār*

[107] See the two tannaitic traditions (*baraitot*) cited in BT Berakhot 32b compared with M Berakhot 5:1. Maimonides followed the first *baraita* in MT, "Laws of Prayer," 4:16. Note also Maimonides' words there on the definition of (obligatory) concentration (*kavanah*) in prayer: "What is [the nature of] concentration? That one empties one's heart of all thoughts and envisions oneself as if he were standing in the presence of the divine presence."

[108] See the composite text on prayer published by Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 152. For Abraham's use of this term, see *SM*, 112 (*al-tafarrugh li'l-'ibādah*), already alluded to, and *Perush*, 255.

[109] See Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 153.

[110] See G. Blidstein, "Community and Communal Prayer in the Writings of Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 78 (1999), 152–8, and see Blidstein, *Prayer in Maimonidean Halakha*, 160. On individual prayer and communal prayer in classical rabbinic thought, see G. Blidstein, "Personal and Public Prayer," *Tradition* 10 (1969), 22–8, and an elaboration of the latter, "Between the Prayer of the Individual and the Prayer of the Community" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 106 (1990), 255–64.

yakshufuhu al-dhauq)[111] to one who has undergone the paths of devotion and contemplated its diverse states . . . [But] there are certain times and certain states when an individual attains a serenity in solitude (*ṣafwah fī khalwah*) in which his mind is purified in his state of prayer far beyond [that of] public prayer."[112]

There is no indication from this passage that by solitary prayer the Nagid intended supererogatory supplications as opposed to statutory prayer. The context of private versus public prayer supports the opposite conclusion. We know, for example, that the Nagid's father-in-law went on solitary retreats for weeks at a time, in which all prayer was conducted in isolation. These lengthy retreats, as well as more limited ones, were precisely what Abraham had in mind when discussing the value of private over public prayer. By making the collective subservient to its individual members, Abraham Maimonides managed to preserve the communal ideal of the quorum while justifying occasional absences for solitary prayer and meditation.[113] His remarks are characteristic of the delicate balance he struck throughout his writings as a public figure between the communal realm and the pietist elite.

The considerable emphasis on private prayer in the literature of the Nagid and his contemporaries speaks to a new reality in pietist life that required not only theoretical consideration but an expansion of the legal categories. Private worship was more than a mere exception to the communal norm; it had become a legitimate subsection of the overall structure of the laws of prayer, all of which a devotee was now required to know. The Nagid followed his father's logic of the essence of prayer to its logical conclusion by attributing legal priority to the individual in worship.[114] In so doing, Abraham Maimonides became of one the few legal scholars to devote not only passing consideration, but a positive legal value, to the individual in solitary prayer. As it had most likely already been during Maimonides' time, private prayer had become a reality of contemporary piety that Abraham was compelled to address, one which he found reason to support, and which he hoped to incorporate within

[111] The word for mystical intuition, lit. "taste" (*dhauq*), was a technical term in Sufi parlance. See the discussion of "tasting and drinking" (*dhauq wa-shurb*) in Qushairī, *al-Risālah al-Qushairīyah*, 271–2. See also *SM*, 131 and 133. The term *dhauq* was also used by the Nagid to designate an intuition of the hidden meaning of scripture, even if not with a mystical import. See *Perush*, 334 (Ex. 21:14).

[112] *SM*, ed. Dana, 188–9; cf. also his explanation in what follows, that in some cases such solitary prayer can become a vehicle for prophecy (*SM*, 189).

[113] See Blidstein, "Community and Communal Prayer in the Writings of Abraham Maimonides," esp. 154–5.

[114] On the essence of prayer as defined by the individual in Maimonides' code, see Blidstein, *Prayer in Maimonidean Halakha*, 23–5, 77–95, and see 154, where he notes that the first seven chapters of Maimonides' laws of prayer , before any discussion of communal matters, emphasize the duties associated with prayer for each individual worshiper. Note Maimonides' remarks on the difference between public and private prayer in MT, "Laws of Prayer," 6:2.

the spectrum and canon of traditional prayer life.[115] It is therefore not surprising to discover that, in addition to his remarks on the public space of communal prayer in the synagogue, Abraham devoted attention in the *Compendium* to the appropriate space devoted to private prayer. The following passage at the end of a chapter on the fitting place for prayer confirms the parallel terminology employed for public and private prayer in his thought:

> It must additionally be mentioned in this context what is required of every individual when alone in his prayer space at home. It is required that he has a designated place (*maqom qavua'*),[116] as I have explained, and that this place be in accordance with his [living] conditions and place of residence, whether as a part of his home set apart for this purpose, or a corner of his house preserved [for this] as far as possible. The mat or carpet that he sits upon [for prayer] should be pure and clean, and if it is possible to have them specially reserved for this purpose, how much the better! This place or corner should be preserved not only from disrepair and filth, but also from dust and the like. And whatever is added to this and any special caution shown is a sign of greater regard for what is due in devotion to [God], may He be exalted, and provides for greater preparation and sincerity of concentration and a strengthening of the fear of God.[117]

The elaborate details for the proper structure and dedication of place in private prayer constitute a logical extension of the rules for worship in the public sphere of the synagogues. This is clearly the case with the recommendation to employ formal prayer mats, preferably kept pure and dedicated in advance for this specific purpose.[118] This is likewise the case with the selection of a "designated place" (*maqom qavua'*) in one's private home, specifically set aside for the purpose of prayer, whether solitary or in an informal worship circle, such as those used at the time by Abraham and the pietists and those maintained by Maimonides and his colleagues a generation before.[119] In spite

[115] Blidstein speculated that Maimonides' supplement to his exhortation to communal prayer, "even when sinners are in its midst," may have been formulated in response to a resistance among some of his contemporaries to praying in the company of sinners, and a preference for solitary prayer. See Blidstein, *Prayer in Maimonidean Halakha*, 154.

[116] Compare Maimonides' comment, MT, "Laws of Prayer," 5:6: *ve-qovea' maqom li-tefillato tamid.*

[117] *SM*, 113.

[118] The use of special carpets and mats for prayer recall the custom in the mosques and of Islamic prayer mats. Maimonides already mentioned the use of prayer mats in synagogues among the Jews of Arab lands. See MT, "Laws of Prayer," 11:5. Other than this passage in the *Compendium*, I am unaware of any other reference to private prayer mats among the Jews, parallel to those used by Muslims, outside the mosque. It is worth noting that Abraham's remarks on the need to keep private prayer mats clean and pure suggest that they were in use among Egyptian Jews during this period.

[119] As Gerald Blidstein has argued, it is likely that the Nagid took a cue from his father, who included his discussion of the "designated place" not in a chapter devoted to public prayer or the synagogue but in a chapter on the requirements incumbent on each individual in prayer, whether alone or in a group. See Blidstein, "Community and Communal Prayer in the Writings of Abraham Maimonides," 157–8.

of the 1205 ban on private prayer groups meeting outside the synagogues, it is evident that such groups did convene and maintained their independent status.[120]

Even as pietists found legal and spiritual validation for prayer conducted in solitude or in private homes, there is an indication that some favored solitary prayer and devotion within the confines of a synagogue. Abraham Maimonides alluded to the practice of "sitting in a devotional manner" (*julūs li-ʿibādah*) in a synagogue, outside of the context of formal prayer, "for the purification of the mind or for meditation on [God], may He be exalted" (*li-jamʿ fikrah naḥwahu taʿālā*).[121] The two sites singled out by the Nagid for solitary retreat (apart from the mountains and wilderness) are houses and places of worship (*al-khalwah fi'l-buyūt wa-mawāḍiʿ al-ʿibādah*).[122] In a separate passage from the *Compendium*, discussed in the previous chapter, Abraham also called for a cloister of pietist devotees in the context of the synagogue.[123] In recent studies, Paul Fenton and Mordechai Friedman have both called attention to the broader significance of the Nagid's call for such a cloister—the former in light of the Sufi institution of the *khānqāh*, and the latter in the context of Maimonides' earlier interpretations of the ten *baṭlanim* of the synagogue.[124]

There is a distinct possibility that Abraham's ideal cloister, as depicted in the important passage on the ten synagogue *baṭlanim*, who "should be permanently secluded in the synagogue for the recitation of the Torah and to practice solitary devotion,"[125] had some foundation in contemporary practice—or, alternatively, that it may have contributed to or inspired a pietist practice to retreat to a remote synagogue, whether individually or in small groups.[126] One synagogue that appears to have served as a site of solitary retreat was the venerable "synagogue of Moses" (*bet keneset shel Moshe Rabbenu* in Hebrew and *kanīsat Mūsā* in Arabic), located in Dammūh, on the west bank of the Nile near the pyramids of Gizah, toward which Egyptian

[120] On the 1205 ban, see the Introduction. Abraham's reference to the plural "homes" used by pietists for their worship suggests that there were more than the one maintained by the Nagid himself. See *Teshuvot*, 62, no. 62. On the private prayer groups mentioned of and by Maimonides, see Chapter 3.

[121] See *SM*, 108. Compare also *SM*, 128–9.

[122] See *HW*, II:392, ll. 13–14.

[123] See *SM*, 112–13, and the discussion of this passage on pp. 68–70.

[124] See P. Fenton, "Maimonides—Father and Son: Continuity and Change," in *Traditions of Maimonideanism*, ed. C. Fraenkel (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 120–1, and Friedman, "The Ten *Baṭlanim*," *passim*, esp. 804–8.

[125] See *SM*, 112.

[126] Friedman has suggested that Abraham, for his part, was averse to using synagogues for solitary retreat, which were, in his view, centers of communal ambition and religious corruption. But while Friedman referred in general to "the synagogues of 'the exiles'," he most likely meant those synagogues frequented by the communal establishment in Fustat, rather than remote sites such as that of Dammūh. See Friedman, "The Ten *Baṭlanim*," 806–7.

Jews were known to go on annual pilgrimage.[127] It had the double advantage of being a consecrated synagogue (and pious foundation) of some antiquity as well as being located in a remote location ideal for solitude.[128] The possibility that the Dammūh synagogue was used for this purpose is supported by the evidence that the site was said to include guest lodgings within its precincts, most likely intended for the purpose of pilgrimage, yet which would have facilitated any devotee seeking solitary quarters.[129] Seen in this light, the tradition preserved by the seventeenth-century Egyptian chronicler, Joseph Sambari, to the effect that Abraham's younger son Obadiah died while on retreat at the synagogue in Dammūh, is all the more intriguing.[130]

For all the importance of formal prayer performed in isolation, the ideal of solitary devotions extended beyond the liturgical sphere into the realm of supererogatory pietist praxis. The pietist regimen required that a number of rites be performed in solitude—whether in a synagogue, at home, or in a remote location—not in the conventicle of the master and the company of fellow pietists. As we saw in the previous chapter, the solitary regimen could and sometimes did pose a challenge for pietists whose family members were hostile to their participation in the movement.[131] The likelihood that one's prayer space at home, without the special maintenance employed in the synagogues, would become compromised by other members of the family prompted the Nagid to encourage extra precaution and, whenever possible, a separate area of the home reserved for this purpose.

While precise information is lacking on the maintenance and dedication of private prayer circles in Egypt, it is clear that the Nagid was not alone in promoting the ideal of a reserved space or room at home for pietist devotions. In a recently discovered treatise composed by an anonymous Maghrabi writer with clear affinities to the Egyptian pietist movement, we encounter an exhortation to maintain a private space for prayer and devotions: "It is desirable that you have a room in your house or a corner in your room[132] set aside for meditation on God (*li-dhikri 'llah*),[133] for reading of scripture, for

[127] On the designation "synagogue of Moses," see J. Sambari, *Sefer divre Yosef*, ed. S. Shtober (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1993), 158.

[128] On the stewardship of this synagogue and pious foundation by communal leaders, see J. Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds* (New York: Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008), 275–6.

[129] On the synagogue of Dammūh, see the information provided by N. Golb, "The Topography of the Jews of Medieval Egypt," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 24 (1965), 255–9.

[130] See Sambari, *Sefer divre Yosef*, 160, but see Shtober's note on the possibility that Dammūh was here confused with Damietta, Sambari ibid.: n. 71. On the tradition of Obadiah's death, see also A. H. Freimann, "The Genealogy of the Maimonidean Family" (Hebrew), *Alumah* 1 (1936), 20.

[131] See the discussion on pietism and family life in Chapter one.

[132] I read *dār* in this context as "house" and *bait* as "room." For another possibility, see Langermann's rendering, "From Private Devotion to Communal Prayer," 40.

[133] See pp. 105–6, n. 91.

performing the duty of prayer if you missed it in synagogue (*in fātaka al-masjid*),[134] for standing in supererogatory prayer at night . . . Enter this place . . . and bow while reciting, 'And I, with Your abundant grace, [enter Your sanctuary]' (Ps. 5:8)."[135] The implication of this brief passage is that liturgical prayer ought to be performed in the synagogue, and only exceptionally in the privacy of one's home. It is clear, however, that such a space was nevertheless reserved for solitary devotions and meditation even if all standard prayers were recited together with the community.

Certain times were reserved by the pietists as especially advantageous for solitude. One of these, immediately before and after prayer, spent in meditation, has already been mentioned. It should also be recalled that the solitary meditative retreat (*khalwah*) was considered an important component of nightly vigils: "For solitary meditation, it is commendable to perform the standing vigil toward the end of the night and to awaken at midnight . . . At times, one who follows this path does not sleep at all during the nights of his solitary meditation."[136] According to an anonymous pietist tract on prayer, followers of this spiritual discipline were encouraged to spend as much as "an hour or a day or a number of days" in meditation. In special cases, one could "become detached such that one becomes one of those of whom it was said, 'and they had a vision of God and they ate and drank' (Ex. 24:11)."[137] We are fortunate to possess a letter from the mid-thirteenth century describing a more extended version of the solitary retreat. The letter, composed by one Benjamin to his friend, Ḥayyim, apparently the son of Ḥananel b. Samuel,[138] sought to calm the worried son's mind over the "journey" undertaken by his father. Eliyahu Ashtor, who published the letter, interpreted this journey as a lengthy business trip.[139] More recently, Paul Fenton has conclusively argued in favor

[134] This is the only case of the term *masjid* used for the synagogue of which I am aware.

[135] See II Firk. I.2499.8, *recto*, published by Langermann, "From Private Devotion to Communal Prayer," 40. For another passage from this treatise, see Y. T. Langermann, "A Judaeo-Arabic Candle-Lighting Prayer," *JQR* 92 (2001), 134.

[136] *HW*, II:416, ll. 16–21.

[137] See Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 145, and a fuller citation from this passage and discussion of its content, pp. 121–2 below. Compare also Abraham's reference to "extended" (*aktharīyah*) versus "limited" (*waqtīyah*) solitude, *HW*, II:386, l. 19. It is interesting to observe that, although Maimonides interpreted this verse as an example of how not to conduct oneself (see *Guide*, I:5 in *Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn*, ed. Qafiḥ, I:32–3), it has been given a positive meaning in pietist exegesis. Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī' interpreted it as an indication of the previous fasting the nobles of Israel had undergone as part of their *khalwah*, followed by eating and drinking. Abraham Maimonides seems to have offered a similar (but simpler) version of this interpretation as one of his suggested readings. He likewise cited an interpretation of Se'adiah Gaon, though not his father's negative interpretation in the *Guide*. See *Perush*, 379 and 383.

[138] The greetings extended at the end of the letter to Obadiah, together with the address to R. Ḥayyim, confirm the social provenance and period of the letter.

[139] Goitein followed Ashtor's general interpretation, though he corrected his reading of the fragment in a number of places. See S. D. Goitein, "Geniza Writings from the Mamluk Period" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 41 (1972), 77–9.

of a pietist interpretation of the letter.[140] The letter is the only direct confirmation that the pietists of Egypt practiced the forty-day retreat known among contemporary Sufis.[141]

> May [God] be for him on his journey a protector and a friend, a guardian and a preserver, a companion and a guide, just as He was for His prophets and His saints on their journeys and in their solitary retreats (*fī asfārihim wa-khalawātihim*),[142] granting [them] a vision of [His] majesty and glory (*jalāl wa-jamāl*), splendor and perfection (*wa-bahā' wa-kamāl*), the divine presence (*al-ḥaḍrah al-ilāhīyah*).[143] An immense longing overtook them[144] that He may reveal (*li-yufīḍa*)[145] to them an unmediated perception of the divine (*li-yufīḍ ʿalaihim ʿilman ladunīyan*)[146] and unveil for them the mysteries of His holy books and assist them both in the knowledge and the discipline contained in them. For [these mysteries] are the path that brings one to communion and that guides and shows the way to perception of [God], may He be exalted, according to human capacity . . . Though [your father] be isolated from human company in his journey, he is yet in the company (*muta'annis*) of the Creator of human beings and of His angels, His prophets, and the bearers of His law, praying incessantly, "Open my eyes that I may perceive wonders in Your Torah" (Ps. 118:18). Do not fear for him in his journey. God will reward him in this journey . . . and He will reward all who long . . . for what your father will generously bestow upon them . . . from what he benefitted from his journey, just as he bestowed upon them what he benefitted from his previous journeys, though those journeys and solitary retreats were long and this journey is short. This solitary retreat is just as short in duration as the journey of Moses our master, master of all prophets—forty days and forty nights.[147]

[140] See Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 15, and *Deux traités*, 63, 65.

[141] On this Sufi practice, known as *arbaʿīn* or *arbaʿīnīyah*, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 103–5, and Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 187, n. 2.

[142] For another term used by Abraham Maimonides for such a solitary journey, *siyāḥah*, see *HW*, II:388, l. 6. See also the use of *safar*, *HW*, 392, l. 17. For *safar* in classical Sufi thought, see Qushairī, *al-Risālah al-Qushairīyah*, 365–71.

[143] The meaning of *al-ḥaḍrah al-ilāhīyah* in this context is similar but not equivalent to *al-shekhinah*. Variations on the former expression are commonplace in pietist literature. See, e.g., Abraham Maimonides' description of the goal of the ascetic as "being truly in God's presence" (*wa'l-zāhid ghāyatuhu al-ḥuḍūr baina yadaihi taʿāla ḥuḍūran maʿanawīyan*), *HW*, II:298, ll. 9–10. See also ENA NS 10 (laminated 46), *verso*, ll. 7, published by Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Genizah," 162. Fenton noted there the use of the term *ḥuḍūr* to refer to the experience of divine presence (Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Genizah," 165, n. 12). See also the use of *ghaibah* and *ḥuḍūr* as related to the experience of *qurb* and *uns* in the composite work published by Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 151, and see Qushairī, *al-Risālah*, 132–3.

[144] Lit. "a great thirst consumed them" (*wa-tuʿaṭṭishuhum al-taʿaṭṭush*).

[145] For a similar use of *yufiḍ* and *faiḍ*, both in the sense of divine revelation and of teaching another, see *Guide*, II:37, *Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn*, ed. Qafiḥ, II:407–9.

[146] For background to the Sufi expression *ʿilm ladunī*, see Fenton, *Deux traités*, 64, n. 136.

[147] TS 13 J 9.12, *recto*, ll. 5–12, 23–35, most of which was published by Ashtor, *History of the Jews of Egypt and Syria under the Rule of the Mamluks*, III:29–30. The complete letter, including the full valediction, was translated into French by Fenton, *Deux Traités*, 63–5.

The letter before us is an important witness to the profound accommodation exhibited by Egyptian pietism not only to the ascetic discipline of contemporary Sufism but also with the spiritual lexicon unique to the latter. The language of intimacy with the divine (*uns*, *ta'annus*), the immediacy of spiritual experience (*al-ḥaḍrah al-ilāhīyah*), the revelation of unmediated divine overflow (*faiḍ*, *'ilm ladunī*), reflect an expectation of ecstatic mystical experience on the solitary "journey"—a theme to which we shall return in Chapter six—infused by the technical vocabulary of Sufism. The adept was to pray incessantly (*mitpalel tamid*) and hoped for an unveiling of the inner meaning of the sacred books (*kashf asrār al-kutub al-muqaddasah*)[148] that was to bring a certain spiritual attainment and apperception of the divine (*wuṣūl*, *idrāk*). It is worth speculating as to the nature of this mystical study performed in solitary retreat. The commentary on the Song of Songs composed by Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī' suggests that the biblical book known from rabbinic literature as "the holy of holies" may have been a focus of study.[149]

According to the elder pietist, the Song of Songs was given this designation on account of its inner spiritual content, "by means of which one attains the ultimate end and noble goal, leading one to the spiritual realm by means of outer and inner sanctity and by an exceeding love of [God], may He be exalted, and a delight in the recollection of Him and His holy names."[150] Study of the Song of Songs and of scripture in general was no less a medium for receiving mystical illumination than prayer or meditation.[151] The Nagid's son, Obadiah,

[148] On spiritual study in Abraham Maimonides' writings, see *HW*, II:44, ll. 1–3, and *HW*, 82, l. 18. Such a pietist reading of scripture is evident in the use of the term *dhauq* and the verb *yuḏāq* to indicate the inner meaning of scripture. On this usage in Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī', see TS Arabic Box 43.108, 2, *recto*, l. 13, and *verso*, l. 3, and ENA 3453.16, *verso*, l. 12. Both texts, stemming from a single source, were published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 61 and 62. See also P. Fenton, "The Literary Legacy of David ben Joshua, Last of the Maimonidean Nĕgīdim," *JQR* 75 (1984), 17, n. 28.

[149] For this expression of R. 'Aqiva, see M Yadayim 3:5 and Song of Songs Rabbah 1:11.

[150] See TS Arabic 1b.7, 1 *verso*, l. 18, and 2, *recto*, ll. 1–5, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 51. Compare II Firk. I.1124, published by Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary to Song of Songs in the Hand of R. David ben Joshua Maimuni," 580–3, and see Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary to Song of Songs," 539–77, for Fenton's introduction to the mystical interpretation of the Songs of Songs and his publication of II Firk. I.3870, the pietist commentary of David b. Joshua. See also P. Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment of R. Abraham Maimonides: Fragments from the Lost Section of *The Sufficient [Guide] for the Servants of God*" (Hebrew), *Da'at* 50 (2003), 113. The trend toward an inner exegesis of the Song of Songs was rooted in Maimonides' remarks in MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 2:12, "Laws of Repentance," 10:3, and *Guide*, III:33, 51, 54, in *Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn*, ed. Qafiḥ, III:582, 679, 684, 693. This approach was taken up systematically by Joseph b. Judah ibn 'Aqnīn in his *Divulgatio mysteriorum luminumque apparentia: Commentarius in Canticum canticorum*, ed. A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1964), esp. 18, 434–6.

[151] See also *HW*, II:292, ll. 10–11 on the possibility of divine inspiration in uncovering the inner meaning of scripture. Note also Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī''s use of the term "taste" (*dhauq*) and its verbal equivalent, *yudhāq*, to denote the inner meaning of scripture grasped by spiritual intuition. See, e.g., TS Ar. 43.108, 2, *recto*, l. 13, and *verso*, l. 3, and others.

devoted an entire chapter of the *Treatise of the Pool* to "attaining the [study of] scripture and its recitation as a [spiritual] seeker consumed with desire [for the Beloved] (*qirā'at mushtāq ṭālib*)." When one arrives at verses relevant to the spiritual path, the seeker is enjoined to "ascend from one meaning to the next, until you attain the object of your quest."[152]

In addition to its allusions to the mystical study of scripture in the spiritual retreat, the letter composed by Benjamin on the journey undertaken by Ḥananel cited above includes important information on the pietist practice of the forty-day retreat. In Sufi practice, the forty-day retreat had attained a semi-canonical status by the thirteenth century as part of the ongoing ascetic and devotional training of the devotee.[153] It is mentioned in the letter as a practice initiated by Moses in his two forty-day retreats on Sinai, as it was perceived to be a core element of the prophetic path that had long since fallen out of practice, subsequently adopted by the Sufis in turn.[154] In its present context, the forty-day retreat, though substantial (and perhaps even dangerous) in its own right, was described as a relatively light regimen in comparison with lengthier retreats. Ḥananel b. Samuel, the well-known judge of Fustat and father-in-law of Abraham Maimonides, was apparently well known for undertaking even lengthier retreats.[155] We can only assume that the practice of solitary meditation, whether daily or nightly in one's home or undertaken on periodic "journeys" to the surrounding mountainside, was a basic discipline common to pietists and Sufis alike in early thirteenth-century Egypt.[156]

From the pietist literature at our disposal, all types of solitary meditation were bounded within a given time frame. The shortest described in our sources are an hour, such as those devoted to the preparation for, and termination of, prayer. But it is noteworthy that even the longest retreats were circumscribed journeys, after which the pietist was to return to society and resume a state of relative normalcy. A more extreme pietist element, however, was known to persist in Egypt despite the ongoing efforts of moderate leaders to suppress it. The Nagid's younger son, Obadiah, warned in the *Treatise of the Pool* not to confuse such extreme isolation from society with

[152] See Bodl. MS Or. 661.23, *recto* and *verso*, published by Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, n.p., and see Fenton's translation of the chapter, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 109–10.

[153] See Suhrawardī, *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, 255–71.

[154] See the discussion of the prophetic path in Chapters five and six. Moses and other prophets (and patriarchs) were taken as models of the practice of *khalwah* throughout Abraham's *oeuvre*. See *HW*, II:386–400, and see *Perush*, 465 (Ex. 33:7, 11), and 59 (Gen. 24:62).

[155] It is nevertheless interesting that Ḥananel's son, Ḥayyim, was concerned for his father's safety. Presumably such journeys involved some element of risk of harm at the hands of animals or bandits.

[156] See also Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah's description of those pietists and disciples of the prophets who trust in God to provide for their needs and seclude themselves in the mountains and wilderness (*inqiṭā' al-ḥasidim wa-talmide ha-nevi'im fi'l-jibāl wa'l-barādī*) in his *Rectification of Religion*, in II Firk. I.3132, 69, *verso*.

true *khalwah*. "Do not think, like the poor in spirit (*al-masākīn*), that isolation (*al-inqiṭāʿ*) in the mountains and caves will alone bring spiritual attainment of any sort. It is not so!"[157] It is possible that this passage alludes to the same extreme element among the pietists that were critiqued by Abraham Maimonides in his time for their neglect of the exoteric law.

One final observation must be made in order to grasp the real purpose of solitary meditation among the pietists. Abraham Maimonides made a critical distinction in the *Compendium* and other writings between "outer solitude," namely the act of physical isolation and meditation, and "inner solitude," or the spiritual transformation and withdrawal for which the outer discipline serves as practical training. According to these sources, the training by which this inner state is attained constitutes a form of asceticism, sometimes imagined as "mortification of the flesh." On more than one occasion, the Nagid cited the verse attributed to the ancient psalmist, Asaf, who declared, "My flesh and heart perish while the Rock of my heart and my portion is God [forever]" (Ps. 73:26).[158] The way to achieve such a death of the flesh "consists in the emptying of the heart and mind of everything other than Him, may He be exalted, and allowing it to be filled and inhabited by Him (*wa-taʿammurihi bihi*).[159] This is achieved by suspending the sensory part of the soul, or most of it, directing the appetitive part away from all other worldly matters and inclining it toward Him, may He be exalted, and preoccupying the rational part with Him . . . "[160] The complete absorption of the heart and mind in the divine was already observed in the special observance of the sabbath for the pietist adept.[161] There, too, the withdrawal of the soul in the act of meditation culminated in a total silencing of bodily sensation and self-awareness.[162]

The background to this idea is rooted in the devaluation of the flesh and of physical matter as a whole, common to pietist and philosophical thought alike. In both traditions, matter is an obstacle to the intellect and to divine perception. According to Maimonides, all bodily sensation, including the intake of food, is a source of degradation, and shame, and an obstacle to the philosopher in search

[157] Bodl. MS Or. 661.14, *recto*, ll. 13–15, published by Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, n.p.; cf. Fenton's translation, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 93. Though Abraham was not as adamant on this point, the following passages in the *Compendium* should be noted, *HW*, I:148, ll. 2–3; II:386, 16–21. Obadiah's critique in context was clearly a polemical appeal for "inner solitude" as opposed to mere physical isolation. My reading is based on the assumption that his harsh words were for more than mere rhetorical effect, but alluded to a more extreme pietist element known also from Abraham's writings.

[158] The word "forever" is in the original but not the citation. See *HW*, II:382, l. 21 to 384, l. 1, and *HW*, ll. 9–10, and *Perush*, 309.

[159] Compare the near identical expression, including the notion of divine indwelling (*taʿammur*) in the heart, *Perush*, 307.

[160] *HW*, 384, ll. 1–5.

[161] See the citation and discussion in the previous section, pp. 106–8.

[162] In Sufism, too, the goal of ecstatic attainment (*wajd*) was sometimes referred to as a "loss of sensation" (*faqd al-iḥsās*). See Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 200.

of intellectual refinement.[163] The Nagid developed the idea of the suppression of outer sensation further in his doctrine of mental receptivity to divine inspiration. "Whenever you approach the attainment of prophetic perfection (*al-kamāl al-nabawī*), which is the supreme form of human arrival (*wuṣūl*) at perfection in this world . . . hunger, thirst, fatigue, depression, anger, or any other accident of matter will cut you off from it."[164] The spiritual battle (*mujāhadah*) waged between body and soul in the pietist system is uncompromising. The goal of *khalwah* was to deaden the body to all worldly stimuli and thereby refine the soul's natural inclination to its divine origin. "Therefore the person whose matter is refined, its coarseness slight and its essence pure, his spiritual nature is manifest and he attains perfection."[165] For the pietists, as for their Sufi mentors, the darkening of outer vision is the preliminary to inner illumination.[166] Abraham Maimonides explicitly referred to the Sufi practice of solitary retreat in dark places (*al-khalawāt fī'l-mawāḍi' al-muḍallamah*), which his colleague Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī' had praised as an original discipline of the ancient prophets.[167]

The mortification of the flesh in the solitary retreat consisted primarily in the gradual diminution of food and drink, which were likely to distract the pietist from full mental withdrawal from worldly matter in meditation. In a characteristic interpretation on the experience of *khalwah* practiced by the Israelites in the desert, Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī' extended the principle of solitary retreat beyond the individual experience to include the community of Israelites at the moment of the Sinaitic revelation. Reading the verse in which the nobles of the tribes of Israel "had a vision of God and then ate and drank" (Ex. 24:10), he identified the resumption of physical indulgence as a reference to the termination of *khalwah*, following the soul's beatific vision. His interpretation is all the more notable for his adoption of the notion of community-wide solitude in the desert, comparable to the communal "witnessing" (*mushāhadah*) at Sinai described by Judah ha-Levi in the *Kuzari*.[168] As we shall see in our treatment of prophetic illumination, both Abraham Maimonides and Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī' looked to the revelation at Sinai as

[163] On this general topic, see J. Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[164] *HW*, II:52, ll. 3–6.

[165] *HW*, II:58, ll. 18–20. Compare these passages with his longer excursus, *HW*, II:352, l. 12 to 356, l. 11, and his remarks on the subservience of the body to the soul, *HW*, 402, ll. 9–14. See also *Perush*, 325. It is interesting to compare Abraham's view on matter and its refinement with his father's remarks in *Guide*, III:8, *Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn*, ed. Qafiḥ, III:466–72.

[166] For an interesting example of the diminishment of outer senses as a means toward inner sensation in Sufi literature of the thirteenth century, see Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return (Merṣād al-'ebād men al-mabdā' elā'l-ma'ād): A Sufi Compendium*, tr. H. Algar (North Haledon, N.J.: Islamic Publication International, 2003), 280.

[167] See *HW*, II:418, ll. 2–10.

[168] See Lobel's summary of this issue in *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's* Kuzari (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 93–5.

a paradigmatic moment for future generations of what individual aspirants might seek to attain as a private experience.[169] As such, it provided a model—even in the collective—for the very discipline of solitude and sensory withdrawal necessary for full attainment of prophetic unveiling and spiritual communion.

> "And they ate and drank" . . . This can be read as a reference to everyone, the nobles and the holy congregation, according to their differing degrees. It alludes to the fact that all of them, peace be upon them, had experienced this solitary meditation that took place at the blessed mountain, isolated unto Him (*munqaṭiʿīn lahu*), may He be exalted, until they achieved the state of perfection they had sought in proximity to Him, may he be exalted, and in devotion to Him, each according to his [level].[170] This condition of theirs was by necessity almost entirely devoid of sustenance. Only after this experience did they then resume eating and drinking.[171]

The role of the mortification of the flesh in solitary retreat was not ancillary or complementary to the practice, but fundamental to its entire objective. As we shall explore further in Chapter six, the goal of such retreats was nothing short of prophetic illumination, accessible to the seeker who has detached himself from all physical sensation and animal desire so as to achieve a state of inner illumination. Detachment from worldly concerns was, put otherwise, a form of death to the world. This may have been what the Nagid intended by suggesting that the righteous experience the essence of the world to come while still in this world. On the basis of his father's remarks in the code, Abraham explained that the world to come "is not a place of eating or of drinking, but consists exclusively of understanding and knowledge. This is the exalted level fully and truly attained by the sages of the Torah in this world . . . who uphold the Torah like the ministering angels . . . "[172] Those

[169] For a full discussion of this theme, see Chapter 6. For some examples of this idea, see TS Ar. 43.108, 1, *verso*, ll. 8–9, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 61 (*wa-maʿamad har sinai huwa al-maqām al-kashfī le-yisrael wa-awwal maqamātihim*), and see Septimus, "*Maʿamad har-Sinai* and other *Maʿamadot*," 1–24, and esp. 19–21.

[170] Compare Maimonides' remarks in *Guide*, II:32, on *maʿamad har sinai*, during which the entire people saw the fire and heard the voices through a miracle, while only those fit for revelation attained the level of prophecy according to different levels and degrees of their perfections (*ʿalā ḥasab kamālātihim*). See *Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn*, ed. Qafiḥ, II:395. It is curious that the Nagid included a long excerpt from the commentary of Abraham ibn Abīʾl-Rabīʿ, without noting the parallel in the *Guide*. See Wiesenberg's comment to this effect, *Perush*, 315, n. 14, in another case, that of the interpretation of the voices heard at Sinai (*Guide*, II:33), in which the Nagid again cited the elder pietist rather than his father. It is interesting, however, that Abraham, unlike his father, admitted the possibility of the prophetic attainment of the collective, through angelic intermediaries. See *Perush*, 247–9, 325, and compare *HW*, II:58, l. 3, and *Guide*, II:33–4.

[171] *Perush*, 379.

[172] See *MH*, 61, and see MT, "Laws of Repentance," 8.2. On these words of the Nagid, see the remarks by B. Septimus, "Notes on Rabbinic Passages in Iberian Poetry" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 53 (1984), 614.

who have been granted a glimpse of the world to come in this life, we are to understand, have made themselves "like the ministering angels," who do not partake of food and drink or engage whatsoever in worldly pursuits.[173]

Solitary meditation was, at its core, an exercise in worldly detachment. Yet it is critical to recall that worldly detachment and the mortification of the flesh that it entailed, were not ends in themselves. In a key study of the notion of the self (*nafs*) in early Sufi thought, Sara Sviri distinguished between what she calls "a pietistic approach that upholds asceticism as an idealized way of life and a mystical approach that sees asceticism as a mere technique, often a temporary technique, whereby inner transformation can be achieved."[174] Sviri's conception of pietism as an idealization of asceticism devoid of mystical aspiration bears further inquiry in light of the present study. Yet, paradoxically, her definition of the mystical path in Sufism as one that is oriented toward a transformation of the self, which utilizes the rigor of asceticism as a means toward that end, is quite apt as a depiction of the ascetic strain in Egyptian pietism.

For Abraham Maimonides, the practice of outer solitude and the regimen of ascetic detachment were perceived as points of spiritual progression on the path toward mystical-prophetic insight. At the point at which the individual is fully in control of the sensitive, imaginative, and impulsive faculties of the soul, all of which become sublimated to the rational faculty, the mind becomes fully absorbed in what he refers to as "the essential religious and intellectual [modes of] knowledge and understanding." The culmination of this intellectual and spiritual attainment is "a glimpse of [God's] exalted existence . . . as David hinted in his testament to Solomon, 'And you, Solomon, my son, know the God of your father' (I Chron. 28:9) . . . as my father and teacher, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing, explained at the end of the *Guide*, such that one's mind is connected to [God], may He be exalted, and removed from all else. This is arrival (*wuṣūl*) [at the culmination of the path]."[175] For all of the apparent divergence of father and son in their spiritual outlook, Abraham's remarks in this passage are a potent reminder that his thought in the *Compendium* picked up where his father left off in the *Guide*. Maimonides' rather esoteric exhortation to the philosophical-religious elite in the *Guide* III:51 to cultivate solitary contemplation and "intellectual worship" became, in the able hands of his son, the portal to a comprehensive path of spiritual discipline and intellectual training leading to prophetic attainment as the culmination of the pietist path.

[173] On the experience of the "world to come" in pietist thought, see Chapter five.
[174] See Sviri, "Self and its Transformation in Ṣūfism," 197.
[175] *HW*, II:382, ll. 5, 8, 9, 13.

MUSICAL CHANT

In the history of Sufi practice, music and dance played a vital, if often controversial, role in the arousal of ecstatic experience and the public ritual of many medieval orders.[176] Chant, in particular, became a prominent feature of collective *dhikr* practice, in which devotees followed the lead of the presiding *shaikh* in chanting rhythmic formulae and the holy names of God.[177] It is curious that, with all that Egyptian pietism owed to the spiritual world of Sufism, there is no direct evidence for parallel *dhikr* ceremonies in Jewish circles of the period.[178] A possible allusion to a collective, as opposed to purely individual, ritual may be detected in the letter from a member of the Nagid's pietist circle in Fustat, cited above, in which the writer counseled his wayward colleague to "attach yourself to the conventicle of the *rayyis* and the companions both in practice and in learning," though the reference is too general to be certain.[179] Given the fact that pietist leaders, including Abraham Maimonides, sought to root their new devotions in the prophetic tradition of ancient Israel, the absence of any corresponding ritual in biblical and rabbinic lore would have made the introduction of Jewish *dhikr* ceremonies an unjustifiable imitation of gentile custom.[180] The controversial nature of adopting such Sufi rituals may be detected in a Genizah letter, in which we learn of a schoolteacher accused by a local *dayyan* of introducing a so-called *zuhdī* dance to his pupils.[181] The teacher wrote in his defense that these accusations were baseless and vowed to travel to Cairo to confront his accuser to clear his good name.[182] The discovery in the Genizah of a citation from the

[176] See A. Shiloaḥ, *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 31–44, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 178–86, and Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety*, 88–9, on the controversial rituals of *samāʿ* in Sufi thought and practice. See the defense of *samāʿ* by al-Qushairī, *al-Risālah*, ed. al-Marʿashlī, 413–29, and al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, ed. Milson, 11–13 (I:28–32).

[177] See the overview by Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 194–207, and see my "Physical Embodiment and Spiritual Rapture in Thirteenth-Century Sufi Mysticism," 307–11.

[178] See Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 17, and *Deux traités*, 66–8, and my "Physical Embodiment and Spiritual Rapture," 324–5, but see above, pp. 91, 105–6, n. 91, and 114.

[179] See TS 10 J 13.8, ll. 16–17, on which see above, pp. 93–101, on the spiritual guide.

[180] For another theologically grounded suggestion as to why *dhikr* may have been avoided by the pietists, see my "Physical Embodiment and Spiritual Rapture," 324.

[181] The practice of *zuhd* (asceticism) was fundamental to the Sufi movement from its inception. The term *zuhdī* here most likely denotes a traditional Sufi dance, though variants of the term also denote ascetic poetry. See J. Kraemer, "The Andalusian Mystic ibn Hūd and the Conversion of the Jews," *IOS* 12 (1992), 68, for a reference to the *zuhdīyāt al-ṣūfīyah* of ibn Hūd. See also T. Beeri, "Zuhdiyya from the Cairo Geniza: The Poems of Judah Ha-Kohen ha-Rav" (Hebrew), *DI* 26–7 (2009–10), 363–86.

[182] See BM Or. 5542.13, partially translated into Hebrew by S. D. Goitein, *Jewish Education in Muslim Countries* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1962), 61, no. 29. The reference to a *zuhdī* as a dance (and song) is significant. Among the poems of an ascetic tenor attributed to David ha-Nasi (fl. first half of eleventh century), there is one explicitly referred to as a *zuhdīyah*. See Bodl. MS 2722/I, fol. 44, published by T. Beeri, *Le-David Mizmor: The Liturgical Poems of*

thirteenth-century Sufi master, ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī, on ecstatic dance (*raqs*) suggests that some Egyptian Jewish pietists took an interest in Sufi dance, in theory if not in practice.[183]

The same could not be said, on the other hand, of the use of musical instruments and chant as a vehicle of religious arousal, for which the biblical sources provided ample testimony and which appear to have been taken up in one form or another by the Egyptian pietists. They needed to look no further than Maimonides' writings for the connection between music and prophetic receptivity. In his discussion of prophecy in the code, Maimonides wrote that "the disciples of the prophets would [place] a harp, a drum, a flute, or a lyre before them in seeking prophetic inspiration."[184] Developing his father's idea one step further, Abraham wrote of music and song as a means for elevating the soul's temperament to facilitate its receptivity to the prophetic overflow. "In order to attain inner solitude that leads to communion [with God] (*al-khalwah al-bāṭinah al-muʾaṣṣilah*), the prophets and their followers used musical instruments and melodies, seeking to arouse the appetitive faculty toward [God], may He be exalted, and to empty the mind[185] of anything but Him."[186] There is tantalizing evidence for the use of the classic Sufi rite known as *samāʿ*, in which religious poems would be chanted and set to music in the group.[187] We likewise possess a fascinating poem in Judaeo-Arabic, attributed to Judah al-Ḥarizi, whose Sufi motifs and language point to a pietist origin. The poem addresses God with the rhythmic language reminiscent of *dhikr* chants: "O He, O He, I have none but Him (*yā huwa*, *yā huwa*, *mā lī illā*

David Ha-Nasi Son of Hezekiah the Exilarch (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 2009), 123, first noted by J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1970; reprint of 1920–2 London edition), II:224, no. 25a, although see Mann, *Jews in Egypt*, I:191, n. 1, where Mann referred to these poems as "liturgical compositions."

[183] See TS Ar. 44.201, on which see Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 55.

[184] MT, "Laws of the Foundation of the Torah," 7:4. Compare his remarks in his introduction to his commentary on "Ḥeleq," principle no. 7, and his introduction to his commentary on Avot, chapter 7, and *Guide*, II:36. For music as a medium for illumination in ibn Sīnā, see his *Ishārāt*, IV.9.8, and see *Ibn Sīnā and Mysticism: Remarks and Admonitions, Part Four*, tr. S. Inati (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 85.

[185] Lit. "the interior" (*al-bāṭin*).

[186] *HW*, II: 384, l. 20 to 386, l. 1. See also *HW*, II:52, ll. 19–21, and 290, ll. 9–15, and cf. 282, l. 13 to 284, l. 8, where Abraham referred to his father's writings on the topic. Maimonides addressed the role of music as a preparation for prophecy in only one place.

[187] See II Firk. I:1494, published and translated by P. Fenton, "A Critique of Maimonides in a Pietist Tract from the Genizah," *GQ* 1 (2005), 144, and see 145, n. 9. A letter from a poor pietist to Abraham ibn Abīʾl-Rabīʿ and his brother Joseph includes a prose poem (*maqāmah*) and an additional poem of twelve rhymed verses at the end of the letter. The writer noted that his poem may be put to music and played with instruments, and the pietist context of much of the letter suggests that this was more than literary posturing. See TS 20.148, *verso*, l. 7 (*aḥaber be-ḥasdekhem ḥamude shir yaʿalu ʿale ʿasor u-vi-meṣiltayim*). See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:79, who took the poet at his word.

huwa) . . . They say, 'Who is He?' but we conceal His [identity]—Truth, sanctified be His names!"[188] The poem bears the intriguing title, "Another one [to the tune of] *Ototenu*,"[189] an enigmatic reference to a melody familiar to the poet's audience to which the verses were to be sung.[190]

What was true of the role of music as a means of spiritual arousal in musical chant was no less pronounced in the context of formal prayer among the pietists. In an intriguing passage on the use of voice in prayer, Abraham Maimonides encouraged the use of song by the prayer leader and individual worshipers alike. He wrote in this vein of the importance of employing "a tender melody" in prayer so as to add a visceral power to the words of the liturgy, in the hope of inducing in the worshipers "an overwhelming sense of awe," and at other times "a softening [of the heart] and submissiveness," as well as "an acknowledgment of one's debt and sense of gratitude," all "for the sake of the arousal and attainment of concentration."[191] While this is true of the congregation through the guidance of the prayer leader, it is no less true of the individual in solitary devotion, who may likewise use melody and chant to focus and purify the mind of all distracting thoughts.

> An individual praying in solitude should adopt a similar practice. If one combines a softness and tenderness when uttering the words, it will lead to a [heightened] sensitivity and a mild temperament,[192] arousing the heart and bringing an effusion of tears and weeping. This is the goal in preparing oneself in prayer . . . If one can achieve purity of concentration in one's mind alone, well and good . . . But if one can [only] achieve it through the use of the voice and overwhelming emotion and chanting—and this is more often the case—then it is likewise essential . . . and for this reason we are commanded to praise [God], may He be exalted, with musical instruments and melodies . . . Understand this and conduct yourself accordingly, and in this way facilitate your concentration [in prayer].[193]

The Nagid's words in this passage take the role of music and chant out of the realm of prophetic attainment and into the daily performance of statutory prayer. But the function in each case is very similar: to facilitate an appropriate state of mind for standing in the divine presence with purity of concentration. Melody is used to focus the mind and empty it of all but God. It is described as the ideal preparation for prayer (*ghāyah fi'l-tahayyu' al-ṣalawī*), bringing the

[188] TS Box H 10.18, 2, *recto*, ll. 6, 9–10, published by Stern, "Some Unpublished Poems by al-Harizi," 361.

[189] See the manuscript, TS Box H 10.18, l. 5. It is worth noting that the only use of the word *ototenu* in the Bible is in Ps. 74:9: "We no longer see our signs; a prophet is no longer among us . . . " One wonders whether there is a connection between the title and theme of the poem and songs of longing for prophetic restoration among the pietists.

[190] The parallel titles of other poems on this fragment confirm the suspicion that the curious term refers to a specific (though familiar) melody.

[191] *SM*, 115 and 116.

[192] Lit. "an inner softening" (*riqqat bāṭin*).

[193] *SM*, 116–117.

mind into proper alignment with the humble disposition expressed in the words of the liturgy. The mind is overcome by the power of the chant, producing an outpouring of emotion and, on occasion, uncontrolled weeping. Here, too, there is a fascinating parallel with "the profusion of tears that flow from the eyes [of the prophets and their disciples] . . . like a flowing spring," in the moment of encounter with the beloved.[194]

The spiritual power of music remained a feature of later pietist thought, including that of the Nagid's descendent, David b. Joshua Maimonides (d. *c.*1410), who wrote of music in his *Doctor ad Solitudinem et Ductor ad Simplicitatem* as "an illuminative and spiritual therapy of the soul, causing it to pine for the noble world and supernal realm that is its source."[195] On the basis of Abraham Maimonides' conclusion of the passage from the *Compendium* cited above, we may assume that speculation as to the role of music and chant in spiritual elevation did not remain at the level of abstract discourse, but was the basis for an uplifting model of prayer in pietist circles, including in the conventicle of the Nagid, where he held regular prayers with his disciples. To prayer leaders and pietist disciples alike, the Nagid advocated the conscious use of melody to uplift the spirit in worship. "Understand this," he insisted, "and conduct yourself accordingly."[196]

PIETIST ATTIRE

Among the defining features by which Egyptian pietism came to be distinguished was its adoption not only of key Sufi rituals but of traditional Sufi attire as a demonstration of dedication to the ascetic life. While wearing wool or cotton was a sign of the individual adoption of penitence in the early Sufi period, by the tenth century it had become a social symbol of a devotee's

[194] See *HW*, II:404, ll. 4–14.

[195] See the text from Bodl. MS Hunt. 382 published by P. Fenton, "A Jewish Sufi on the Influence of Music," *Yūval* 4 (1982), 127. As Fenton has shown, this text of the Huntington manuscript, analyzed almost seventy years ago by Franz Rosenthal, belongs to David's *Doctor ad Solitudinem*. See also Fenton, "A Jewish Sufi on the Influence of Music," 53–5, and cf. 43, 49, and 59. Rosenthal summarized the treatise in "A Judaeo-Arabic Work under Sufic Influence," *HUCA* 15 (484), 433–84. See also Fenton's attribution in "The Literary Legacy of David ben Joshua, Last of the Maimonidean Nĕgīdim," 16, and *Deux traités*, 224. Fenton not only published the Judaeo-Arabic text of the *Doctor*, but also provided a French translation in *Deux traités*, 226–300.

[196] An interesting parallel to this emphasis on musical chant in prayer can be found in the pseudo-Maimonidean treatise, *De Beatitudine*, apparently also of pietist provenance, which exhorted its readers: "The worshiper should turn toward God, standing on his feet, rejoicing in his heart and with his lips, hands outstretched . . . And he should continuously chant with melodious voice . . . " See *De Beatitudine*, 7–8, and see *Qoveṣ Teshuvot ha-Rambam ve-Iggerotav*, ed. A. E. Lichtenberg (Leipzig: n.p., 1859), II:32c.

participation in the movement.[197] A similar trend can be observed in the Jewish pietist movement by the early thirteenth century, when Abraham Maimonides critiqued anyone who fancied himself a pietist merely by virtue of donning the woolen cloak.[198] The adoption of this distinctively Sufi attire by Jewish pietists has led one of the chief modern scholars of the movement to designate Egyptian pietism as nothing short of "Jewish Sufism."[199] It would nevertheless be incorrect to assume that the Jewish pietists adopted the woolen garment to the exclusion of other symbolic attire. It is possible to point to three distinct types of clothing worn by members of the movement, whether on a consistent basis or at designated occasions, which together make up the pietist *habitus*, known to Abraham Maimonides as the discipline of "outer humility" (*al-tawāḍuʿ al-ḍāhir*).[200]

I. Woolen or Coarse Mantle

The adoption of a woolen garment was among the earliest characteristics of early Jewish pietism in Egypt and perhaps beyond, even before it coalesced into an organized movement.[201] In a rebuke of self-styled pietists, who imitate true devotees by adopting the outer trappings of the movement, the Nagid dismissed the mere adoption of the woolen cloak, the *habitus* by which pietists had already become known by this time. "It is a grave error for one to imagine about himself, or for someone else to imagine about him, that he is a *ḥasid* because he avoids marriage or practices fasting or eats little or wears wool (*ṣūf*), while at the same time being remiss in the commandments or transgresses prohibitions."[202] A number of passages in the *Compendium* testify to the wearing of woolen clothing as the daily habit of the adept. But, on closer inspection, the pietist habit varied according to the season. Abraham Maimonides recommended the use of a "coarse mantle" (*libās al-khashin min al-thiyāb*), made of coarse cotton in the winter and threadbare linen in the

[197] See Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, 104–5.

[198] See *HW*, I:144, l. 20 to 146, l. 2. Note also Maimonides' earlier critique in the fourth of the "Eight Chapters," for which see *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Shailat, 382.

[199] See Fenton's designation of Abraham the Pious as a "Jewish Sufi" in the full title to his article, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," and his expression "Jewish Sufi circle" in the full title to "A Mystical Treatise on Perfection." He justified this usage on the basis of the wearing of *ṣūf* among the Jewish pietists in *Deux traités*, 52.

[200] For this expression, see e.g. *HW*, II:74, l. 15.

[201] Baḥya referred to the wearing of wool as the custom of ascetics in his day, which he maintains originated in the practice of the prophets and prophetic aspirants of ancient Israel. See *Hidāyah*, IX:3 and 6, ed. Qafiḥ, 390 and 403–4. See also Maimonides' remarks in the Eight Chapters, *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Y. Shailat (Jerusalem: Shailat Publishing, 1995), 382.

[202] *HW*, I:144, l. 20 to 146, l. 2.

summer.[203] Consistent with his general approach to the guidance of disciples at different stages on the path, he discouraged the wearing of wool as a discipline for beginners or for someone who possesses a naturally hot temperament.[204] Wool (*ṣūf*) and cotton (*quṭn*) were likewise described as equally befitting one who is training his soul for worldly detachment.[205]

Sensitivity to weather conditions, as exhibited by the Nagid, was likely to be found in contemporary Sufi practice, although some were known to deliberately wear a felt cap and a fur coat in the heat of the summer as a penitent practice.[206] The Nagid openly admitted to having adopted, together with his fellow pietists, the custom of wearing a certain sleeveless shirt (*al-baqā'ir*), among other forms of dress, from the Sufis.[207] As in other cases, Abraham Maimonides believed all such dress to have been originated by the ancient prophets of Israel, such as Elijah, who was known to have worn "a cloak of hair and a leather girdle about his loins."[208] Elsewhere, he claimed that the practice of wearing "ragged garments" (*muraqqa'āt*), well known among his Sufi contemporaries,[209] was first developed by the ancient prophets and only later appropriated by the Sufis.[210]

The pietist habit served, first and foremost, as a discipline of "outer humility," with the purpose of inculcating the character of inner humility. As we shall see in Section III on pietist attire for prayer, the adornment of outer humility functioned additionally as a symbolic act, representing the disrobing of worldly attachment and the donning of the mantle of piety and humility. In a fascinating responsum, the Nagid replied to a request for an interpretation of the suggestive passage in I Samuel 19:24: "He, too, stripped off his clothes and likewise prophesied before Samuel, and he lay down naked that whole day and the whole night." The Nagid's interpretation of the verse, while tantalizingly brief, serves as a window into the prevailing view that the coarse garments of

[203] See *HW*, II:74, l. 20; 76, ll. 6–7. For other references to coarse clothing, see *HW*, II:186, ll. 11–12, and note the exhortation, *HW*, II:242, l. 21 to 244, l. 7.

[204] See *HW*, II:324, ll. 7–8.

[205] Compare *HW*, II:248, l. 13, and 250, l. 2, and see also 276, ll. 20–1. Recall also the Nagid's earlier allusion to the donning of "wool and other [clothing] out of asceticism," in *HW*, I:146, l. 21 to 148, l. 1.

[206] For references to such practices among Sufis of this period, see Kraemer, "The Andalusian Mystic ibn Hūd," 69, n. 39, and see Athīr al-Dīn's observation that ibn Hūd's choice of fur coat was "unusual for the surroundings," Kraemer, "The Andalusian Mystic ibn Hūd," 70.

[207] See *HW*, II:266, ll. 9–10.

[208] See *HW*, II:16, ll. 8–10, citing II Kings 1:8. It is indeed possible that the wearing of animal hair may have been a practice adopted by those aspiring to prophecy. See Zachariah 13:4.

[209] See, e.g., al-Suhrawardī in *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, ed. Milson, 9–10 (I:25). In his translation of the work, *A Sufi Rule for Novices:* Kitāb Ādāb al-Murīdīn *of Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī*, ed. M. Milson (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 32, Milson translated *muraqqa'āt* as "patched frocks." See Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 181, 184, n. 5.

[210] See *HW*, II:348, ll. 13–18, and see, on this subject, my "Respectful Rival: Abraham Maimonides on Islam," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, ed. A. Meddeb and B. Stora (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 858–9.

the pietists and Sufis constituted the "habit of poverty and humility," facilitating an inner transformation of character. "The stripping of clothes refers to his removal of the raiment of the king, so as to leave behind the appearance of greatness and its apparel (*hai'at al-malik wa-malbūsihi*), and to assume the habit of poverty and humility (*ziyy al-faqr wa'l-tawāḍu'*). This is a mystery."[211]

The mystery to which he referred—that aspect of the interpretation not appropriate to reveal at large—is, of course, the connection between spiritual poverty and prophecy.[212] It is not coincidental that Abraham Maimonides referred elsewhere to prophetic dress (and its imitation by contemporary Sufis) being the outer raiment of one aspiring to inner revelation, as hinted at in the passage from Samuel.[213]

II. Initiatory Cloak

Equally significant is the pietist adoption of the traditional Sufi cloak (*khirqah*) placed by the master upon the novice in a rite of initiation into the *ṭarīqah.* By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the rite of initiation into the fellowship and the conferring of blessing had become increasingly widespread in Sufi orders, although in some circles, most notably in Egypt, it was used sparingly, only for the most deserving disciples.[214] It is unclear at what point the custom was adopted among the pietists, although it is clear that the Nagid played a significant role in promoting the rite. Here, as before, Abraham acknowledged the prevalence of the custom among contemporary Sufis as compared with the small contingent of Jewish pietists who continued the practice in his day. He nevertheless maintained that the origins of the rite were to be found in the ancient prophetic path cultivated by the likes of Elijah and Elisha, who served as the models for future practitioners of the initiatory rite, whether Muslim or Jewish.

[211] *Teshuvot*, 35, no. 24.

[212] For Abraham's adoption of the Sufi ideal of *faqr* as a spiritual virtue, see *HW*, II:220, l. 21, and compare 240, l. 11. See also *HW*, 222, ll. 16–17 (a comparison with Sufi mendicants). For the term *sirr* in Abraham Maimonides' writings used to designate mystical secrets not to be revealed to the masses out of danger of misuse, only perceived by the select few, see *SM*, 126, and *Perush*, 315. For *sirr* as the inner meaning of the Torah, see *SM*, 307, 309, 311; *HW*, II:282, l. 12; 290, l. 8; 292, l. 11; 294, ll. 1–3, and very frequently in the *Perush*. For the term as a designation for the inner meaning in general, see *HW*, II:286, ll. 20–1; 288, ll. 7, 12, 20; 290, l. 6; 302, l. 13.

[213] See *HW*, II:318, l. 10 to 320, l. 9. On the prophetic aspirations of the pietist movement, see the discussion in chapters five and six.

[214] This is evident from the account of the *khirqat al-taṣawwuf* in Ṣafī al-Dīn, *La Risāla*, 79b (Ar. 55, Fr. 148). On the khirqah in general, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 102–3, 105–6, 234, and Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 181–5.

> When Elijah passed by Elisha before [the latter] became his loyal follower, he found him plowing . . . Elijah cast his cloak over him as a sign—a joyful annunciation—that his habit and raiment (*labsuhu wa-ziyyuhu*) and the rest of his path would be like his, and a joyful annunciation that his own perfection would be transferred to him and that he would attain to what he himself had attained. And you are aware of the [custom] among the Sufis of Islam, among whom—due to the sins of Israel!—some of the ways of the ancient saints of Israel are to be found, while such is not found—or only in small numbers—among our contemporaries, according to which the master places the ragged cloak over the aspirant (*talbīs al-shaikh al-khirqah li'l-murīd*), when the latter wants to join his path and travel with him. "He takes from Your words" (Deut. 33:3).[215]

As we shall see in our discussion of prophecy in Chapters five and six, the biblical model of Elijah and Elisha, and of the institution of the "disciples of the prophets" more generally, served as the primary mechanism by which the pietist movement sought both to train its disciples in the prophetic path (*al-maslak al-nabawī*) and, equally important, to perpetuate itself in future generations. But, in light of this passage, the more immediate and symbolic function of the initiatory cloak was to serve both as a formal induction of the novice into the fellowship of disciples and as a "joyful annunciation" to the effect that the disciple would now travel the pietist path under the direction and protection of the master. As the Nagid suggested here and elsewhere, the personal guidance of the *shaikh* served as a form of promise that the disciple, with the proper training and tutelage, would "attain to what he himself had attained," the perfection and illumination attained as the ultimate culmination of the pietist path.[216]

III. Prayer Attire

Among the most intriguing prescriptions for pietist dress in the pietist literature of the thirteenth century is the special attire disciples were encouraged to wear exclusively for prayer. Given the total dedication to the spiritual life required by pietism, the prayer habit did not necessarily entail a separate garment.[217] In the *Rectification of Religion* of Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah, "those distinguished by pietism, who spend all of their time with God," are identified by "cleanliness of body and cleanliness of clothing, with the purity required by

[215] *HW*, II:264, l. 20 to 266, l. 9. The passage continues with the acknowledgment that his fellow pietists have also adopted the sleeveless shirts (*al-baqā'ir*) mentioned above. The implicit interpretation of Deut. 33:3 is that traditions native to the Jewish people (the initial recipients of "Your words") were subsequently appropriated by other nations.

[216] See *HW*, 266, l. 4, and cf. *HW*, 422, ll. 7 to 424, l. 9.

[217] On classical rabbinic views on proper attire for prayer, see Ehrlich, *Non-Verbal Language of Jewish Prayer*, 128–47.

religion, as it says in Ecclesiastes (4:17), 'Guard your foot when you go to the house of God'."[218] Abraham Maimonides, on the other hand, recommended a separate prayer raiment for those capable of the additional exertion, although he acknowledged that such a regimen was excessive even for many dedicated pietists. The garment prescribed by him appears to have been a version of sackcloth and ashes, again in imitation of the prophets of old. Here, as before, Elijah and Elisha were brought forth as witnesses, although the fact that such clothes were set aside by some for prayer suggests that it was different than the usual coarse garments worn by most adherents to the movement. As we shall see, the Nagid's treatment of the prayer attire of the strict pietist is of great importance for his approach to the movement in general.

> The garment worn for prayer must be the cleanest of one's garments. If it is possible for one to reserve one or more garments special for prayer, apart from the garments he uses for other activities, how much the better! This is especially so for the prayer leader, on the analogy of the priestly garments just as prayer is in place of sacrifice . . . If this is too difficult, and not everyone—not even every pious person—is capable of it, one must at least make sure that his clothing is clean and pure . . . Be careful not to misunderstand what is related of the practice of the sages, of blessed memory, and also of the prophets, peace be upon them, of making oneself look ragged in supplication . . . and of wearing sackcloth (*al-musūḥ*),[219] [a custom] found throughout the prophetic books but hardly to be found among those mired in the exile on account of their lowly state. Now, to adopt this custom is even greater and more elevated than the cleanliness of clothes and their adornment . . . One should not even consider bringing this [advice to scholars to wear clean clothes] as proof against a pietist who practices asceticism (*ḥasid tazahhada*) by wearing different clothing and by other means. For an ascetic such as this travels a path more elevated than the path of scholars, just like the path of Elijah and Elisha, peace be upon them, is more elevated than the path of David and Solomon. In the same way, the prayer of a pious and ascetic person, who accepts upon himself (*al-multazim*) in his state of prayer to wear sackcloth and sit upon ashes, is more elevated than the scrupulous (*al-mutaḥarriyīn*) [of the law] . . . But even the few pious individuals who adopt this custom do not do so regularly but only occasionally.[220]

In this passage, the Nagid appears once again in the role of reformer, resurrecting the customs of the prophets and sages of antiquity over against the ways of his contemporaries, most of whom appear "mired in the exile on account of their lowly state."[221] But the Nagid's words were concerned not

[218] See II Firk. I.3132, 61, *verso*–62, *recto*, which forms part of Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah's discussion of cleanliness (*neqiyut*), one of the levels of spiritual ascent.

[219] This term can also mean hair or coarse wool.

[220] *SM*, ed. Dana, 103–5.

[221] For the significance of the exilic condition in pietist thought, see especially pp. 64, n. 85, 161, n. 13, and 175, n. 67.

only with the lowly state of the Jewish people as a whole, but with certain scholars (polemically dubbed "the scrupulous" in the above passage), who were known to voice strong opposition to the pietist endeavors of his colleagues.[222] The image of a number of strict pietists re-enacting the sackcloth and ashes of biblical and talmudic times would have been most remarkable and doubtless aroused more than curiosity, as the Nagid's acerbic critique suggests. It is nevertheless noteworthy that the Nagid openly conceded to varying degrees of tolerance for a special prayer raiment among the pietists, suggesting a certain variety in practice within the group. This picture conforms well with what we know of pietist prayer circles more generally, in which fellow devotees "view[ed] their bowings and prostrations as a sign of [heightened] concentration."[223] Pietism in general was defined in terms of increasing levels of spiritual striving, reflecting the different points at which disciples find themselves along the path.[224] As a result, Pietist conventicles were characterized by variation in individual practice, depending on the spontaneous movement of the spirit, leading to prostration at different moments in prayer, or on a more penitent form of attire, adopted by each pietist on an individual basis (known here and elsewhere as a form of "commitment," *iltizām*). For the few who aspired to more rigorous forms of piety, the clean and specially consecrated prayer garment was replaced by a raiment of sackcloth and ashes. For the majority of pietists, however, the Nagid encouraged the more suitable practice appropriate for each disciple. As with his prayer reforms more generally, to which we turn in the next chapter, this approach was part and parcel of the Nagid's overall effort to make increased levels of piety more accessible to his coreligionists, with the goal of gradually bringing the fruits of the pietist movement into the mainstream of Jewish society.[225]

[222] On the opposition to pietism in general, and the Nagid's devotional reforms in particular, see Chapter three.

[223] See *Teshuvot*, 62, no. 62, on which see the beginning of Chapter three.

[224] See the Nagid's remarks in *Teshuvot*, 65, no. 62: "Most pietist practices are not obligatory but an added stringency. Whoever is stringent on himself in this and similar cases is worthy of blessing (*tavo lo berakhah*), in so far as it is for the sake of heaven and according to the manner of Jewish worship . . . As for [any pietist practice], such as voluntary fasting or voluntary prayer or [other] pietist act, may it grow and increase!"

[225] On the Nagid's efforts to make the life of piety more accessible to his coreligionists more generally, see Chapter three. An interesting expression of his desire to assist his community in spiritual matters can be seen in *Teshuvot*, 19, in the preface to his responsa beginning with no. 4: " . . . I strive in the worship of my God, the God of Israel, may His name be blessed, with all my heart and with all my soul, and I increase my bowings and prostrations and the like, all of which is no secret and I have written about them in my treatise [the *Compendium*]. May it be [God's] will that you come to me with questions on all of these matters!"

Part 2

Prayer and the Synagogue

3

The Devotional Life

In an undated query addressed to Abraham Maimonides, one of the Jewish immigrants newly settled in Egypt questioned the Nagid on the status of various prayer customs he observed among the pietist circles in the country.[1] The questioner was careful to note that the pietists comported themselves differently when praying in the main synagogues than when congregating in their private prayer circles. "When they pray in a mixed group in the synagogues . . . they pray together according to the established custom, so as not to burden the congregation with something that it cannot sustain," thus making themselves indistinguishable from other worshipers (except perhaps for their mode of dress) out of deference to the congregation.[2] But it is another matter "when they pray alone in their homes or when they gather for public prayer in houses of study (*be-vet midrashim*)." On these occasions,

> they sit for the "hymns of praise" (*pisuqe zimra*) and for the blessings of the recitation of *shema'* in fear and awe, their faces toward the holy [ark], which is in the direction of the land of Israel and Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord . . . taking it upon themselves to sit in the same way in which they stand for the prayer [toward Jerusalem]. They bow down to the ground and prostrate when bowing in the *qadish* and *qedushah*, and some or most of them prostrate to the ground whenever they are overcome with humility and great concentration. So, too, they prostrate instead of bowing from the waist at the beginning and end of the "forefathers" and "thanksgiving" blessings [of the standing prayer]. They similarly prostrate at certain moments in the "hymns of praise," the blessings of the recitation of *shema'*, and the blessings of the [standing] prayer. In sum, they view their bowings and prostrations as a sign of [heightened] concentration . . .[3]

[1] The query and responsum can be found in *Teshuvot*, 62–5, no. 62. The query was authored in Hebrew, rather than Judaeo-Arabic, an indication of the non-Arab provenance of the writer in question.

[2] See *Teshuvot*, 62. For the talmudic concept of not burdening a community with something that most individuals cannot sustain, see, e.g., BT 'Avodah Zarah 36a and Bava Batra 60b.

[3] *Teshuvot*, 62.

For all the rigors of its ascetic regimen, outlined in detail in the previous chapter, Egyptian pietism came to be defined by its unique devotion to the life of prayer. We have already had occasion to describe the performance of supererogatory prayers observed during the night vigils and meditative retreats that were key to the pietist discipline. But for the curious onlooker (such as the author of our query), the most distinctive feature of Egyptian pietism was its novel approach to prayer and prayer rites. As we shall see in this and the following chapter, each element of pietist prayer described in the query—the direction of prayer, the manner of sitting, new forms and occasions for bowing, and an emphasis on heightened concentration—were essential components of the new pietist prayer rites of the early thirteenth century. The examples mentioned in the query are by no means exhaustive, and in this chapter we shall have occasion to consider additional prayer reforms introduced by the pietists of Egypt.

Before turning to the prayer reforms themselves, it is worth pausing to consider the unique significance attached to prayer in Egyptian pietist thought. An entire treatise on prayer and its role in the inner life of the "seeker of God" (*ṭālib allāh*), composed in the early years of the thirteenth century by an anonymous pietist master, was brought to light some twenty years ago by Paul Fenton and provides a vivid portrait of the role played by prayer among the pietists. Like their counterparts in Germany during the same period and the later pietists of early modern Eastern Europe, prayer became the desired medium of spiritual transcendence in Egyptian pietism, but for somewhat different reasons. The latter shows no traces of the numerological or theosophical speculation found in European Jewish pietism in its various forms.[4] For the Egyptian devotees, prayer served the same purpose as other devotional rituals: to clear the mind of all worldly distractions so as to concentrate fully on the divine. Prayer performed "with the sincerity of the tongue and the heart," in which the soul cleaves to God and "yearns to turn toward its sacred realm," is designated by the author, "the worship of the devotees" (*ʿibādat al-ārifīn*).[5] Writing on the advantages of prayer for the attainment of spiritual perfection, the anonymous pietist author explained the necessity of temporary moments of retreat from worldly activity:

> The first thing [to know] regarding the essence of prayer is that prayer is not an end in itself, but is [performed] for the purpose of polishing the majestic soul

[4] On numerology in the prayer life of medieval German pietism, see I. Marcus, "The Devotional Ideals of Ashkenazic Pietism," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 356–66, and I. Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 98–101, and T. Fishman, "Rhineland Pietist Approaches to Prayer and the Textualization of Rabbinic Culture in Medieval Northern Europe." *JSQ* 11 (2004), 313–31.

[5] See TS Arabic 44.3, 1, *recto*, a, ll. 8, 13, 15–16, published by P. Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer and the Spiritual Quest from the Pietist Circle," *JSAI* 16 (1993), 150–1.

> (*ṣiqālat al-nafs al-rabbānīyah*) and burnishing its faculties. For the more a person is immersed in, and preoccupied with, the world . . . the more the soul of necessity grows dim and those faculties vital to its ability to attain its own perfection are weakened.[6]

The emphasis on the luminescence and perfection of the soul, so central to pietist thought in general and to this manual on the spiritual life in particular, is a subject to which we shall return in Chapter five on prophecy. But it is worth observing at this point that the author found it necessary to stress that prayer is not an end in itself, but rather serves a critical yet auxiliary role toward a more sublime purpose. For this reason, our author has interwoven the standard obligations for prayer with additional pietist requirements to be performed before, during, and after the formal prayers, including the revival of an ancient practice recorded in the Mishnah, according to which the "early pietists" (*ḥasidim ha-rishonim*) would devote time before and after prayer to contemplative devotion.[7] This raises yet another theme addressed later in this chapter, namely the complete synthesis of pietism and law, in which devotional and supererogatory practices were integrated seamlessly, yet not without a measure of ambiguity, into the framework of religious obligation.

The best example of this new emphasis on devotional worship and its relationship to the normative structure of statutory prayer is manifest in the writings of Abraham Maimonides from the same period. Elsewhere, I have explored the pivotal role played by the Nagid in the liturgical reforms enacted in synagogues throughout Egypt during the second decade of the thirteenth century.[8] Here, too, we are concerned with prayer reforms undertaken by the Nagid, but this time with two critical differences. First and foremost, the reforms we examine here were not liturgical but structural. That is to say, they were directed at the appropriate preparations for, and required postures of, statutory prayer, rather than at the words of prayer per se. Second, unlike the liturgical changes, these reforms betray a key ambivalence toward their actual position in the law.

Surprisingly, despite his zeal in rectifying synagogue practice in the case of liturgy and waging a "controversy for the sake of heaven," Abraham Maimonides declined to impose his structural changes in the main synagogues, so they were only adopted in practice (as is attested by the query with which we began the chapter) among the pietists in their private worship

[6] II Firk. Heb.-Arab. I.3116, fol. 5, published by Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 151–2. On the idea that prayer provides vital nourishment for the soul, like regular meals for the body, compare Halevi, Kuzari III.5, in *Kitāb al-radd wa'l-dalīl fi'l-dīn al-dhalīl*, ed. D. Z. Baneth. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 94.

[7] See M Berakhot 5:1 and BT Berakhot 32b.

[8] See E. Russ-Fishbane, "Between Politics and Piety: Abraham Maimonides and his Times," Dissertation, Harvard University, 2009, 203–59.

services. And yet Abraham explicitly and repeatedly referred to the reforms as obligatory for the proper fulfillment of worship. It is important to bear in mind that he included his treatment of these structural forms in the second part of his *Compendium*. As already noted, the first three parts of the work dealt with laws obligatory on the people as a whole—what he dubbed the "common path" incumbent on all Israel—while the fourth and final part dealt exclusively with the "elevated path" of pietism. On more than one occasion, Abraham chastised the people as a whole for their neglect of these prayer rites, yet he never enforced them in the synagogues. We shall return to the perplexing status of these rites later in the chapter. For now, it will suffice to take note of the urgency with which the Nagid addressed the problem of prayer and the restoration of the neglected rites in the following passage from the *Compendium*.

> I have dwelt on this topic at length on account of the people's general decline over the course of the exile in the area of communal worship. Many years and multiple generations have passed since they have properly observed those obligatory rites which I have described . . . There is no greater need [in our worship] than to observe these commendable obligations (*al-wājibāt al-mandūb ilaihā*). "It is time to act [for] the Lord—they have neglected Your Torah" (Ps. 119:126)[9] . . . The Temple is destroyed on account of our sins. Sacrifice and all that is connected with it is no longer available to us. All that remains is prayer and similar [devotions], yet no one gives them any heed.[10]

Abraham's stated goal was to rouse the Jewish community from its current malaise, invoking the time-honored verse for the reform of communal norms: "It is time to act [for] the Lord; they have rendered void your Torah."[11] As we shall see, his father had formerly invoked the same verse in the midst of his own synagogue reform, a change to the statutory standing prayer that remained on the books in Abraham's day and which remained relatively stable until the sixteenth century.[12] As was his father in this case, Abraham was the primary figure responsible for formulating and implementing his reforms, although in some if not all of them he was supported by the elder pietist, Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ ("the Pious"), before the latter's death in or shortly after 1223.[13] Referring to one case of reform, the Nagid observed that "I have

[9] The scribe of this manuscript (Bodl. MS 1274), Eleazar b. Abraham, omitted the word "for" (*la*) in the verse. For a facsimile of the colophon, see *SM*, 322.

[10] *SM*, 184.

[11] For the classic rabbinic use of this verse in this sense, see M Berakhot 9:5 and BT Berakhot 54a.

[12] On Maimonides' reform and its aftermath in Egypt, see pp. 140–1 and n. 27, and pp. 155–7.

[13] An auction of the latter's personal library occurred in Adar and Nisan of 1534 ED (1223 CE) in the Palestinian synagogue in the presence of the Nagid. The proceeds of the auction were to pay off his debts while the remainder was to go to his living heirs. See TS 20.44, published by E. J. Worman, "Two Book-Lists from the Cambridge Genizah Fragments," *JQR*, o.s., 20 (1908),

chosen to establish it out of my desire and zeal for His majestic name, may He be exalted . . . Those who have followed me in other [practices], both those I have already explained and those I am yet to explain, follow me in this case as well. The first to do so was Rabbi Abraham the Pious, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing."[14] While some scholars have read this passage to mean that Abraham the Pious, rather than the Nagid, was the originator of these rites, a straightforward reading appears to suggest the reverse.[15] The Nagid clearly took credit for the new rites, explaining his motivation in terms of zeal for divine honor, and referred to Abraham the Pious as the first of those who followed his example, beforehand as well as now. On another occasion, however, the Nagid wrote of his cooperation with Abraham the Pious in establishing his prayer reforms: "I myself and Rabbi Abraham the Pious, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing, established our custom, followed by others who followed our example."[16]

If the Nagid was the central figure behind the changes, he appears to have worked closely with the revered elder pietist and enlisted his assistance in support of the undertaking. As already noted in our account of the growth of the pietist movement in Chapter one, Abraham the Pious and his brother Joseph were respected leaders of the nascent movement in the early years of the thirteenth century.[17] It is likely that they were among the charismatic figures behind the early pietist activity to which the young Abraham was drawn even before his father's death.[18] In a fascinating aside in the context of his case for sitting in rows, to which we shall return in due course, Abraham wrote: "Even I, who detest [the current practice] and disallow it, was among

460–3, and N. Allony, *The Jewish Library in the Middle Ages: Book Lists from the Cairo Genizah*, ed. M. Frenkel and H. Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006), pp. 256–63.

[14] *SM*, 79.

[15] See N. Wieder, *Islamic Influences of the Jewish Worship* (Hebrew) (Oxford: East and West, 1947), 37, and P. Fenton, *Deux traités de mystique juive* (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1987), 55, based on the Nagid's expression that Abraham the Pious was "the first to do so" (*al-bādi' bi-dhālik*).

[16] *SM*, 98. At one point, the Nagid described his colleague as "my companion in the path of the Lord" (*ṣāḥibunā fī derekh ha-shem*). This is the reading of II Firk. I.1717, whereas Bodl. MS 1276, published by Rosenblatt (*HW*, II:290, l. 17), reads merely *ṣāḥibī*. See P. Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqala al-Hawdiyya* (London: The Octagon Press, 1981), 7 and n. 31.

[17] See pp. 47–8.

[18] In a poem in honor of Abraham's wedding, when his father was still alive, we hear that the young man "supplicates before his Rock in fasting and prayer" (*va-yeḥal pene ṣuro be-ṣom u-tefillah*). See TS NS Box 309.5, *verso*, l. 12, published by N. Allony, "On Sephardic Poetry and its Language" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 55 (1964), 250. Note also Maimonides' description of his son as "most humble and modest of men," in *Iggerot ha-Rambam: Ḥalifat ha-Mikhtavim 'im R. Yosef b. Yehudah*, ed. D. H. Baneth (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985), 96 (In the medieval Hebrew translation of this part of the letter, of which the original Judaeo-Arabic is not extant: *ki hu 'anav ve-shafel she-ba-anashim*). See my translation of this letter, p. 11.

those [leaders] who fell into the same error at the beginning of my headship,[19] before God removed the veil from before my eyes, leading me to repent to Him for this and similar [errors]."[20] As we know from another document dated to 1205, shortly after he assumed the headship, Abraham was already leading a private prayer group in his home or house of study by this early date.[21] Assuming a linear course of events, Abraham's early interactions with Abraham the Pious may have proved the catalyst for his campaign for synagogue reform.

The decisive shift away from the established custom in the main synagogues and the establishment of an alternative worship circle in his private residence helps to explain the strong polemic in the Nagid's writings against the partisans of the old synagogue rites, who, not surprisingly, comprised a segment of the communal leadership in Fustat. Anonymous polemical criticism of this sort is notoriously difficult to verify with any precision, especially when it attributes to "those misguided leaders in our day" a single-minded "lust for power."[22] But there are echoes of more specific battles over the synagogue reforms buried in the Nagid's polemic. On one occasion, he mentioned "one of the contemptible leaders" who "wage war against the truth" and "seek to justify erroneous customs."[23] Elsewhere, he referred to "the arguments of those who oppose the truth with distortions and fabrications that cause the Lord's people to stumble," suggesting something of a concerted effort on the part of his opponents to justify the prevailing customs before the broader community.[24]

One senses in the Nagid's trenchant polemic against his adversaries in the communal establishment an additional factor, namely the staunch opposition of his rivals, who appear to have stymied his efforts. Abraham may have alluded to this resistance when describing his "limited ability" to renew long-obsolete practices in the synagogues.[25] In another revealing passage, Abraham contrasted the negative reception accorded his own reforms with the generally positive response to those initiated by his father some decades earlier. Turning to the substance of the two reforms, Abraham noted with some umbrage how his own modifications of synagogue ritual were more in sync with Jewish law than those of his father. While his father eliminated a custom with a firm foundation in the Talmud,[26] he sought, by contrast, merely to reintroduce long-neglected rituals, whose biblical and talmudic precedents

[19] This is the meaning of the term (*taqaddum*) as used throughout Abraham Maimonides' oeuvre, although Dana translated it as "my life."
[20] *SM*, 98. [21] See TS 16.187, discussed on pp. 15–16.
[22] See *HW*, II:74, l. 4, and *SM*, 96, respectively. [23] See *SM*, 96.
[24] See *SM*, 96, 183, and cf. also *HW*, 408, l. 11–410, l. 3.
[25] See B. Goldberg, ed. *Sefer Ma'aseh Nissim* (Paris: n.p., 1867), 107.
[26] See BT Rosh ha-Shanah 34b.

were clear and unambiguous. In spite of this, he observed wryly, the community at large was more willing to adopt his father's changes than his own.

> This ordinance [of my father] has become widely accepted throughout all Egypt (*fī'l-diyār al-miṣrīyah*)[27] during his lifetime and after his death and it has become the norm, replacing the [former practice] . . . Not a single scholar of his generation opposed him in this matter nor did anyone impute that such a thing was contrary to the [institution of the] sages, despite the fact that it runs counter to the text of the Talmud. The reason for this is that, at that time, there was no obstinacy or envy among [the leaders], nor anyone who wrote hasty rulings in spite of their ignorance and lack of scruples. This is precisely the outrage that has occurred in this generation on account of those who oppose the great emendations and important recommendations and obligations that I have proposed.[28]

Abraham's remark on the compatibility of his reforms with talmudic law (or the lack of it in the case of his father) was not a rhetorical aside, but the theoretical basis of his structural emendations and the source of his exasperation at the general reaction to his reforms. Much of what the Nagid proposed looked alien and inauthentic to the community, not only for its association with Islamic prayer rites but also for its total absence from living Jewish practice for as long as anyone could remember. The fundamental question of what constitutes authentic Jewish ritual—actual practice or textual precedent—was of major significance in Abraham's thought. As I have recently argued, Abraham and his father both inclined toward an authentication of talmudic authority over a justification of prevailing custom, even if the two men did not always act with equal zeal in the repeal of established custom and the restitution of talmudic norms.[29] This background adds an element of irony to Abraham's comment on the lack of talmudic support for his father's reform. His words were duly calculated to cast aspersions on all those who were quick to accept his father's emendations while renouncing his own.

Yet, in another respect, much of the Nagid's reformist writing was defensive in nature. His general appeal to biblical (and not only talmudic) precedent was intended in part to validate his claims of a return to origins, a restoration of

[27] One gets the impression of some resistance to Maimonides' ordinance from another responsum: see *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1986), II: 485–6, no. 259. Yet, as Abraham testified here, they were nevertheless widely accepted throughout the country. From a responsum of the sixteenth-century Egyptian scholar and Maimonidean commentator, David ibn Abi Zimra, we read that Maimonides' change was still in effect by that late date (though repealed by the latter). See *Shut ha-Radvaz*, ed. A. Walden (Israel: Super Sefer, 1971), IV:2, no. 1079, where the custom is described as prevalent "throughout this entire kingdom." Ibn Abi Zimra repeated, and elaborated on, Maimonides' justification of the enactment as necessary in light of Muslim opinion. See also I. Friedlaender, "A New Responsum of Maimonides concerning the Repetition of the *Shmoneh Esreh*," *JQR* 5 (1914), 1–15.

[28] *SM*, 196.

[29] See Elisha "The Maimonidean Legacy in the East: A Study of Father and Son," *JQR* 102 (2012), 190–223.

ancient Jewish ritual from its exilic corruption. As already noted in Chapter one, a major part of the Nagid's reformist argument consisted in the assertion that these rites were the "ancient modes of worship" and "ancient practices of Israel."[30] "Be careful," he wrote in the same vein, "not to confuse a new idea and custom with ancient [rites] that have been neglected to the point of being forgotten and [only] later . . . restored and revitalized . . ."[31] The implication of the Nagid's remarks are clear. What was originally binding, no matter how many years it had lain in abeyance, retains its obligatory status. As a result, he concluded, it is incumbent on the community to resume its practice "when it is shown to be an obligation."[32] Yet if, as he insisted, the rites were indeed obligatory, how may we explain his unwillingness to push them through at all costs, as he did with his liturgical reforms? Here we turn to the paradox inherent in the Nagid's treatment of the reforms, a paradox hinted at more than once and only obliquely resolved in his writings.

REQUIREMENT OR RECOMMENDATION?

The inability of Abraham's reforms to gain traction beyond his own pietist following or to survive far beyond his own brief, if colorful, career, has been a subject of curiosity for a number of scholars. Goitein famously lamented Abraham's "tragic fate" as a communal leader, suggesting that his many duties to his flock and obligations to the Sultan's court "limited the extent and duration of his impact."[33] According to Goitein, Abraham neglected the implementation of his own reforms out of a desire to implement his father's reforms, choosing to remain in the very position of authority that tragically constrained his own life's work.[34] In a recent study, Mordechai Friedman argued that opposition to Abraham's leadership, even more than the burdens of that leadership, contributed to this failure, suggesting further that Abraham remained in office precisely because of his desire to promote his agenda of reform.[35]

[30] See *SM*, 149 and 150, respectively, and see the discussion on p. 175.

[31] *SM*, 161.

[32] See *SM*, 161.

[33] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:492. Expressing his well-known sympathy for Abraham's character and career, Goitein then added: "The nobility of his mind and the excellence of his spiritual gifts were deserving of richer response."

[34] See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, V:493.

[35] See M. A. Friedman, "Abraham Maimonides on His Leadership, Reforms, and Spiritual Imperfection," *JQR* 104 (2014), 499–502. Friedman differs with Goitein in assuming that Abraham's desire to remain in a position of authority was not to maintain the observance of Jewish religious law in general, and his father's reforms in particular, but that "his paramount goal in pursuing leadership was the promotion of his program for radical reform in divine worship for the entire Jewish community." See Friedman, "Abraham Maimonides on His

In my view, the primary reason for the failure of Abraham Maimonides' devotional reforms to gain acceptance, beyond the immediate communal resistance it engendered, was his unwillingness to enforce them in the synagogues "for the sake of heaven," as he had done despite loud and angry objections in the case of his liturgical reforms. Abraham's reluctance is therefore surprising and requires some explanation. In the passage from the *Compendium* cited above, Abraham described his synagogue reforms as "the great emendations and important recommendations and obligations that I have proposed" (*al-maṣāliḥ al-kubrā wa'l-mandūbāt wa'l-wājibāt al-ʿuẓmā*).[36] The peculiarity of obligations that are merely proposed (rather than imposed) puts the problem of Abraham's reforms in full relief. There is little doubt that he hoped to implement the changes beyond his pietist circle. But, as we shall see, he did not consider the added strictures to possess the same obligatory status as other mandatory conditions of prayer, and at no time sought to institute them beyond the prayer service in his private residence. Not a single document from this period suggests that they were ever embraced in either of the main synagogues in Fustat. While the Nagid was no stranger to controversy (or to holding his ground in the face of popular opposition), he pinned his hopes for these new reforms on his own powers of persuasion to convince the people of their importance. Once again, he attributed the people's reluctance to adopt the reforms to the opposition of other communal leaders.

> I have seen the community drawn in whatever direction they are led with great ease, much as they are led toward the opposite with great ease. [They are] like an empty receptacle that takes in whatever you fill it with. Whether you fill it with life-giving waters or with harmful waters, it receives them and is filled [one way or the other]. God will bring punishment upon those leaders who have no pity upon [the community] but lead them astray, as He said to them, "O my people, your leaders lead you astray and destroy the way of your paths" (Is. 3:12).[37] And how great is the reward for those leaders who have pity upon them—pity for their religious well-being—leading them toward what God, may He be exalted, desires. Of those it is said, "And the enlightened shall shine [as the glory of the firmament], and those who bring many toward righteousness are as the stars forever" (Dan. 12:3).[38]

Leadership, Reforms, and Spiritual Imperfection," 502. If, by "radical reform," Friedman intends Abraham's changes to prevailing liturgical rites, I am in full agreement. As I argue in what follows, the Nagid did not impose, nor intend to impose, his devotional reforms (i.e. those discussed in general in this chapter and enumerated in greater detail in the following chapter) on the community at large. This is not to say that he did not view his position as valuable in promoting these reforms through the force of persuasion, though not through imposition.

[36] See p. 141.

[37] Abraham most likely cited the verse from memory and omitted the word "please" (*na*). The omission could also be a scribal error.

[38] *SM*, 185–6.

Abraham's low estimation of the independent judgment of the community is striking for a work that purports to be for a general audience. Yet it should be emphasized that he wrote these words as an affirmation of his faith in the people's eventual acceptance of these important reforms.[39] The real rebuke in this passage is directed at the communal leadership (*murshidīhim*), scholars and magistrates, who stymie the religious improvement of the people. Yet it is notable that, for all that, the Nagid did not seek to implement his changes over the opposition of rival leaders, beyond the power of persuasion directed at the people. There is no mention of enactments or decrees, merely preaching and mild condemnation. Abraham's repeated reproach of opposing leaders for all but guaranteeing the failure of his reforms to take root in the community lends a certain air of authenticity, and ought, in my view, to be taken at face value.

Among the documents published by S. D. Goitein on the Nagid's reforms is a letter written by a supporter of the Palestinian rite, concerning an appeal to the Sultan accusing the Nagid of religious innovation.[40] A number of scholars have interpreted this letter as a critique of his structural changes to synagogue devotional practice, rather than noting its relevance to the liturgical controversies.[41] Yet the letter does shed important light on the question of how far Abraham was willing to encourage devotional practices in communal worship. In the letter, the Nagid was denounced to the Ayyubid authorities for introducing changes into the synagogues, a charge he openly denied. In a written report to the government, Abraham attested to the fact that he never compelled others to adopt his synagogue reforms: "I . . . do declare that I voluntarily undertake devotions to God and supplementary prayers with bowing and prostration and prayer in my house for myself (*fī baitī li-nafsī*). I do not compel anyone to do the same nor have I imposed any changes on the [community] in their synagogues."[42] To settle the matter, the Nagid and his immediate circle solicited "the entire community . . . close to two hundred people," to affirm his claim that he had never imposed his changes in the main synagogues, an assertion that most people readily agreed to be true and affixed their names in confirmation.

The author of the letter expressed outrage at what he considered the blatant lie perpetrated by the Nagid and confirmed by the unscrupulous people. He charged that "the writing of the report demonstrates a weakness and deficiency [of character]," adding that "as for everyone who wrote their confirmation, may

[39] Note his remarks on his general audience in the preceding passage, *SM*, 185.

[40] See TS Arabic Box 51.111, *recto*, ll. 8–26, published by S. D. Goitein, "New Documents from the Cairo Geniza," in *Homenaje a Millás Vallícrosa* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1954), I: 717, under the old shelf mark, Hirschfeld Boxes, I, XV, 111.

[41] On the ambiguity over the reference to the Nagid's synagogue innovations in the latter, see pp. 15–16.

[42] TS Arabic Box 51.111r, ll. 12–13, and see Goitein, "New Documents from the Cairo Geniza," 717.

their beards be shaven, for they bore false witness! I brought . . . proof and demonstration that he has made changes and modifications in our synagogues and imposed them on us."[43] In light of what we know of the Nagid's liturgical reforms, the accusation that the Nagid and his supporters were less than forthcoming to the Ayyubid authorities would seem quite justified. Yet, apart from the notable fact that some 200 local Jews gave their official confirmation to the Nagid's report, it is worth remembering that the precise claim made by the Nagid as to the private and non-coercive nature of his pietist worship was likewise true.

It appears that both parties in this dispute were right in their assertions, though in reference to different reforms. The controversy over the Palestinian rite, together with the other liturgical changes, constituted a clear imposition by the Nagid on the community. The pietist reforms, on the other hand, were a different matter altogether. There are no grounds to assume that Abraham Maimonides ever imposed these changes on the main synagogues. In his responsum to the query posed to him on pietist worship, with which we began this chapter, he correctly pointed out that, "since [the pietists] do these things in their homes (*be-vatehem hen 'osin*), whether in private or communal prayer . . . whoever finds [their practice] difficult should not join them and pray with them, thus avoiding any difficulty. The synagogue is available to them."[44]

The consensus of scholarly opinion has tended to read the letter on the denunciation of the Nagid to the Sultan as evidence that he did initially seek to impose his structural reforms in the main synagogues and was later rebuffed. Goitein, who published the letter, was the first to suggest that "it is . . . possible that in his younger days [Abraham] had been more high-handed" with the pietist reforms.[45] As I understand the controversies alluded to in this letter, Abraham's high-handedness can only be demonstrated in his liturgical, not his structural, reforms. Even before Goitein's publication of the document, Naphtali Wieder had already suggested that Abraham did at one point introduce the devotional rites in the main synagogues of Egypt,[46] although elsewhere he hinted at the possibility that contemporaries of the Nagid may have stymied his efforts to implement the reforms.[47]

A number of scholars have followed Wieder and especially Goitein. Gerson Cohen asserted that Abraham Maimonides and his colleague, Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī', "were responsible for introducing into Egyptian synagogues the liturgical reforms that were inspired by pietist motives," and that the community viewed this as "but one more innovation that a family of Andalusian interlopers had brought to, and forced upon, an old and proud Jewish

[43] Goitein, "New Documents from the Cairo Geniza," ll. 24–5.
[44] *Teshuvot*, 64, no. 62.
[45] See Goitein, "New Documents from the Cairo Geniza," 713.
[46] See Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 31 and 71.
[47] See Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 57.

community."[48] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh went a step further, suggesting that, under pressure from the Muslim authorities, "R. Abraham was compelled to apologize to the Muslim ruler and to announce that he did not intend to abuse his authority . . . by introducing such religious innovations."[49] In an essay on the practice of prostration as a backdrop to the Nagid's reforms, Y. T. Langermann adopted a similar view, arguing that "Abraham introduced into the synagogue kneeling, prostrations and other bodily postures," although he qualified this by saying that these changes enjoyed but a "brief, controversial, and ultimately unsuccessful re-entry" into general synagogue life.[50] Paul Fenton has interpreted the letter in a similar vein. Following Goitein's conjecture cited above, Fenton wrote that "it seems that at some point, perhaps in the early days of his office, the *nagid* had endeavored to enforce his practices upon other sections of the community," though with no success.[51]

The sources do attest to Abraham Maimonides' expectation that his synagogue reforms would eventually be accepted and stimulate a religious revival in the community as a whole. But there is no evidence to suggest that he took the next step and enforced them at any point. The contrast with his approach on the liturgical reforms is all the more evident when we consider that both sets of changes were undertaken during the same period, beginning in the first years of his headship. Consider his remarks at the end of a responsum on a private dispute between two community members: "[It is well known] that I devote much effort in the service of my God . . . with all my heart and with all my soul, performing many bowings and prostrations and similar things, the likes of which I do not conceal but have written about in my treatise. May it be [God's] will that you inquire of me regarding these noble matters!"[52] His appeal reflects a degree of helplessness in stimulating interest in his devotional changes, an interest that was not entirely forthcoming.

How then can we explain the Nagid's caution in this case, as opposed to his liturgical reforms? The question is all the more intriguing given his frequent use of the language of obligation when discussing the structural changes in the *Compendium.* His strategy in each case was to enumerate at great length not only the traditional precedent for the rites but their legal requirement, according to the "triple cord" of scripture, tradition, and reason. To be sure, this should be viewed in the context of the apologetic purpose of the work as a

[48] G. Cohen, "The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni," *PAAJR* 35 (1967–8), 76.

[49] H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Judeo-Arabic Culture," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book* (1977/8), 108.

[50] Y. T. Langermann, "From Private Devotion to Communal Prayer: New Light on Abraham Maimonides' Synagogue Reforms," *GQ* 1 (2005), 31 and 49.

[51] P. Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237): Founding a Mystical Dynasty," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, ed. M. Idel and M. Ostow (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 139.

[52] *Teshuvot*, 19, no. 4.

whole. But if the Nagid was sincere in describing their legal obligation, what constrained him from imposing them and engaging in a similar "controversy for the sake of heaven"? As it turns out, a close look at his language of obligation reveals a somewhat ambiguous relationship between law and pietism.

> Now since prostration is obligatory (*wājibah*), as required (*mutaʿayyanah*) by scripture, tradition, and reason—scripture according to what I have cited, tradition according to what I have explained, and [reason due to the fact] that prostration is the highest form of exertion in outer worship—it is incumbent upon us to clarify in what circumstance it is obligatory (*tajibu*)—or, if you prefer, imperative (*talzumu*) . . . [A]s for the circumstances in which it is imperative or obligatory or required (*talzumu au tajibu au tutaʿayyanu*), it is obligatory (*tajibu*) in three circumstances: that of glorification of His name, may He be exalted, that of acknowledgement and thanksgiving for His goodness, and that of supplication for His mercy.[53]

The passage begins, like most others of its type in the *Compendium*, with the scriptural and traditional basis for determining a given practice as obligatory. It concludes with an enumeration of the three circumstances in which the practice of prostration is obligatory. But it is the imprecise and hesitant language in between that is so striking. If the three terms he employed for legal obligation were purely synonymous, what would be the purpose of hesitating over which is the most accurate? Surely no wavering would be called for in the case of other religious duties, whose legal status is unquestioned. When we look at parallel passages of the Nagid's structural reforms, we find the same curious multiplication of terms. Thus we read a description of spreading out the hands in supplication as "among the preferred, obligatory, and commendable postures" (*al-auḍāʿ al-mukhtārah al-wājibah al-mustaḥabbah*).[54] Similarly, when describing the ritual ablution of hands and feet before prayer, he wrote that one who performs this rite "has fulfilled an obligation and has applied a commendable practice, which is close to being a duty" (*faʿala wājiban wa-ʿtamada mandūban yuqārib al-farḍ*).[55] As we saw earlier, the Nagid described his reforms in general with the combined expression of "obligatory and commendable practices" (*al-wājibāt wa'l-mandūbāt*).[56] Though these last two terms in English translation may pass for a merely rhetorical flourish, readers accustomed to the technical distinction between the two in Arabic legal literature will immediately detect the apparent oddity of the Nagid's formulation.[57]

[53] *SM*, 134. [54] See *SM*, 100. [55] *SM*, 158.
[56] See *SM*, 183 and 196 (in reverse).
[57] While *wājib* in Islamic *fiqh* refers to an absolute commandment, *mandūb* is the technical term for a praiseworthy, though not obligatory, act. Judaeo-Arabic halakhic writings, influenced by the Islamic environment (and perhaps also Islamic legal literature), maintain the same

Abraham applied the same language of obligation in each case, though it is clear that he did not consider every pietist reform to have the same legal status. While in some cases his words were chosen with great precision, others exhibit greater flexibility of usage, reflecting a uniquely pietist approach. In cases where there is a clear legal foundation, even if a qualified one (as in the case of prostration), his language of obligation drew on earlier formulations in the tradition, particularly those of his father. He introduced his chapters on the laws of prayer with a preface on the different degrees of obligation in Jewish law, with clear parallels to Islamic jurisprudence.

> Know that the word "obligation" (*al-wujūb*) in Arabic refers to an imperative (*al-luzūm*) and necessity (*al-ḍarūrah*), as is well known from the meaning of the language, and therefore the opposite of obligation is prohibition. [Obligation] can sometimes have a less absolute meaning, indicating something commendable but not necessary (*al-mandūb ilaihi al-ghair ḍarūrī*), as when it is said that a person ought (*yajibu*) to be generous or brave and the like. The word "obligatory" (*al-wājib*) used here refers both to the necessary (*al-ḍarūrī*) and the commendable (*al-mandūb ilaihi*). Of the duties of prayer included in our law, derived from scripture and tradition and synthesized and enumerated by my father and teacher . . . five are necessary obligations, without which one has not fulfilled one's obligation, and eight are commendable ones, which one is not permitted to transgress unless absolutely necessary. If one did not fulfill [the latter] due to negligence or laxity, one has still fulfilled the obligation of prayer and is not required to repeat it, even if one committed the transgression with intentional neglect . . . [58]

As Abraham's careful parsing of technical terms reveals, Jewish law recognizes two distinct meanings for the notion of religious obligation. The use of Islamic terminology, "obligatory" (*wājib*) versus recommended action (*mandūb ilaihi*), is evident here, though Jewish law views the two not as differing degrees of obligation. The distinction is not unique to prayer, but is a basic principle of talmudic law. In rabbinic parlance, the first category represents the principle of *'ikkuv*, a legal *sine qua non* without which one's obligation has not been fulfilled. The second category, on the other hand, refers to actions required though not essential to fulfilling one's obligation. As Abraham noted in the passage just cited, Maimonides listed five obligations of the first category[59] and eight in the second.[60] Maimonides' distinction is also reflected

distinction. Substantive comparative work on Islamic and Jewish law in the Near East has been undertaken of late by Gideon Libson (see the Bibliography).

[58] *SM*, 60.

[59] i.e. ablution of the hands, covering one's nakedness, cleanliness of the place of prayer, relieving oneself, and intention of the heart. See MT, "Laws of Prayer," ch. 4.

[60] i.e. standing, facing the sanctum, proper positioning of the body, proper clothing, proper place to stand in prayer, lowering one's voice, bowing from the waist, and prostration. See MT, "Laws of Prayer," ch. 5.

in his language as applied to the qualified obligations of the second type: "There are eight things which one ought (*ṣarikh*) to be careful to fulfill, but if he . . . did not do them, they do not render [the action] unfulfilled (*en me'akkevin*)."[61] The importance of this distinction is evident in the case of prostration. Though he frequently asserted the requirement to prostrate, Abraham included it, like his father, among the non-binding obligations: "As for anyone who does not fulfill any of these [occasions for prostration], due to laxity in concentration and an absence of [religious] zeal, it cannot be said that such a one has not fulfilled his obligation."[62]

In light of the foregoing, we are in a much better position to appreciate Abraham Maimonides' decision to come down forcefully on some customs while treading lightly on others. As we have seen, the Nagid viewed both the problematic liturgical rites and the contemporary observance of synagogue postures as faulty customs that took root over many years in exile.[63] He nevertheless distinguished between those customs that are essential for the fulfillment of the law and those that are desirable yet non-binding. While the obligation in each case was rooted in scriptural and rabbinic tradition, one required an uncompromising rejection while the other demanded vigorous persuasion but without enforcement. Paradoxically, Abraham Maimonides showed greater restraint in matters he considered the foundation of all religious life, while displaying the utmost zeal for the sake of less fundamental, yet legally binding, rites.[64] In his vision for communal revitalization, Abraham stopped short of provoking a direct confrontation with the public by implementing his changes in the face of local resistance. But this did not stop him from publicly promoting them to the general public, a course that brought him into conflict with rival scholars in Egypt. In a revealing passage, the Nagid encouraged his followers to approach the new rites as if they were as binding as any other law. Here again, one senses his palpable frustration over the opposition of rival leaders. "On account of those who have contempt for the truth and wish to turn people away from devoting themselves and increasing their effort (*ijtihād*) in the worship of their Creator, may His name be blessed, we ought to be especially zealous in its [fulfillment]. Even better, we ought to consider it a religious duty (*yunzal manzilat al-farḍ*)."[65]

[61] MT, "Laws of Prayer," 5:1. [62] *SM*, 139.

[63] For Abraham's insistence that contemporary practice is a result of the faulty customs of the exile, see *SM*, 130 and 161.

[64] See Abraham's remarks that his pietist reforms constituted obligations in and of themselves (i.e. worship, awe, and love) but were "like the foundation upon which the edifice stands firm," *SM*, 186.

[65] *SM*, 79. For an interesting parallel to the notion of pious obligations, see Baḥya, *al-Hidājah ilā Farā'iḍ al-Qulūb des Bachja ibn Jōsēf ibn Paqūda aus Andalusien*, ed. A. S. Yahuda (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1912), gate three, chapters 3 and 4.

JEWISH PRAYER IN AN ISLAMIC MODE

By far the most remarkable and intriguing element of the Nagid's prayer reforms was their unmistakably Islamic character. As already noted in the Introduction, the *religious* adaptation of Islamic rites, as opposed to the *literary* or *intellectual* adaptation of Arabic culture, was unprecedented on this scale. To be sure, traces of Islamic influence are well known in isolated cases before the Nagid's time. The first sustained effort to collect information on the impact of the Islamic environment on Jewish ritual, and to date still the most systematic treatment of the subject, was undertaken over sixty years ago by the late Naphtali Wieder, who detected at least two clear cases of cross-fertilization from as early as the Gaonic period.[66] Wieder looked at evidence from Iraq and Palestine in the Gaonic period and from Egypt, Palestine, and North Africa in the period leading up to Maimonides and his son. Yet Wieder clearly perceived the unique significance of the reforms to Jewish ritual that were the fruit of Egyptian pietism, singling out prostration, kneeling, facing the ark, the arrangement in orderly rows, and the spreading out of the hands as the primary innovations of the pietist movement.[67]

In light of the background analyzed by Wieder, it is clear that the case of Egyptian pietism is qualitatively different from those of Islamic influence in earlier periods. The most noteworthy case of Islamic influence from as early as the Gaonic period—that of ritual ablution of the feet before prayer—betrays no explicit acknowledgment from its early proponents of its association with Islamic worship. Its significance is to be found simply in the extent to which it mirrors, seemingly quite unconsciously, a dominant mode of worship in Islam.[68] A noticeable shift in scope, and more importantly in self-consciousness, sets the Egyptian pietist reforms apart from previous cases of Islamic influence. Unlike the earlier cases, the pietist rites were not only discontinuous with local custom, but reflect a conscious break with it, and therefore fully deserve their designation as full-fledged reforms to prevailing practice. The protestations of the pietists to the effect that the changes to synagogue ritual were not innovations but restorations of original Jewish rites in no way diminish the fact that they were, for all practical purposes, both novel and reformist at their core. Even as he insisted on their authenticity and antiquity, the Nagid acknowledged that such a massive change "appears to the

[66] See Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 10–25, for the evidence of Islamic influence on Jewish worship before the time of the Nagid. For reviews of Wieder, see G. Vajda, "Naphtali Wieder, *Hashpa'ot Islamiyot 'al ha-Pulhan ha-Yehudi, Islamic Influences on the Jewish Worship,*" *REJ* 108 (1948), 107–8, and, more recently, S. Goldman, "An Appraisal of Naphtali Wieder's *Islamic Influences on Jewish Worship* on the Fiftieth Anniversary of its Publication," *ME* 5 (1999), 11–16.

[67] See Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 47–82.

[68] See the discussion on ablutions in the following chapter.

deluded and ignorant as if it were a religious innovation."[69] Statements such as this attest to the degree to which the novelty and scope of the pietist reforms made a formidable impression on Jewish observers of the time.

In one key respect, Wieder's assessment of the pietist prayer rites has led to a degree of confusion as to the significance and scope of the reforms. In a section of his monograph entitled "Prayer and its Mystical Purpose," Wieder wrote: "The reforms that [Abraham Maimonides] introduced into prayer observance flow from his mystical perspective on the importance and purpose of prayer. In this respect, he was entirely under the influence of Sufism."[70] In what follows, he sought to connect the value attributed to prayer in Sufism with the new pietist emphasis on worship. Yet, in an attempt to illustrate his point, Wieder bypassed Sufi literature concerned with statutory prayer and pointed instead to the unique supererogatory prayers for which Sufi devotees were known.

> [The Sufis] went beyond the limitations of divine worship at fixed times during the day and instituted supererogatory prayers on a voluntary basis, in which a devotee converses with his God out of the depths of his heart. In particular, they developed a new form of worship, the rite of *dhikr*, which they would practice at any time, without a specific connection to location or time, and which constitutes to this day the primary observance of Sufi ascetics.[71]

On the surface, it would appear that Wieder was right to connect the additional devotions of the Sufis with the novel rites of the pietists. To be sure, both groups felt the need to supplement the prevailing norms, which in both cases failed to provide a sufficient outlet for religious fervor and pious devotion in their respective communities, by introducing new forms of divine worship into the traditional canon. But that is as far as the parallel goes. As we saw in the previous chapter, there is no direct evidence of a comparable *dhikr* service among the pietists, although there are tantalizing hints that something similar may have existed in all but name and content. To the contrary, supererogatory Sufi rites are not the best model with which to gauge the significance of the pietist prayer reforms, for at least two reasons. For one thing, we are concerned here not with supplementary and supererogatory rites, but with what were deemed to be obligatory postures accompanying the statutory prayers. The Nagid in no way judged these postures to be separate from the required rites associated with normative worship, but in fact fundamentally integral to them. Second, and most importantly for the purposes of comparison, the novel postures were not intended for pietist devotees alone, to justify a "mystical purpose" unsuited for the general community of worshipers, but as a common ritual for all alike. This is not to say that Wieder was wrong in associating the novel postures with pietism. As we

[69] See *SM*, 161. [70] Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 42.
[71] Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 42–3.

have seen more than once, the postures both originated among the pietists and, even years after they were first introduced, were exclusively adopted within pietist prayer circles, to the point of being denounced by leaders in the main synagogues. Yet pietist leaders, from the Nagid to Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī'a, envisioned the devotional postures as part and parcel of authentic Jewish prayer, without singling out one class of worshipers from another.

In the final analysis, a distinction must be made between the specific influence of Sufism, so central to the self-construction of Egyptian pietism, and the general impact of Islamic norms that have no particular mystical valence. It should be recalled that, unlike his predecessor Baḥya ibn Paquda, the Nagid was not averse to calling explicit attention to the Sufi inspiration for specific pietist rites, even as he asserted an original Jewish source from which the original Sufis ostensibly drew their practices. In the last chapter, we pointed to a number of cases in which newly incorporated pietist practices were unambiguously ascribed by the Nagid to Sufi models. If the paradigm for the prayer reforms were likewise attributed to a Sufi matrix, we would have expected the same testimony regarding their Sufi provenance as in the previous cases. Instead, we find a discussion regarding their similarity to general Islamic (rather than specifically Sufi) rites. Each of the prayer reforms, from prostration to sitting in rows, were familiar from the Islamic environment and were not specific to Sufism proper. As already noted, the rites associated with Sufism were included by the Nagid in the fourth part of the *Compendium*, exclusively devoted to pietist themes, whereas those associated with Islam in general were incorporated in the second part, concerning normative practices that were binding on all worshipers in common.

The question of Islamic influence weighed heavily on the Nagid, who exerted a good deal of effort in refuting the claims of his opponents that the reforms were little more than Islamic rites in Jewish guise. One of the introductions to the *Compendium* was a full-fledged definition of the prohibition on imitating gentile practices, which he was at pains to differentiate from his own initiatives.[72] In one case, he recalled the "spurious claim [of] one of those considered scholars in our time," who argued that the Nagid's proposed reforms were included in the prohibition "on account of the fact that the gentiles [do] thus in their prayers."[73] His primary response, discussed at length in Chapter 1, was a rhetorical argument based on a *reductio ad absurdum*: "This would result in the prohibition of fasting, charity, prayer, and numerous commandments, in so far as these are [also] practiced by the gentiles . . . "[74] An indication of how much weight the Nagid gave to these accusations can be observed in the fact that he returned to the question of gentile imitation in his

[72] See the reference in *SM*, 147.
[73] See *SM*, 148, and the opposition of another scholar on similar grounds, *SM*, 149.
[74] See *SM*, 153–4, and see my discussion on pp. 76–85.

responsum on the pietist prayer reforms, with which we began this chapter, despite the fact that the questioner in that case never raised this as a potential objection. His argument there was a condensed version of his primary rebuttal offered at length in the *Compendium*.

> If one should argue that this is prohibited on account of the fact that the Muslims[75] or the Karaites[76] pray in this manner, answer him as follows: The Christians pray in the direction of Jerusalem, yet we do not as a result prohibit praying in the direction of Jerusalem. The Muslims stand in prayer, just as we stand. They bow from the waist, just as we bow during [the blessings] "forefathers" and "thanksgiving."[77]

Rather than avoid the mere suggestion of Islamic imitation in his writings and communal work, the Nagid sought instead to bring it out of the shadows and into the full light of day. What might appear at first glance as an attempt to diffuse the accusations by all means possible should, quite to the contrary, be seen as a vigorous effort to reignite the conversation, by showing why it is not only not prohibited but occasionally even salutary to take a page out of the current handbook of Islamic worship. The reasoning is quite similar to the Nagid's argument in favor of adapting the ascetic regimen of the Sufis on the basis of its Jewish roots, which we examined in the previous chapter, and to his general observations on the paradoxical necessity of the Islamic matrix for the renewal of Jewish piety.

Abraham Maimonides, perhaps more than any other Jewish sage in the medieval Islamic Near East, including his father, conceded much spiritual merit to Islamic piety and practice, from which Jews could and should draw a valuable lesson. From the purity of its monotheism to the piety of its practitioners, Islam provided Judaism with a mirror of its former self. By arguing that the best of Islam ultimately derives from Jewish origins, Abraham positioned himself in a long tradition of cultural appropriation. In his sweeping study of what he calls the myth of Jewish origins, Abraham Melamed has noted numerous examples from the Middle Ages (and other periods before and after) in which Jewish scholars justified interest in matters of general culture—including everything from philosophy and poetry to science and mathematics—on the grounds that the non-Jewish wisdom was first attested by Jews or ought to be construed as ancient Jewish wisdom.[78] In his own way,

[75] Lit. gentiles (so in the rest of the passage).
[76] Lit. Sadducees. On Karaite prostration, see Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 49–50.
[77] *Teshuvot*, 64, no. 62.
[78] See A. Melamed, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Science and Philosophy* (Hebrew) (Haifa and Jerusalem: University of Haifa Press, Magnes Press, and Hebrew University Press, 2010), especially 94–157, although Melamed's book does not address the case of Abraham Maimonides or the Egyptian pietists in general. See also the earlier study by N. Roth, "The 'Theft of Philosophy' by the Greeks from the Jews," *Classical Folia* 32 (1978), 53–67.

Abraham likewise saw the latter-day virtues of Islam as vestiges of the original mother religion grafted onto foreign soil.

But, as with the larger debate over the adoption of Sufi rites, Abraham's polemic was two-pronged. Rather than merely emphasize the derivative status of Islam, he turned the polemic on his own community, chiding them for the extent to which the daughter religion surpassed her exemplar. After centuries of neglect of their native traditions, Judaism was now in a position of seeking its own inheritance from the hands of a foreign religion. This was not only the case with the pietist (or, as we shall see in Chapters five and six, prophetic) regimen, which he believed to have been adopted by the Sufis, but with the core belief in monotheism, fundamental to both religions. The Nagid noted, with not a little irony, that whereas the Jews "from the uttermost east to the uttermost west throughout the lands of Ishmael" are pure in their monotheistic belief, the same cannot be said of all Jews living under Christian rule, "for the faith of one [i.e. the Christians] is not unlike the faith of the other [i.e. Jews of Christian lands]."[79] As for Islam, "the children of Ishmael received this [monotheistic] faith from the children of Israel and built the foundation of their religion upon it . . ."[80] The unavoidable logic of the Nagid's intra-Jewish polemic is that the restoration of original Jewish traditions, whether the revival of the prophetic path or the purification of biblical monotheism, requires a certain embrace of Islamic faith and norms.[81]

The same positive gesture toward the Islamic environment, coupled with the internal polemic against current Jewish practice, is evident in the Nagid's remarks on the prayer reforms. In a passage on the correct way to perform prostration, Abraham contrasted the faulty custom prevalent among fellow Jews in his day with the pure (and, in his view, originally Jewish) form maintained by Muslims in worship. The allusion to an existing custom of Jewish prostration prior to the pietist reforms should come as no surprise, as a number of medieval sources attest to the practice of partial prostration performed during a portion of the liturgy following the statutory prayer (known as *nefilat apayim* or *nefilat panim*) among the Jews of the Islamic world. These sources, including his father in the *Mishneh Torah*, refer to the custom simply as "prostration" (*sujūd* in Arabic, *hishtaḥavayah* in Hebrew).[82] This practice, as it developed over the generations, required the worshipers to turn their head to one side, apparently so as not to touch one's bare head to the floor of the synagogue.[83]

[79] See *MH*, 51 and 55. [80] See *MH*, 51, and cf. *SM*, 85.

[81] For a discussion of Abraham's view of Islam, see my "Respectful Rival: Abraham Maimonides on Islam," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, ed. A. Meddeb and B. Stora (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 856–64.

[82] See, e.g., *Siddur Rav Se'adiah Gaon*, 39, 357, and Maimonides, MT, "Laws of Prayer," 5.13–14.

[83] The scruple in question had its source in the rabbinic prohibition on touching the ground with one's head in worship, known as *even maskit*, based on the verse in Lev. 26:1. See Sifra,

Abraham's criticism of the Jewish custom of prostration was twofold. For one thing, as we shall see when we look at his discussion of prostration, he considered this posture to be the form of bowing proper to the statutory prayer itself, though not exclusive to it. More importantly for our present concern, he opposed the manner in which the Jews turned their heads in the act of prostration, rather than bow directly to the ground. Here he invoked the potential criticism or even mockery directed at Jews by Muslims, who witness their half-prostration and deride it as "the prostration of the Jews" (*sujūd yisrael*). As he put it, the custom "has gotten to the point of being notorious among the Muslims as the prostration of the Jews and has become the butt of gossip . . . "[84] If the Jewish custom, in its current form, is unacceptable, the model for reform—or restoration—is to be found within the matrix of Islamic worship: "One who prostrates in this way does not spread one's limbs on the ground entirely, but folds in one's legs, with the hip against the thigh, like a kneeling [animal], while the remainder of one's body—stomach, chest, and head—are positioned against the ground."[85]

Abraham's concern for the image of Jewish worship in the eyes of neighboring Muslims may have been partly inspired by his father's example.[86] In his capacity as head of the rabbinic court in Fustat, Maimonides issued an ordinance (*taqqanah*) abolishing the silent recitation of the *'amidah* on sabbaths and festivals when large numbers were in attendance in the main synagogues.[87] As Maimonides wrote in one responsum, his change to the synagogue service was motivated by the casual talking and general disorder that ensued following the congregation's silent recitation and during the cantor's repetition.[88] In order to remove the opportunity for these disturbances, Maimonides ordained that all worshipers pray in tandem with the

"be-har," 9:5, and BT Megillah 22b, and see MT, "Laws of Idolatry," 6:6–8, and "Laws of Prayer," 5:14. On the rabbinic prohibition in the early rabbinic sources, see G. Blidstein, "Prostration and Mosaics in Talmudic Law," *BIJS* 2 (1974), 19–39. Abraham addressed the nature and extent of this prohibition in *SM*, 162–5; see also *HW*, II:42.

[84] *SM*, 145, and cf. *SM*, 142 and 170. As before, the word "Muslims" is a translation of *goyim* (lit. gentiles). Note also the Islamic tradition recorded in the name of Muḥammad that his followers avoid leaning to their left when sitting in prayer, a custom he called "the prayer of the Jews." See M. J. Kister, ed., "'Do not Assimilate Yourselves . . . ' *Lā tashabbahū* . . . ," *JSAI* 12 (1989), 331, and n. 37. Wieder speculated that this form of prostration in the Rabbanite synagogues first came to the attention of the Muslims on account of Karaite polemics. See Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 49.

[85] *SM*, 121–2. See also *SM*, 142, where the Nagid associated the improper form of prostration practiced at the time with "the customs of the exile" (*siyar al-galut*). On the concept of "exilic" prayer, see especially pp. 64, n. 85, 161, n. 13, and 175, n. 67.

[86] On Abraham Maimonides' efforts to enforce liturgical reforms his father had endorsed yet failed to implement, see E. Russ-Fishbane, "The Maimonidean Legacy in the East: A Study of Father and Son," *JQR* 102 (2012): 190–223.

[87] See Friedlander, "A New Responsum of Maimonides Concerning the Repetition of the *Shmoneh Esreh*," 1–15, and G. Blidstein, "Maimonides' *Taqqanah* concerning Public Prayer," *MS* 3 (1992–3), 3–28.

[88] See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, II:474–5, no. 256. The relevant responsa are undated.

cantor, so that only the latter's voice would be heard while those who knew the prayers would pray silently.

Even more interesting than the ordinance itself is Maimonides' argument in justification of the change: "In this way everything will be dignified and in proper order . . . and the desecration of God's name that has arisen among the Muslims, that the Jews spit, blow their noses, and converse in the midst of their prayer service, will be removed. This is what they witness in this matter."[89] On another occasion, Maimonides repeated this justification with language that recalls his son's words:

> When it comes to prohibitions of the Torah, we say, "It is time to act for the Lord; they have rendered void your Torah," and all the more so concerning the order of prayer. Another reason for this is to remove the desecration of God's name, in that people think of us that our prayer is a joke and a mockery and [merely] to fulfill people's [religious] obligations, something that is no secret.[90]

The reforms enacted by father and son were by no means identical, and not only for the reason noted by Abraham as to their degree of talmudic precedent. If Abraham sought to restore an ancient practice, Maimonides sought to remove one, although on the surface both may be perceived as uprooting customs that were firmly held for generations. Yet the similarities are remarkable, well beyond the simple act of reform. Fundamental to both leaders, at least in part, was the external motivation generated by the real or potential perception of Jewish worship by their Muslim neighbors. The language in each case suggests that their private fears of Muslim impressions were grounded in some measure of reality rather than a mere hypothetical reaction. Maimonides spoke of the desecration that "they witness" and that was "no secret," while Abraham, even more suggestively, alluded to the current Jewish practice that was "notorious among the Muslims" and had already become "the butt of gossip."

The preeminent concern for both father and son was the perceived lack of order in the Jewish synagogues, in contrast with the state of decorum prevalent

[89] *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, 484, no. 258. Once again, "Muslims" is the translation for *goyim*.

[90] *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, 475, no. 256. See also *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, 548, no. 291. It is interesting to note an early Islamic admonition to the faithful to avoid talking during prayers so as to avoid the improper conduct of Jews and Christians in their worship. See Kister, "'Do not Assimilate Yourselves . . . ,'" 334, and n. 45. It is worth wondering whether the "mockery" Maimonides heard of Jewish talking during prayer was a result of the observation of synagogue worship by Muslims or merely the repetition of this early tradition. For an interesting parallel to Maimonides' concern for the impression left by Jewish worship on Muslims, see the responsum of the fifteenth-century North African rabbi, Solomon b. Simeon Duran, on the taking off of shoes in the synagogue, translated by Menahem Kister in his appendix to M. J. Kister's article, 366.

in the mosques.[91] But behind the interesting question of Muslim perceptions of Jewish worship is the Jewish perception of the latter, both for the degree of cultural and religious intimacy that it suggests and the degree to which such perceptions mattered in the execution (and reform) of Jewish law and practice. As Gerald Blidstein wrote in his discussion of Maimonides' enactment, "the estimation of the impression conveyed to non-Jews concerning Jewish prayer is rooted at least in part in Maimonides' own perception of that impression."[92] At the heart of the changes to age-old custom, enacted by both father and son, was a palpable self-consciousness of the Islamic environment, both as a witness to Jewish worship and as a standard of decorum (in the case of Maimonides) and devotional posture (in the case of the Nagid) for the latter to emulate.

[91] Note especially Maimonides' language in *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, II:484, no. 258: "In this way everything will be dignified and in proper order" (*wa-yajrī al-amr ʿalā niẓām wa-istiqāmah*).

[92] See Blidstein, "Maimonides' *Taqqanah* concerning Public Prayer," 7, and n. 11 for other examples from Maimonides' responsa, in which there is a palpable concern for the non-Jewish perception of Jewish custom, framed in the language of the desecration of the divine name. On the importance of the halakhic argument of desecration (*ḥillul shem* or *ḥillul ha-shem*), see Blidstein, "Maimonides' *Taqqanah* concerning Public Prayer," 4–8.

4

Prayer Reforms

The reforms proposed by the Nagid and partly implemented in pietist circles were not invented whole cloth in the early thirteenth century. A number had some precedent in the customs of Jews throughout the medieval Islamic world, although the evidence for Egypt in particular is not always forthcoming. It would, however, be wrong to assume that they were all born from a desire to conform to Islamic worship, and the intersection of Jewish and Islamic customs is not always simple to detect. What is clear is that, taken as a whole, the modifications initiated by the Nagid represent the most thoroughgoing—and, as we have already observed, self-conscious—adaptation of Jewish worship to its Islamic environment. Equally alarming to opponents of the reforms was the sheer extent of the modifications enacted in a single gesture. In qualitative and quantitative terms, the prayer reforms have no direct parallel to any previous case of Islamicization in Jewish worship, nor were they viewed as such by either opponents or proponents. The number and extent of the reforms requires a certain degree of consolidation and categorization of the material. In what follows, the reforms are divided into four separate parts: preparations prior to prayer, and sitting, standing, and bowing within the prayer service itself. The overview provided here does not strive to be exhaustive, but should be viewed as representative of the prayer reforms and their overall significance to the religious revival envisioned by the Nagid and his supporters.

PREPARATIONS FOR PRAYER

In his laws of prayer, Maimonides included a well-known stipulation for concentration in the statutory prayer, so as to ensure that one does not pray "like one who carries a burden and then casts it off before going on his way." In order to avoid rote and mechanistic prayer, he added that one ought to focus one's mind for a period of time before and another period after prayer, just as "the early pietists would spend a fixed time before and a fixed time after

praying . . ."[1] Although Maimonides was drawing on an old tradition of pietist prayer, included in the Mishnah and discussed in both Talmuds, his inclusion of the principle raised it from a pious example to a legal standard for proper concentration in the context of prayer.[2]

In the context of his own laws of prayer in the *Compendium*, the Nagid carried his father's injunctions further, likewise explaining the example set by the early pietists as the legal framework stipulated by the sages, referencing in the course of his remarks a separate chapter earlier in his code on concentration (*kavvanah*) that unfortunately has not survived.[3] A contemporaneous treatise on prayer fills in the gaps for how Abraham and his disciples followed the example of the "early pietists." The anonymous author articulated the benefits of concentration as a kind of mental cleansing from the pervasive concerns of society, which consume a person's attention during the remainder of the day.

> The more a person becomes occupied and absorbed with the world and takes an active interest in other people's business, listening to their conversations and doings, engaging in their activities, the soul necessarily grows dim and those faculties critical to the attainment of its perfection grow weak. Among the benefits of prayer is that the mind ceases to be attached to those distractions and one's thoughts are purified of all dross, so that a person is able to attain mental focus and equilibrium. It is for this very purpose that the [sages] said, "The early pietists would spend a fixed time before prayer." See how much the [sages], of blessed memory, extolled the advantages of this fixed time! It is [a time] devoted to emptying one's mind and thoughts and to removing all distracting sounds and noxious sights that come from a preoccupation with the doings of society and that lie hidden in the recesses of one's heart.[4]

Although neither this treatise nor the extant material of the Nagid attests to such a ritual explicitly, one must assume based on these passages that the Egyptian pietists encouraged devoting a set time before the formal beginning of prayer for mental concentration. This type of meditative cleansing, as it is described in the passage, was a more concentrated version of the solitary meditation practiced by the pietists and described in the previous chapter. As with the solitary retreat (*khalwah*), the preparatory time prior to prayer was designed to purify one's attachments to worldly distractions and preoccupations, allowing the worshiper to reap the benefits of genuine prayer, which was

[1] See MT, "Laws of Prayer," 4:16, and cf. G. Blidstein, *Prayer in Maimonidean Halakha* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1994), 78–9.

[2] The primary sources for Maimonides' ruling include M Berakhot 5:1 and BT Berakhot 32b. See also PT Berakhot 5:1.

[3] See *SM*, 63, in which he referred twice to his chapter on concentration (*faṣl al-kavvanah*).

[4] II Firk. I.1040, folios 5–6, published by P. Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer and the Spiritual Quest from the Pietist Circle," *JSAI* 16 (1993), 152.

described as an island of inner retreat from the comings and goings of mundane living and the demands of social intercourse.

The language of the anonymous pietist treatise on prayer cited above, which speaks of a dimming of the soul when immersed in worldly pursuits, is reminiscent of the description of prayer found in the *Kuzari* of Judah Halevi, which depicts it as the one time when the soul is completely free of mundane matters and exclusively devoted to the spiritual world. "The longer the soul is removed from the time of prayer, the more it grows dim (*al-nafs tatakaddara*), as a result of the preoccupation with worldly matters . . . During prayer, a person purifies one's soul from all that came over it and prepares it for the future."[5] For both writers, contact with the world dims the inner light of the soul, which can be periodically cleansed through the purifying balm of prayer. The critical difference for the pietist author is that, for the genuine benefits of prayer to bear fruit, the worshiper must undergo a preparatory period of mental cleansing and detachment from social endeavors before entering the domain of worship.

Apart from designating fixed times for readying the soul for the moment of prayer, we hear of a greater insistence on other forms of preparation connected with the body. As is well known, Islamic worship consists of an extensive process of bodily ablution before each prayer (unless the worshiper remained in a state of ritual purity, *wuḍū'*, since the previous prayer). According to contemporaneous Islamic practice, the required ablutions include a thorough cleansing of parts of the face and extremities.[6] In a suggestive passage in his *Compendium*, Abraham Maimonides hinted that there may have been certain pietists who performed these additional ablutions, although without his blessing. "Whoever washes his arm[s] and obliges himself to wash behind his ear[s] and to rinse the hair on his head with water and to breathe water up his nose before prayer, out of imitation of Muslims, ought to be stopped and forbidden from doing so, because it is not a Jewish custom, whether written or oral."[7] As noted in Chapter one, the Nagid did not consider these Jewish ablutions a technical violation of the prohibition of imitating idolatrous practices, for the simple (though noteworthy) reason that he did not consider Islam to be an

[5] See Halevi, *Kuzari*, III.5, in *Kitāb al-radd wa'l-dalīl fī'l-dīn al-dhalīl*, ed. D. Z. Baneth (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 94. Diana Lobel has described this passage as part of Halevi's strategy to invest the performance of commandments, and not merely the isolated individual ecstasy of the Sufis or the disembodied union of the philosophers, with spiritual moment. See D. Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's* Kuzari (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 160–1.

[6] See Ghazālī, *Iḥyā 'ulūm al-dīn* (n.e.) (Cairo, 2009), I:177–81, and especially the spiritualization of these rituals in Suhrawardī, *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, A. Maḥmūd and M. Ibn al-Sharīf (Cairo: Maktabat al-Īmān, 2005), 320–6.

[7] *SM*, 158.

idolatrous religion.[8] Yet the Nagid's criticism reflects a tension within pietist ranks over the degree of acceptable accommodations to Islamic models of religious practice.

Another key ablution, which was embraced by the Nagid and incorporated among the standard preparations for prayer, was the ritual washing of the feet, requiring the removal of shoes before entering a synagogue or alternate prayer space. As Naphtali Wieder observed over sixty years ago, the Nagid's reform drew on earlier precedent from Jewish practice in the Islamic world, partially endorsed by his father.[9] In his laws of prayer, after recording the practice of purifying the hands before prayer, Maimonides added an explanatory note: "Under what circumstances is one only obligated to purify one's hands? For all prayers other than the morning prayer, whereas in the morning one must first wash one's face, hands, and feet and then begin to pray."[10]

The oddity of the requirement to wash one's feet and face for prayer in addition to one's hands is attested by the quizzical comment of R. Abraham b. David (Rabad) of Posquières (d. 1198) to Maimonides' code, in which he simply wrote: "I do not know why the feet." What was surprising about Maimonides' requirement was not so much the details as the context. The Babylonian Talmud includes a tradition requiring or encouraging a person to "wash one's face, hands, and feet every day in honor of his Creator," but there is no indication that this washing was understood as a preparation or prerequisite for prayer, prompting Rabad's skeptical response.[11] As Wieder showed with examples from Gaonic and later literature, Maimonides appears to have drawn his requirement for more extensive washing before prayer from the prevailing custom of the Jews of the Islamic world, providing it with a more firm foundation in talmudic tradition.[12]

If Maimonides applied the talmudic injunction to wash every morning to the context of prayer, the Nagid extended his father's novel ruling one step further. Central to Abraham's theology of worship is the premise that synagogues serve as a substitute for the Temple and prayer for the sacrifices. As he articulated this principle on one occasion, "For us who live in the exile, the synagogue *is* the temple that remains for us."[13] As we saw earlier in this chapter, Abraham elsewhere expressed a similar idea in his chastisement of

[8] For the Nagid's view of Islam, see my "Respectful Rival: Abraham Maimonides on Islam," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, ed. A. Meddeb and B. Stora (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 856–64, and see the Introduction.

[9] See N. Wieder, *Islamic Influences of the Jewish Worship* (Hebrew) (Oxford: East and West, 1947), 10–22.

[10] MT, "Laws of Prayer," 4:3.

[11] See BT Shabbat 50b.

[12] See the sources provided by Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 11–13.

[13] See *SM*, 109 (emphasis added). See also *SM*, 111–12, where he again laments that the synagogue is all that remains after the fall of the Temple, yet "our eyes have been blinded from the travails of the exile, to the point at which we have added to the [divine] wrath against us by our own doing, by neglecting these remnants [i.e. the synagogues] that remain to us."

the people for their lethargy in religious worship: "The Temple is destroyed on account of our sins. Sacrifice and all that is connected with it is no longer available to us. All that remains is prayer and similar [devotions], yet no one gives them any heed."[14] But it is one thing to draw a parallel between the sanctuary of old and the exilic sanctuaries of latter-day synagogues, and another matter altogether to rewrite synagogue ritual on that basis. Applying this paradigm to the preparatory ablutions before prayer, the Nagid emphasized the importance of washing the feet and its foundation in Jewish law, while conceding that its level of obligation is not equal to that for washing the feet.

> While the purification of the hands is an essential requirement, without which one has not fulfilled one's obligation, it is preferred and recommended to wash one's hands and feet together, not only during the morning prayer, but for each and every prayer. For "the prayers were established on the model of the sacrifices" (BT Berakhot 26b). Prayer occupies the place of sacrifice, and the Torah states, "You shall make a bronze basin . . . and [Aaron and his sons] shall wash [their hands and feet from it]" (Ex. 30:18–19) . . . One is obligated to practice washing of hands and feet before each prayer and ought not to neglect it unless absolutely necessary. If a proof [for the position of my opponents] may be adduced from the words of David, "Let me wash my hands in cleanliness [and circle Your alter, O Lord]" (Ps. 26:6), a proof may also be brought from the words of the Torah, "They shall wash their hands and feet" (Ex. 30:21). In this way, there is a similarity to the service of the Temple . . . [15]

The argument adduced by the Nagid for the washing of the feet reflects his novel approach to the assimilation of Islamic modes of worship to the Jewish tradition. Unlike the ablution of the arms, nose, or hair, for which no justification could be found apart from the imitation of gentile rites, Abraham did find an authoritative source for the washing of the feet in the Jewish tradition, but in a rather unexpected place. He did allude to the talmudic source utilized by his father, although he carefully omitted any reference to washing of the face, emphasizing instead the hands and feet. He likewise extended the injunction to wash the feet to include every prayer, again departing from his father's precedent, which explicitly limited the practice to the morning.[16]

Even more interesting, and characteristic of his approach in general, was his appeal to biblical precedent by drawing a parallel to the priestly service in the Temple. The Nagid used the model of priesthood on other occasions, but this is the only example in which worshipers were compared to priests for the purposes of adopting rites allocated to them in the context of the ancient

[14] *SM*, 184. [15] See *SM*, 69–70, and cf. *SM*, 61.

[16] See, however, *SM*, 70, where the Nagid did refer to the talmudic parameters, but as a minimum and not as a maximum, and without adducing any particular significance to the washing of the face.

sanctuary.[17] The use of priestly precedent in this context reflects the lengths to which Abraham Maimonides was willing to go in order to provide an authentic Jewish foundation to rites that were absent from current Jewish practice yet characteristic of the immediate Islamic environment.

Part and parcel with the ritual purification of the feet was the understanding that prayer, according to this model, was to be performed without shoes. Whereas Maimonides made the wearing of shoes conditional on the local custom to wear footwear in the presence of honored individuals, the Nagid viewed the prevalent custom of wearing shoes not as the optimal practice, but as a concession to necessity.[18] The sages "only permitted [the wearing of shoes]," he contested, "when absolutely necessary, not that a person may enter the synagogue with shoes that have dirt or filth on the bottom."[19] Rather than relegate the matter solely to a difference in local custom, the Nagid dismissed what he viewed as the permissive stance of the sages (and, by extension, the current practice) as a last resort in extreme circumstances, reserving his own reform as the normative and optimal practice under normal conditions.

It is interesting to note that Maimonides described the custom of "all Jews who live in Sepharad and the Maghreb, in Shinʿar [Iraq] and the Land of Israel . . . to place rugs to sit on [in their synagogues], while in the cities in Edom [Christendom], they sit on chairs."[20] Abraham also wrote of the custom of placing rugs in the synagogues, and even using mats when praying privately at home, but nowhere is this connected directly with praying without shoes.[21] While the custom of praying barefoot is attested among the early Jews of Arabia, perhaps even influencing early Islamic worship, the reform introduced by the Nagid must be seen as part of an independent effort to revive ancient devotional forms, whose roots theoretically originated in ancient Jewish tradition but which were in practice attested only in the religious matrix of the neighboring environment.[22]

SITTING

At the heart of Abraham Maimonides' prayer reforms was a concern to recapture the solemnity and ceremonialism of authentic prayer. As we shall see in greater detail toward the end of the chapter, the outer forms of prayer

[17] See *SM*, 112–13 and 152–3, and cf. MT, "Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee," 13:13.
[18] For Maimonides' ruling, see MT, "Laws of Prayer," 5:5.
[19] See *SM*, 110.
[20] See MT, "Laws of Prayer," 11:5.
[21] See *SM*, 106 and 113 respectively.
[22] The Arabian Jewish custom and the early and later Islamic reactions to it are discussed in M. J. Kister, ed., "'Do Not Assimilate Yourselves . . .' *Lā tashabbahū* . . .," *JSAI* 12 (1989), 335–49.

were understood, in some cases, to mirror the inner disposition of the worshiper, and in others were thought to induce such a disposition. The formal aspect of prayer was considered a vehicle for inner experience and its restoration was deemed vital to a renewal of religious life. An outgrowth of this attention to formalism in the thought of the Nagid, and reflected in pietist practice, was a renewed emphasis on the proper postures associated with genuine worship. The first set of devotional postures, to which we turn now, consists of various modes of sitting in a manner fitting worship. As it turns out, the simple act of sitting for prayer and the concomitant seating arrangement of worshipers in the synagogue became a source of great contention in Egypt, fueled entirely by the Nagid's polemical reforms. While he never formally imposed these modifications, his proposals for synagogue reform became the occasion for profound and politically contentious divisions in the Egyptian Jewish establishment.

In the query addressed to Abraham Maimonides, with which we began this chapter, it is evident that among the most striking features of pietist worship was, quite literally, its rearrangement of the traditional seating structure common to the Jews of the medieval Islamic world (and which, in large measure, has continued unchanged down to the present day in Sephardic, Middle Eastern, and North African communities). As Abraham described it, the prevalent custom was for worshipers to arrange benches and pillows around the walls of the synagogue and to sit such that everyone faced everyone else, including the elders of the congregation, who sat with their backs to the ark and their faces toward the worshipers.[23] As we noted earlier in this chapter, Abraham confessed to having sat with the elders in this manner at the beginning of his period of headship, "before God removed the veil from before my eyes, leading me to repent to Him for this and similar [errors]."[24] By contrast, we are informed by the author of the query, when the pietists pray in their private prayer circles, "they sit for the 'hymns of praise' and for the blessings of the recitation of *shema'* in fear and awe, their faces toward the sanctum, which is in the direction of the land of Israel and Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord . . . taking it upon themselves to sit in the same way in which they stand for the prayer [toward Jerusalem]."[25] That is to say, they did not sit around the walls facing one another, but in rows facing the ark, in the direction of the Jerusalem Temple, much as it was the custom for both pietists and non-pietists to face Jerusalem during the standing statutory prayer.[26] While the Nagid used the classical Hebrew term for sanctum (*qodesh*) to

[23] See *SM*, 98. This description is somewhat different from that already observed in his father's code, "Laws of Prayer," 11:5, although the two need not be taken as mutually exclusive, but perhaps as complementary accounts.

[24] See *SM*, 98. [25] *Teshuvot*, 62, no. 62.

[26] On the obligation to face the Temple for the standing prayer, see BT Berakhot 30a and MT, "Laws of Prayer," 5:3. The primary argument made by one of the Nagid's opponents in favor of

refer to the direction of prayer, he frequently employed the technical Arabic term (*qiblah*) to designate the same. The natural and frequent use of the word suggests that it was deemed a neutral (and perhaps colloquial) term—a clear mark of the Islamic environment yet devoid of any exclusively Islamic connotation in this case.[27]

In his response to the query on the pietist prayer reforms, the Nagid provided a condensed version of the justification for the change that he offered in the *Compendium*. The key source cited by the Nagid in both cases was the following *baraita* in the Tosefta on the proper arrangement of worshipers in the synagogue: "How do the elders sit? [They sit] with their faces facing the people and their backs facing the *sanctum* . . . And the entire congregation faces the *sanctum*."[28] While the *baraita* does not specify precisely how the congregation of worshipers is to be (or was) arranged vis-à-vis the elders, Maimonides inferred this from the fact that the *baraita* describes the elders as facing the congregation and the latter facing the *sanctum*. In his remarks on synagogue arrangement in his code, he added the following coda to the words of the Tosefta: "And the entire congregation sits in rows, each row behind the row in front of it, such that the entire congregation faces the *sanctum*, the elders, and the ark."[29] Maimonides' addition as to the congregation sitting in rows need not be taken as an indication that he intended to reform the prevailing practice in his day, nor does this arrangement appear anywhere else in his writings or responsa, but merely as an interpretive interpolation of the original tradition.[30]

the current custom was that the sages only obligated worshipers to face this direction for the standing prayer and not for the entire worship service. See *SM*, 96.

[27] For the Nagid's explanation of the term (alone and in the fuller form, *istiqbāl al-qiblah*), see *SM*, 91–2, and see 96. For the more general use of this term in Judaeo-Arabic literature, including that of Abraham's father and grandfather, see Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 68, n. 300, and J. Blau, *A Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 526 s.v. For a discussion of *qiblah* as the direction of prayer in Islam and its influence on medieval Jews, both Rabbanites and Karaites, see S. Shtober, "The Qiblah between Islam and Judaism: From Polemic to Absorption and Assimilation" (Hebrew), in *Masoret ve-shinui ba-tarbut ha-ʿaravit ha-yehudit shel yeme ha-benayim*, ed. J. Blau and D. Doron (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 227–42. On the direction of prayer in classical rabbinic literature, see U. Ehrlich, *Non-Verbal Language of Jewish Prayer* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999), 64–96.

[28] This is the version of T Megillah 3:21 cited by Abraham and by his father. See *Teshuvot*, 63, no. 62, and *SM*, 95. As Friedman noted in his discussion of this reform, however, all other versions of the Tosefta read "How would the elders sit" (*keṣad hayu zeqenim yoshvin*). See *Tosefta ki-feshuṭah*, ed. Lieberman, "Moʿed," 360, and see M. A. Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven: Studies on the Liturgical Debate of Abraham Maimonides and his Generation" (Hebrew), *Teʿudah* 10 (1996), 277, n. 133. Friedman correctly observed that the textual difference has practical implications as to whether to read the *baraita* as legally normative or merely historically descriptive.

[29] MT, "Laws of Prayer," 11:4.

[30] See also Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 69–70, Blidstein, *Prayer in Maimonidean Halakha*, 212–15, and Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," 277–9.

In his own discussion of the proper seating arrangement in the synagogue, the Nagid drew directly on his father's interpolation, which he described as an "explanation" (*tabyīn*), a "clarification" (*taṣrīḥ*), and an "elucidation" (*sharḥ*) of the Tosefta, adding, "I do not believe that another interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of this is possible."[31] If the Nagid was adamant that his father's addition was not only a mere interpretation, but the only possible interpretation, it is for a very simple reason. To justify his own reforms in the eyes of his contemporaries, and especially his fellow scholars, the authenticating source could not merely be his father's code, a recent (and, as we saw in Chapter three, somewhat controversial) composition in the field of Jewish law, but one of the foundational texts of the rabbinic tradition, on which no legitimate doubts or aspersions could be cast by his opponents. He made no secret of the opposition to his reform in his *Compendium*, although he could now dismiss these opponents as committing "a transgression against the language of the *baraita*," and acting "not in accordance with the words of the sages."[32] Having all but established the bona fide credentials of his reform, Abraham accused his opponents (and, by implication, the entire community apart from his coterie of followers) of "sitting in the manner in which people sit down for a conversation one with the other, not sitting in a way that is fitting for one to speak in the presence of his Creator."[33]

The latter remark exposes the fact that the Nagid's polemic was not so much about restoring an ancient *baraita* to its proper place, as rehabilitating the dignity and decorum of the synagogue. The formal character of the worship was a reflection of its spiritual content, with the implication that one could not be reformed without the other. In this case, the haphazard and disorderly seating arrangement in the synagogues was more conducive to a casual conversation than a meeting with the divine. As a result, Abraham's insistence on sitting in rows during the entire prayer service was not merely directed at the congregation as such, but also at their leaders, the "elders" in the language of the Tosefta, who justified their practice of facing the congregation on the very *baraita* used by the Nagid in defense of his reform.

In keeping with his effort to provide an authoritative, if unconventional, interpretation of the *baraita*, Abraham explained that, according to the Tosefta, congregational elders were permitted, though by no means required, to face the worshipers and turn their backs to the ark. The reason for the Tosefta's concession to the ideal arrangement, he argued, was the expectation that beholding the faces of the elders would induce greater reverence among

[31] See *SM*, 96–7.

[32] See *SM*, 96, and *Teshuvot*, 63, no. 62, respectively. See also his remarks in *SM*, 99, to the effect that "the current customs are haphazardly arranged."

[33] See *SM*, 96. The Nagid earlier decried the lack of decorum in the synagogues as a result of not sitting facing Jerusalem, *SM*, 94.

the worshipers. In their own day, given that the elders are no longer models of piety, but "display arrogance in the way in which they sit in the synagogue, sitting upon elevated seats and reclining on cushions, sometimes even in the *hekhal* itself,"[34] the concession granted to the elders, he argued, no longer applied. After a brief period during his early time as Nagid, in which he, too, sat facing away from the ark, Abraham came to the conclusion that the entire arrangement, for elders and lay worshipers alike, required reform from its current laxity.[35] "Under these circumstances," he attested, "I myself and Rabbi Abraham the Pious, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing, established our custom, along with those who followed our example."[36]

If the customary seating arrangement was to be reconstituted from an informal arrangement of worshipers along the walls of the synagogue to a solemn pattern of orderly rows, the physical form of seating for each worshiper was itself refined to reflect the ideal mode of sitting "in the presence of his Creator."[37] As we shall see toward the end of this chapter, the physical posture for prayer was, with few exceptions, considered integral to the experience of worship itself. One who exhibits the proper posture for sitting was said to perform "a sitting conducive to worship" (*julūs ta'abbud*) or "a devotional sitting" (*al-julūs al-ta'abbudī*).[38] Worship should not be performed "sitting while leaning against the wall . . . or sitting like someone relaxing at home or in a private space among friends and family, but . . . 'like a servant before one's master' (BT Shabbat 10a)."[39] Two practical conclusions were drawn from the ideal of sitting in the divine presence. The first was the importance of facing one's master in supplication, which in the case of prayer includes facing the direction of Jerusalem.[40] The second, addressed by the Nagid in the context of maintaining proper "bodily posture" (*waḍ' al-badan*), was the way in which the worshiper ought to sit while facing Jerusalem.

> In this manner, the person sitting ought to sit during worship in the manner in which a servant would sit properly disposed (*muta'addib*) in the presence of his master, when the latter grants him permission to sit. This was the manner in

[34] See *SM*. For an elucidation of the *hekhal* in the synagogue architecture of medieval Egypt, see Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," 284–6. For other examples of the Nagid's critique of the behavior of the elders in the synagogues, see *SM*, 183, and *HW*, II:74, ll. 3–7, and 408, l. 1 to 410, l. 8.

[35] See *SM*, 81 and 98, and compare his remarks regarding the custom "in which I was raised" to sit without facing the *qiblah*, *SM*, 91–2. It is interesting to note the early Palestinian custom for congregational elders to face the ark like the other worshipers, in contrast to the Iraqi custom that followed the arrangement described in the Tosefta. See *Ha-Ḥilluqim she-ben anshe mizraḥ u-vene ereṣ yisra'el*, ed. Margaliot, 86. I know of no source testifying to the continuity of this custom in the Palestinian synagogues in Egypt.

[36] *SM*, 98.

[37] See *SM*, 96, cited above.

[38] See *SM*, 128, and 99, respectively.

[39] See *SM*, 99.

[40] See *SM*, 94.

> which the prophets would sit during their supplications and prayers, as it is attested in the case of Solomon and Daniel, who used to sit kneeling on their knees. This is the duty one should strive to uphold, or something resembling it if one is unable to maintain this posture for a long time or [at all] due to a natural or acquired handicap.[41]

The kneeling posture instituted by the Nagid and adopted by his pietist disciples, coupled with the orderly arrangement of worshipers in rows, would have given every impression to his contemporaries of being a foreign import from the immediate Islamic environment. But Abraham's extensive justification of his changes was only partly concerned with the accusations of imitating gentile worship. The bulk of his explanation involved a lengthy examination of the native Jewish sources that ostensibly require kneeling and arrangement in rows. The Nagid's appeal to traditional sources in this instance was typical of other cases, in that his novel approach in general required a novel reading of the sources. We have already seen his insistence that the reading of the Tosefta provided in his father's code was the only conceivable interpretation for this text. But his reliance on novel interpretations was equally—if not more vividly—manifest in the case of kneeling. Here his only sources for the Jewish tradition of kneeling in prayer were biblical, drawing repeatedly on the personal prayers of Solomon and Daniel as witnesses of this gesture in ancient Jewish worship.[42]

As he acknowledged elsewhere, where there is no rabbinic injunction prescribing or prohibiting, one must infer logically from the available information on ancient practice known from the biblical tradition.[43] With no explicit rabbinic tradition or continuous Jewish custom from which to draw support, Abraham Maimonides constructed a novel interpretation of the biblical verses as authoritative and binding models for the original posture of kneeling practiced by the prophets (and presumably the people) before it was corrupted and ultimately forgotten over the course of the exile. As with the other postures, restoring the pre-exilic forms of prayer was to be part and parcel of the religious revival necessary for bringing an end to the long exile and inaugurating the ultimate redemption.

[41] *SM*, 99–100

[42] See I Kings 8:54 and Dan. 6:11, cited a number of times by the Nagid in support of this reform. See *SM*, 95, 100, 118, 120, 121, 129, 130.

[43] On the importance of rational judgment in the Nagid's reforms, for which there is no precedent in rabbinic tradition, see his remarks in *SM*, 182: "[A]s for those matters which [the sages] did not prohibit nor recommend, they remain in whatever form logic attributes to them with the support of scripture, tradition, and the principles of logic, whether in requiring them or forbidding them."

STANDING

A similar argument was advanced by the pietists in favor of standing in orderly rows for the standing statutory prayer that we have already seen in the case of sitting. The rationale behind the effort to restructure the seating arrangement in the synagogues, as noted in the previous section, was two-pronged. It involved, first and foremost, a reinterpretation of the early tradition on synagogue arrangement in the Tosefta, but it also involved a logical deduction of the proper orientation in prayer based on the classical rabbinic conception of prayer as standing in the divine presence, in this case requiring the worshiper to face the Temple in Jerusalem.[44] As the Nagid alluded in his polemical remarks against his opponents, one local scholar dismissed this orientation for all prayers apart from the standing statutory prayer, which both sides in the dispute agreed was to be performed facing Jerusalem, as if in the presence of God. But if the anonymous scholar, and the prevalent custom to which he gave voice, required worshipers to face the same direction during the standing prayer, it did not demand their arrangement in orderly rows, permitting them to stand up from any point in the synagogue where they had previously been sitting. The new arrangement advanced by the Nagid and his fellow pietists required the same formal division into rows for the entire service, whether sitting on the knees or standing for set prayers.

As with the rationale for the change in seating arrangement, Abraham Maimonides justified his requirement to stand in orderly rows on the basis of a rather obscure rabbinic source. Unlike in the previous case, however, he could not rely on his father's interpretive precedent, yet he sought in similar fashion to portray his unconventional exegesis as both exclusive and normative. The text in question was taken from the Mishnah, from the unlikely tractate of Avot, an atypical source for determining legal procedure of any kind. It is derived from a unit delineating the ten miracles which befell the people during the days of the Temple. The eighth item on the list reads as follows: "They would stand close together (*'omdim ṣefufim*), yet they had sufficient room in which to prostrate."[45] The original meaning of this passage seems rather straightforward, although the use of the form *ṣafuf* is unique in early rabbinic literature.[46] It is, however, quite certain that the Mishnah was not concerned with establishing normative law, nor was it a descriptive account of the manner in which the people would stand in the Temple court. In the Nagid's reading, on the other hand, what appears at first glance as a miraculous tradition on Temple days is reread as an indicator of proper worship.

[44] Although this idea is implicit in a variety of talmudic sources, it is formulated most clearly by Maimonides, MT, "Laws of Prayer," 4:16.

[45] M. Avot 5:5.

[46] The form is unique to the tannaitic material and does not appear (apart from citations in this mishnah) in pre-medieval rabbinic collections.

> The entire people, individuals and communities alike, have the custom of standing for the [statutory] prayer. They do not violate [this custom], even though the arrangement in which they stand has become muddled, as they stand in no particular order, with people coming in and going out. This is not in accordance with the ancient Jewish practice described in the Mishnah: "They would stand *ṣefufin*[47] . . . " This is the required arrangement, while the other one [i.e. the prevailing practice] is a faulty custom which ought to be restored to its required form.[48]

If one were not paying careful attention to the Nagid's application of the text, one would hardly think twice of its use in this context. The Mishnah was given in its barest form, without additional clarification as to its application or meaning. Unexpectedly, however, the Nagid achieved much the same goal in his use of this source from the Mishnah as in his earlier citation of the Tosefta, although by an entirely different means. Rather than insisting on a given interpretation of the passage, as in the previous case, Abraham merely alluded to the intended meaning of the Mishnah, leaving one to piece together how it serves as a prooftext for his understanding of the required ritual. If one were to read the word *ṣefufim* in this Mishnah along the lines of our translation above ("close together"), its application in this passage would be incomprehensible. But, as Naphtali Wieder first demonstrated in his study of the Islamic background to these reforms, Abraham Maimonides read the word *ṣafuf* not as "compact" (as variations of the root *ṣafaf* were universally applied in classical rabbinic literature), but in light of the Arabic word *ṣufūf* (sing. *ṣaff*), meaning "rows."[49] With this reading of the word, Abraham's application of the Mishnah in Avot comes into clearer focus. In contrast to the haphazard configuration of worshipers in his day, the traditional arrangement in the Temple was thus understood to be designated in orderly rows, an arrangement that allowed everyone present sufficient room to prostrate in the course of their worship.

It is tempting to read the Nagid's omission of any clarifying clause proving the validity of his interpretation as an implicit acknowledgment of the questionable nature of his Arabic rendering of the Hebrew word. If he were to invoke the Arabic etymology, one would imagine that it could have undermined his own efforts at reaching his coreligionists. Paradoxically, the opposite is more likely to have been the case. Abraham Maimonides' reading was far from the exception among medieval Jewish writers and grammarians, in particular, but not exclusively, those writing within an Arab milieu.[50] It is

[47] The word is left untranslated, as the Nagid's interpretation is not identical with the current accepted translation of the term.

[48] *SM*, 73, and see *SM*, 148.

[49] See Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 75–7. For rabbinic uses of this root in the meaning of "compact," see Wieder, *Islamic Influences*, 77, n. 336.

[50] See Wieder's references, *Islamic Influences*, 76.

quite likely that Abraham did not explain his reading of the Mishnah because it was the commonly accepted reading prevalent in his day. The novelty of his citation was therefore not so much in his interpretation as in his application of the passage. Building on a common conception of what Jewish worship looked like in the Temple courtyard, Abraham Maimonides converted a tradition about the miraculous nature of Temple worship into a normative legal framework for Jewish worship suitable for all time.

This last point is directly connected with the Nagid's emphasis on Temple worship as a model and precedent for Jewish prayer in his own day.[51] The orderly arrangement in rows was explicitly identified with "the custom [practiced] in the Temple" (*sīrat bet ha-miqdash*).[52] The preoccupation with Temple norms was part and parcel of the messianic ambitions of pietist thought, to which we shall return in the final chapter, according to which the exilic customs that had long passed for Jewish rites would at last be restored to their proper format. The other reason for the special interest in Temple ritual, connected with the first, was the belief that the more original a rite in the history of Jewish worship, the more authentic and authoritative it was for present and future practice. Abraham Maimonides drew on his father's principle of greater legal weight granted to talmudic law over later (albeit established) customs.[53] Based on his defense of his prayer reforms, we may say that Abraham went a step further by attributing legal authority to all pre-exilic precedent, whether rooted in the Bible or Temple lore, and viewing the latter as the groundwork for the rehabilitation of authentic Jewish worship in his own day.

In his explanation of the standing posture in the *Compendium*, Abraham Maimonides attested to the fact that the importance of standing in prayer is a "matter confirmed by reason," based on its use in formal human etiquette. "Given that standing is a proper form of respect, which a servant shows to his master as part of his service, it is incumbent upon the worshiper to stand upright during worship."[54] But if the statutory standing prayer was the core section requiring a standing position in talmudic law, Abraham and his fellow pietists applied the same logic of proper etiquette to other prayers not previously designated as times for standing.[55] Worshipers were encouraged to stand for special sections of the hymns of praise recited prior to the blessings of *shema'*, while the prayer leader was enjoined to stand for the entire

[51] See the earlier discussion on ablution of the feet.

[52] See *SM*, 194.

[53] See my remarks on this subject in "The Maimonidean Legacy in the East: A Study of Father and Son," *JQR* 102 (2012), 211–16.

[54] See *SM*, 72–3.

[55] On the obligation to stand for the central prayer, known from the early medieval period simply as "standing" (*'amidah*), see BT Berakhot 30a and MT, "Laws of Prayer," 4:3. For the early use of the term *'amidah* with this meaning, see Tractate Sofrim 16:9.

section.[56] Similarly, in his comments on the recitation of the *shemaʿ* and its accompanying blessings, the Nagid enjoined his followers to stand, if possible, for the entire section, or at the very least for the *qedushah* portion in the first blessing. He distinguished between the legal guidelines for individual worshipers, which do not require one to stand, and the custom for the congregation as a collective body, in which the prayer leader representing the group must stand throughout. "Nevertheless," he added, "if a scrupulous individual or group of individuals (*mujtahid au mujtahidūn*) decide to stand on their own like the prayer leader and require themselves (*yultazim*) [to stand] during the blessings of *shemaʿ* and the *shemaʿ* itself, just as they do during the [statutory] prayer, how praiseworthy this would be (*hare zeh meshubaḥ*)!"[57]

An even more forceful stipulation for standing was made in the case of the sanctification prayer, known as the *qadish*. Although none of these innovations were imposed in the main synagogues, Abraham described his injunction to stand during these prayers as one of the customs he and his followers established in their own prayer circles. Local customs regarding the *qadish* differed from place to place, and the Nagid went to great lengths describing the customs with which he was familiar ("I investigated all the divergent customs people practice in this area, which I either witnessed or heard reports about"),[58] but no custom with which he was familiar required worshipers to stand for every *qadish*. He observed with some interest the custom to stand for the *qadish* recited at a burial service, for which he considered a number of possible explanations. At the end of his speculations on this custom, Abraham used the occasion to propose an entirely different approach to the question of whether to stand and why:

> As for me, I don't see the need for such an elaborate argument for why to stand during this prayer, whose composition was intended to glorify His name, may He be exalted, nor [do I see] what a great burden it is to stand for something of such great importance! For this reason, I have established the custom, out of my own voluntary desire (*istiḥbāb*) and regard for the majesty of His name, may He be exalted, to stand during every *qadish*. Those who follow me in other [practices], both the ones I have [already] explained and [others] I will explain, follow me in this [as well] . . . This [practice] is in keeping with the fear of His name, as scripture says: "They sanctified the Holy One of Jacob and magnified the God of Israel" (Isaiah 29:23).[59]

As before, in the case of the reform to sit on one's knees and to arrange the worshipers in orderly rows, detractors and opponents of the change to current custom were not long in coming. Legal argument and bitter polemic were inextricably linked in the Nagid's code, which sought to introduce nothing

[56] See *SM*, 81–4.
[57] See *SM*, 74, and the entire discussion, *SM*, 73–5.
[58] See *SM*, 77.
[59] *SM*, 79.

short of a revolution in nearly every component of Jewish worship, and the seemingly innocuous case of standing for *qadish* was no exception. "Whoever refrains from [standing] does so out of indolence. Such a person lacks sufficient intelligence [to recognize its importance], but habit is his [only] excuse and of those like him."

The Nagid's appetite for controversy led him in this instance to encourage a measure of pious defiance among his followers against any scholars who argued in favor of the prevailing custom.[60] "On account of those who have contempt for the truth and wish to turn people away from devoting themselves and increasing their effort in the worship of their Creator, may His name be blessed, we ought to be especially zealous in its [fulfillment]."[61] Significantly, however, the response to this criticism was more than a defense of pietist devotion, and included its own criticism of those who neglected to adopt the reforms. What began as a desire to take on greater levels of pious devotion beyond the minimum required of the community devolved into a polemical posture of pietist opposition to, and even bitter castigation of, their fellow coreligionists.

In addition to his general concern for standing in prayer, the Nagid introduced one other posture to be performed while standing or sitting—the practice of spreading out one's hands in supplication. As with the case of removing one's shoes, it appears from an early Islamic tradition that some form of this practice of extending the hands in worship was practiced by Jews in the early Islamic period, and was initially spurned by Muslims as a distinctively Jewish custom.[62] A collection of early legal material emanating from the Palestinian academy in Tiberias in the early Islamic period (if not earlier), known as the "[Legal] Exempla of the Jews of the Land of Israel" (*Sefer ha-maʿasim li-vene ereṣ yisraʾel*), includes the following stipulation: "A prayer leader may not spread out his hands until he reaches the age of twenty and has a recognizable beard."[63] The fate of this custom in the Palestinian rite is unclear, although it was not mentioned as a current practice by the Nagid in his discussion of the posture in the *Compendium*. It appears that what began as a Jewish custom in the early Islamic period was later adopted as the standard Islamic practice, only to be revived by the pietist movement under the influence of the custom pervasive in the surrounding environment.

[60] See Friedman, "Controversy for the Sake of Heaven," and my "The Maimonidean Legacy in the East," for examples of the Nagid's approach to communal controversy.

[61] See *SM*, 79.

[62] See Kister, "'Do Not Assimilate Yourselves . . .'," 332, and n. 40 and 41. See also the appendix by Menahem Kister, "'Do Not Assimilate Yourselves . . .'," 371, n. 50 and 51. On the placement of the hands in early rabbinic sources, see Ehrlich, *Non-Verbal Language of Jewish Prayer*, 106–15.

[63] See Mann, "Exempla of the Jews of the Land of Israel," 7, ll. 4–5.

Yet, as we have seen in each of his prayer reforms, Abraham appealed not to the current Islamic practice, but to ancient Jewish tradition. "Among the preferred, obligatory, and desirable postures is for one's hands to be outstretched in supplication, whether sitting . . . or standing . . . as we have seen was the custom of the prophets in their prayers of supplication."[64] The rationale behind the adoption of the custom was similar to that for standing for *qadish*, in so far as the physical posture was befitting of the type of prayer for which it was designated: standing for the glorification of God, and extending the hands during a moment of supplication. Scripture provided the precedent, but logic demanded its rehabilitation and application at the appropriate place and time.[65]

BOWING

The culmination and focal point of the Nagid's prayer reforms was the introduction—or, as he maintained, reintroduction—of prostration as a medium of worship.[66] As we observed earlier in this chapter, medieval Jewry in the Islamic world did practice a form of prostration, performed during the supplicatory prayer known as *nefilat apayim* but not in the central prayer nor at any other point in the service. In our review of Abraham Maimonides' polemic against the prevalent Jewish practice, we noted his barbed critique of his coreligionists for earning the derision of their Muslim neighbors for their mode of worship. The latter, we are told, mocked the posture in the synagogues as "the prostration of the Jews" (*sujūd yisrael*), as opposed to prostration proper as it was performed in the mosque. Abraham Maimonides' chastisement was not simply a matter of distress at the image of Jewish worship among Muslims. It was primarily a concern as to the dissolution of Jewish rites from their original and authentic forms and their replacement, over many years, with exilic rites with no foundation in the ancient tradition. While this concern was particularly evident in the case of prostration, it was by no means limited to it. On numerous occasions, the Nagid wrote of the corruption of Jewish worship over many years in exile. I have alluded more than once to the messianic implications of his preoccupation with

[64] *SM*, 100.

[65] See the Nagid's comments on the relationship between the application of scripture and reason in the absence of an explicit rabbinic source, *SM*, 182.

[66] Abraham distinguished between prostration as a devotional posture in worship and as a social gesture of respect. See *Perush*, 325 (Ex. 20:21): *sujūd ta'addub lā ta 'abbud*. See also *Perush*, 51 (Gen. 23:7), and cf. 57 (Gen. 24:26), 137–9 (Gen. 37:10), and 187 (Gen. 47:31).

rehabilitating "the customs of the exile" (*minhagot ha-galut*).[67] The ultimate goal of these reforms was to replace exilic practice with the forms proper to original Judaism, thus drawing an end to the era of corruption and decay in Jewish life and ushering in the awaited days of messianic revival. But, if the theme of restoration was a major trope of the Nagid's efforts, it was especially evident in the case of prostration. The following passage has been cited before in a previous chapter, in the context of responses to accusations that the pietists were imitating Islamic worship, but considering its direct bearing on prostration and the rehabilitation of lost rites after years of neglect, it is worth citing again in this context:

> Be careful in this matter not to confuse a new idea and custom with ancient [ones] that have been neglected to the point of being forgotten and [only] later brought to the attention [of the community], restored, and revitalized. This is the case in the matter concerning us here, that of prostration, which we are now discussing. For prostration is an obligation of the law and ancient custom of the people, a fact neglected over the course of many years in exile. And when one has been made aware that it is an obligation and puts it into practice, it appears to the deluded and ignorant as if it is a religious innovation. It is an innovation only in relation to the intermediate time [in which it was defunct], not in relation to the time of the original community.[68]

Given the pride of place devoted to the revival of prostration in Abraham's *Compendium*, it is evident that it was perceived, by the author no less than by his contemporaries, as the hinge connecting all the reforms and serving as their common touchstone. In the eyes of an outside observer (as attested by the author of the query on pietist prayer), it was the most distinctive feature of Egyptian pietism and the most recognizable indicator of the influence of its Islamic environment. But if prostration stood at the center of the prayer reforms, so it stood too at the center of anti-pietist polemic and communal controversy. One of the seven preambles to the *Compendium*, which served collectively as anticipatory arguments in defense of the work's most controversial themes, was exclusively devoted to a justification of prostration, a distinction that does not appear to have been shared by any other posture or rite among the reforms.[69] What is more, the Nagid devoted no less than six lengthy rebuttals of real and hypothetical criticisms of this reform, plus a final

[67] For this expression, see *SM*, 75, and cf. 77 and 78 in that same pericope. Note also the criticism of "the customs of the exile" (*siyar al-galut*) and "the practices of the exile" (*aʿmāl al-galut*), *SM*, 142 and 204 respectively. See also the lament on the "sins of the exile" in TS 10 J 13.14, ll. 14–19, published by S. D. Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 33 (1964), 185. The Nagid wrote of the corruption of Jewish worship over the course of the exile on other occasions, including the important passages in *SM*, 161 and 184, on which see more below.

[68] *SM*, 161, and see above, pp. 141–2.

[69] See the author's comments in *SM*, 145.

exhortation on the importance of prostration as the key to a renewal of Jewish prayer and the dawn of a new era of Jewish religious life.[70]

But, as important as they were in the context of communal politics, polemics were not in and of themselves the primary reason for the Nagid's disproportionate attention to prostration. His remarks on the relationship between the different reforms suggest a more internal motivation. As we shall explore in greater detail at the end of this chapter, the postures in prayer were intended by the pietists both as a reflection of the internal states of the worshiper and, more commonly, as an outer inducement of these states. While these states vary from prayer to prayer and from worshiper to worshiper, the most fundamental and the most frequently invoked of these states was understood to be humility in the divine presence. As an outer comportment conducive of a proper inner bearing, prostration occupied for the pietists the most exalted position of all the devotional postures. In a passage delineating the virtues of the various postures, the Nagid moved in hierarchical fashion from kneeling to standing to bowing from the waist to prostrating, suggesting that, in addition to their separate merits, they help the worshiper progress to increasingly more exalted forms of devotion.

> It is best . . . that one sit in a manner conducive to worship, namely in a kneeling position, as I have explained. This is the first level of devotional postures in prayer . . . Worship may also be performed upright in a standing position, and this is even greater and more exalted than sitting . . . In addition to standing, worship may also include bowing (*rukūʿ*), which [the sages], of blessed memory, called *keriʿah*, namely bending [from the waist] (*al-ḥany*)[71] . . . This posture demonstrates even greater deportment and humility in His presence, may He be exalted, than standing upright. And, in addition to standing and bowing, worship may be performed with prostration, by casting one's body and forehead to the ground. This is the culmination of [all] the levels of devotional posture (*nihāyat marātib hay'at al-taʿabbud*), for beyond this there is no greater form of deportment and humility available to the worshiper.[72]

Much like the expanded application of standing, in which worshipers were enjoined to stand beyond the minimum amount (on the grounds that standing in the presence of the Creator is a "matter confirmed by reason"), the unique status of prostration demanded that it be performed with greater frequency.

[70] See *SM*, 184 for his remarks on the importance of a revival of prayer as a precondition for a revival of religious life in general, cited and discussed on pp. 240–1. The six criticisms and their rebuttals, found in *SM*, 147–83, were concerned with the following problems: (1) imitation of gentile worship, (2) prohibition of prostration outside of the Temple, (3) prostration limited to extraordinary or miraculous occasions, (4) prostration not for everyone, but only for exceptional individuals and only in privatem, (5) practice of prostration contrary to prevailing custom, (6) prostration not mentioned as a requirement by the talmudic sages and hence an implicit criticism of the sages.

[71] Note the *lapsus calami* in Dana's transcription of *anḥany* (Ps. 19:13).

[72] *SM*, 128–9, and cf. *SM*, 118.

As we noted earlier, there was a widespread custom of prostrating with one's head to the side during the supplication following the statutory prayer, but the only other evidence for the general use of prostration was found among the Karaites.[73] Following the Nagid's example, the pietists adopted the posture as a replacement for bowing from the waist during the main standing prayer.[74] Even in this prayer, however, Abraham encouraged his followers to prostrate for all of the benedictions, rather than merely at the beginning and end of the "patriarchs" and "thanksgiving" benedictions.[75] In addition, three other types of prayers were singled out as appropriate occasions for prostration: glorification of the divine name, gratitude and thanksgiving, and petition.[76] For example, worshipers were encouraged to prostrate at the end of each chapter ending with "hallelujah" during the hymns of praise and *hallel*, as well as during *barekhu* and *shema'*, among many other places.[77] We are given a window into the way in which the Nagid's reforms were put into practice among the pietists in the responsum devoted to the topic. As we shall see, the source confirms the Nagid's strictures of prostrating not flat on the ground with one's arms and legs outstretched, but bowing to the ground from a kneeling position, as was common among Muslims and Karaites alike.[78]

> They bow to the ground and prostrate in the form of bowing (*ve-yishtaḥavu bi-kheri'ah*) during *qadish* and *qedushah*. Some if not most of them prostrate to the ground whenever they are so induced by humility and heightened concentration. [They prostrate] likewise, in place of bending and bowing [from the waist] at the beginning and end of the "patriarchs" and "thanksgiving" benedictions, and sometimes prostrate at other points during the hymns of praise or in the blessings over the *shema'* or in the other benedictions of the [statutory] prayer. In sum, they connect their bowings and prostrations with their [level of] concentration.[79]

[73] See the discussion on pp. 154–5. On Karaite prostration, see n. 78.

[74] On bowing in early rabbinic literature, see Ehrlich, *Non-Verbal Language of Jewish Prayer*, 31–63.

[75] See *SM*, 136–7, and see *SM*, 118–19. Note the interesting paraphrase of BT Shabbat 51a and 146a ("if one wants to increase, one may increase") for the purposes of bowing in *SM*, 119.

[76] See *SM*, 134.

[77] See *SM*, 138. Note also the appeal to Temple custom in this passage (see M Tamid 7:3) in light of our remarks on the restoration of original rites and the removal of those associated with faulty exilic customs. In another example, the Nagid exhorted his followers to prostrate at every mention of prostration in the liturgy, an interesting parallel to the Islamic practice of prostrating upon reading a form of the verb "to prostrate" (*sajada*) or its corresponding noun (*sujūd*) in the Qur'ān. See *SM*, 141. There had already been a custom in Egypt, recorded in a responsum of Maimonides, to bow upon reading the following verse in the evening service: "And the entire nation saw and fell upon its face and proclaimed, 'The Lord is God, the Lord is God'" (I Kings 18:39). See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1986), II:343–4, no. 187. In his attempt to "complete" (see *SM*, 141: *in atamma al-mujtahid*) the custom, Abraham advocated prostration upon recitation of this verse. See *SM*, 138.

[78] For evidence of Karaite prostration, see the references to Qirqisānī and Hadassi in Wieder, Islamic Practices, 49–50, and see the reference to Teshuvot, 64, no. 62, on which see p. 153.

[79] *Teshuvot*, 62, no. 62.

There is some indication that the practice of prostration among medieval Jewry of the Islamic world did not begin or end with the Nagid's prayer reforms. In an article on the subject, Tzvi Langermann has argued that, in the case of prostration, "Abraham's reform represents not a direct importation of Muslim custom, but rather a relocation of a private practice (which itself probably owed a great deal to Muslim praxis) to the public space of the synagogue."[80] Drawing primarily from the exhortations to prostrate in the work of Baḥya ibn Paquda and Judah Halevi, as well as an anonymous pietist treatise emanating from North Africa, enjoining devotees to prostrate in private spaces in the home set aside for worship, Langermann suggests that the practice of prostration was well known in Andalusian and Maghribi circles as a private devotion.[81]

The evidence for this practice is undeniable, but its influence on Abraham Maimonides is, in the final analysis, inconclusive. Given his propensity to mention any customs pertaining to his reforms, and particularly that of prostration, it would be highly surprising for the Nagid to omit any reference to the rite, even in modified form, had it been known to Jewish contemporaries in the Mediterranean basin. On the other hand, even if we cannot conclude with absolute certainty that Abraham Maimonides drew on earlier practices in his own reforms, the evidence does suggest that, among the Jews of the medieval Islamic world, prostration was perceived to be an authentic demonstration of Jewish piety.[82]

In one instance, it is evident that Abraham's reforms appear to have been the catalyst for the spread of the practice of prostration beyond Egypt. In a fragment published close to a century ago, a number of former French émigrés scholars, who had lived in Egypt for a period of time before completing their voyage to Palestine, were described as having adopted the particular modifications to the posture advocated by the Nagid and his fellow pietists. It was said of "those who are currently settled in Acre, R. Joseph b. R. Matthew, R. Judah, and R. Samuel," that they "bow and fall upon their faces, but without [facing] to the side, and when they pray it is on their knees with their faces to the ground."[83] The double reference to falling on their faces (*noflim 'al penehem*) and to praying on their knees with their faces bowed to the ground (*u-fenehem ba-qarqa*) suggests that the Frenchmen adopted both the modified

[80] See Y. T. Langermann, "From Private Devotion to Communal Prayer: New Light on Abraham Maimonides' Synagogue Reforms," *GQ* 1 (2005), 32.

[81] See Langermann, "From Private Devotion," 32–41.

[82] In addition to the sources mentioned in Langermann's study, see also the document (DK 3 V) published by I. Goldziher, "Un récrit sur l'apparition d'un messie," *REJ* 52 (1906), 43–6, and again by Friedman, *Maimonides*, 182–6, esp. 184, l. 12.

[83] See TS Ar. Box K 15, cited by J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1970; reprint of 1920–2 London edition), 371, n. 2.

posture for the supplicatory prayer (*nefilat apayim*) as well as the introduction of prostration into the benedictions of the main statutory prayer.[84] The information in this fragment confirms what we know of the diversity of the participants in pietist circles in Egypt, discussed in detail in Chapter one.

The future of this practice, both in Egypt and beyond, is uncertain. It is clear, however, that, with the passing of Abraham Maimonides, pressure from opponents of the pietists increased considerably. His two sons, David (d. 1300), who succeeded as Nagid, and Obadiah (d. 1265), both experienced the ongoing disputes over prostration first-hand. David was forced to close his pietist prayer conventicle and attend the main synagogue in 1250, after a formal complaint was issued to the newly installed Mamluk authorities against the pietists, and for a brief time he was compelled to take refuge in Acre (for reasons that remain uncertain) before being reinstalled as Nagid in 1252.[85] Even before this episode, however, we are informed of a clash that broke out immediately following Abraham Maimonides' death concerning the practice of kneeling and prostration in Jewish worship. In this case, pietist leaders appealed to the Muslim authorities for a formal ruling on the appropriate response to the opposing party.[86] The government's response is not preserved, but the dispute continued to simmer until the authorities became involved once again in the *embrouillement* with David and his supporters. The repeated appeals to the Muslim authorities during the controversies over the pietist reforms testify to the deepening rift in Jewish society at the end of the Ayyubid and beginning of the Mamluk periods over the fate of Egyptian pietism. It was most likely in reaction to this crisis that Abraham's son Obadiah wrote in his *Treatise of the Pool* of the need for the utmost caution so as not to reveal one's pietist affiliations to opponents of the movement. "Should any of your practices be brought under investigation, the unthinkable may happen[87] . . . It is

[84] On the connection of Abraham Maimonides with the Jews of Acre, see A. Graboïs, "Acre as the Gateway of Jewish Immigration to Palestine in the Crusader Period," in *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, vol. 2, ed. U. Rappaport et al. (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1972), 93–106, and see M. Idel, "The Land of Israel and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century" (Hebrew), *Shalem* 3 (1981), 121, and M. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 93.

[85] It was also at this time that David's grandfather, Abraham's father-in-law, Ḥananel b. Samuel, went into hiding. See TS 6 J 7.3, published by S. D. Goitein, "A Letter to Maimonides on Donations and New Information on His Descendents, the Negidim" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 34 (1965), 240–1.

[86] See TS AS 182.291, published by G. Khan, ed., *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1993), 293–4, and translated by P. Fenton, "Jewish–Muslim Relations in the Medieval Mediterranean Area," in *The Cambridge Geniza Collections: Their Contents and Significance*, ed. S. C. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 158–9.

[87] This is an attempt to render the author's expression, *fihi mā lā ta'alamuhu*, into idiomatic English. Compare Fenton's translation in *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqala al-Hawdiyya* (London: The Octagon Press, 1981), 107: "If (peradventure) thou betrayest thyself then the unimaginable will befall thee on its account."

vital for anyone who understands what I warn about to guard it and not reveal it to anyone who is not worthy of it . . . Employ dissimulation (*al-kitmān*), as the sages have said in a related manner, 'I have sworn to you, daughters of Jerusalem, [do not arouse love till it pleases]'."[88]

"MY HEART AND MY FLESH"

In the description of pietist prayer in the responsum cited above, the questioner took special note of the individual discretion of each pietist to prostrate to the ground at different points in the prayer service. As the account makes clear, the pietists did not all bow in a synchronized motion, but each bowed in a slightly different manner from the others. While certain overarching guidelines existed as to the appropriate occasions for prostration, such as the categories of glorification, thanksgiving, and petition outlined above, a good deal of room remained for individual spontaneity and the inner disposition of each worshiper. "Some or most of them prostrate to the ground whenever they are so induced by humility and heightened concentration . . . In sum, they connect their bowings and prostrations with their [level of] concentration."[89] In line with the Nagid's conception of the prayer postures as not merely a formal rite to accompany the liturgy, but the appropriate physical counterpart to the inner experience of worship ("a matter confirmed by reason"), his followers practiced a unique combination of synchronized and spontaneous prostrations that were as noteworthy to the observer as the prostrations themselves.[90] The source of this unique practice can be traced back to the Nagid's exhortation to this effect in the *Compendium*.

> Whoever goes beyond this and prostrates at additional points [in the service], being moved by an impetus and movement from within (*bā'ith qalbī wa-ḥaraqah*), directed toward [God], may He be exalted, one which brings an increased sense of humility and meekness, *such that one cannot but prostrate in a state of bewilderment and submission* in His presence, may He be exalted, based on the level of one's effort and disposition, not only is there no harm or difficulty with this, but it is a [sign of] abundance and sincerity in worship of [God], may He be exalted.[91]

[88] See Bodl. MS Or. 661.22, published by Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, n.p., citing from Song of Songs 2:7, 3:5, 8:4. For the concept of "dissimulation," see P. Fenton, *Deux traités de mystique juive* (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1987), 69–70. For a possible rabbinic source for Obadiah's reference to the interpretation of the sages, see Song of Songs Rabbah II:18 (2:7).

[89] See the beginning of Chapter three.

[90] According to the observer, this practice had become the norm among "some if not most" of the pietists. See Teshuvot, 62, no. 62.

[91] *SM*, 138–9 (emphasis added).

The Nagid's words in this exhortation were carefully chosen and provide a precious window into the devotional life of Egyptian pietism. Depending on the degree to which one has cultivated this form of devotionalism (and possesses a certain predisposition), the natural expression of humility and fear of God includes a spontaneous need to bow one's body to the ground. This inner impulse, which he describes as an overwhelming force or movement (*ḥarakah*), causes the worshiper to involuntarily prostrate in a state of bewilderment (*mutaladdidan*). We have already noted a number of occasions on which worshipers were taught to cultivate this experience by prostrating at key moments in which the liturgy invokes divine grandeur and instills a state of sincere humility.[92] Following this idea to its logical conclusion, Abraham suggested that someone who recites liturgical passages mentioning prostration and grasps their inner meaning, yet does not follow suit in outer prostration, "is like one who bears false testimony about oneself."[93]

Of particular interest in the Nagid's remarks is his articulation of an inarticulate and involuntary movement from within, compelling the worshiper to prostrate. It is described as the physical embodiment of sincere humility, "such that one cannot but prostrate in a state of bewilderment and submission" when standing in the divine presence. In a recent study on mystical rapture in thirteenth-century Sufism, I called attention to the pervasive accounts of physical tremors and involuntary movements associated with *dhikr* and ecstatic prayer in Sufi manuals from the period.[94] Among the most interesting parallels to the involuntary prostrations described by Abraham Maimonides come from the pen of his contemporary, the Persian Sufi master and founder of the Kubrawīyah order, Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā (d. 1221), who wrote in Arabic and spent many years in Egypt. Describing the physical movements that occur uncontrollably during *dhikr* in his *Fragrance of Beauty and Portals of Grandeur* (*Fawā'iḥ al-jamāl wa-fawātiḥ al-jalāl*), Kubrā related that "one's limbs become light as if in flight, moving uncontrollably and unconsciously (*ḥarakāt ḍarūrīyah ḡair ma'hūdah*), like the movements of one caught by tremors."[95] The involuntary movements, Kubrā relates, can cause the devotee to fall on one's face in prostration. "He begins to tremble and shake (*fa-yatazalzal wa-yuntafiḍ*) and, overcome

[92] See the section on prostration above.

[93] See *SM*, 141, where the comparison is made to reciting the *shema'* without wearing phylacteries, to which the concept of false testimony was applied in the Talmud (BT Berakhot 14b).

[94] See my "Physical Embodiment and Spiritual Rapture in Thirteenth-Century Sufi Mysticism," in *Les mystiques juives, chrétiennes et musulmanes dans l'Égypte médiévale: Intercultualités et contextes historiques*, ed. G. Cecere et al. (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2013), 305–32.

[95] See F. Meier, ed., *Die Fawā'iḥ al-ğamāl wa-fawātiḥ al-ğalāl des Naǧm ad-dīn al-Kubrā: Eine Darstellung mystischer Erfahrungen im Islam aus der Zeit um 1200 n. Chr*. (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1957), 23 (no. 49).

by fear, begins to invoke *lā ilaha illa'llah*. He is overwhelmed by a powerful energy and mighty force, such that he cannot help but prostrate . . ."[96] Expressions of a similar type are found in other works of the period, reflecting a core dimension of the Sufi experience of mystical rapture, according to which the physical and spiritual components both impact on one another and serve as mirror images of the other.[97]

In addition to the impact of the spirit on the body, in the form of automatic movement and prostration during prayer, Abraham Maimonides' account of the devotional postures reveals a similar interest in the reverse phenomenon: the impact of bodily posture on the inner world of the spirit. This was the case not only for prostration, but for all the postures. Here, too, there are important parallels in the ideas of thirteenth-century Sufi masters, although their direct impact on Egyptian pietism remains to be seen.[98] For the Nagid and his pietist disciples, each posture in prayer corresponded to a separate inner disposition and was performed chiefly for the purpose of inculcating this disposition in the worshiper. Sitting in a kneeling position in the direction of the *qiblah* was "a preparation for the focus and refinement of the mind, which is awakened and purified in one who strives ceaselessly and dedicates oneself, progressing in one's heart toward increasing levels of sanctity."[99] In a similar manner, praying with one's hands outstretched was deemed conducive to inculcating a state of humility in a prayer of supplication, "just like a beggar who asks for charity."[100] The outer form in each case was meant to mirror and reinforce the inner disposition of the worshiper.

[96] See Meier, *Die Fawā'iḥ al-ǧamāl*, 25 (no. 53). See also Meier., *Die Fawā'iḥ al-ǧamāl*, 9 (no. 20), in which the devotee is said to "tremble, grow agitated, and shake out of terror of what came over him, such that he is compelled to prostrate (*wa-yasjud iḍṭirāran*)."

[97] See, e.g., the work of pseudo-Qushairī, *Tartīb al-sulūk fī ṭarīq allāh ta'ālā*, ed. I. Basyūni (Cairo, 1985), 34, and see my "Physical Embodiment and Spiritual Rapture," 308–9, 316–18.

[98] Most important for the situation in Egypt was the work of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sikandarī (d. 1309), the most important personality of the early Egyptian Shādhilī order, who wrote of the impact of proper posture on the inner state of the devotee: "The proper way is for [the devotee] to sit before his master in a humble and submissive manner . . . He should place his head between his knees, closing his eyes to all sensory perception. By sitting in this way, his heart will become concentrated and purified of dross and receive flashes of light and hidden insight." See Sikandarī, *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ wa-miṣbāḥ al-arwāḥ bi-dhikr allāh al-karīm al-fattāḥ*, n.e. (Cairo, 1999), 76. Note also the accounts of outer ritual mirroring inner disposition in the work of 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 1234), *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, 321–2, 332–7. On these figures and a more extensive discussion of this phenomenon, see my "Physical Embodiment and Spiritual Rapture," 313–19.

[99] See *SM*, 128. Note also Abraham's exhortation to sit in the synagogue even outside the parameters of worship "in a devotional form for the purification of the mind or for meditation on God," *SM*, 108. Compare *SM*, 75, where sitting in this manner is considered a form of worship (*wa-hua 'ibādah*) in and of itself, and the reference to all the postures as "the form of worship" (*hai'at al-ta'abbud*), *SM*, 120.

[100] See *SM*, 100.

What was true of the other postures was even more evident in the case of prostration, to which Abraham devoted more space in his *Compendium* than all the other postures combined. Prostration was called "the essence of worship" (*'iqar 'avodah*) and "the culmination of the levels [attained by] posture in worship" (*nihāyat marātib hay'at al-ta'abbud*).[101] Similarly, the physical submission of the body to the ground represents "the culmination of exertion in outer worship" (*nihāyat al-ijtihiād fī'l-'ibādah al-ẓāhirah*).[102] The reason for the unique position of prostration is clear. The physical submission of the body to the ground is the simplest expression of the state of humility and glorification of the divine, which is the core of worship.[103] This is precisely why the exalted position of prostration among the various postures was not an argument for keeping it apart as a posture of the elite, but for its adoption among the people as a whole. "For prostration . . . cultivates meekness and humility in the one prostrating through [the physical] enactment, [downward] movement, and placement [of the head upon the ground]."[104] The physical motion is "the greatest expression of humility and gesture of awe for the one prostrating," whether the latter is the most experienced pietist or the simplest worshiper.[105] The spiritual benefits more than repay the effort required to bow to the ground, as it is aimed "against one's lower nature, which breeds arrogance, envy, baseness, and vice."[106]

In the final analysis, it was the self-evident power of prostration and the other postures to induce a state of sincere worship that led Abraham Maimonides to devote the preponderance of his career exhorting his coreligionists to embrace his prayer reforms. He conceded that, for "the individual elect," such as the prophets and "the few whom the Lord calls" (Joel 3:5), worship can be purely internal, "such that it is exclusively in concentration and thought."[107] The vast majority of worshipers, on the other hand, require a combination of physical postures to arouse the proper concentration within. In so far as people "are made of matter and change from one state to another rather than remaining static, it is essential that worship [of God] in prayer should be now sitting . . . now standing . . . now bowing and prostrating . . ."[108] Yet, as we have seen in the case of Sufism, not even the devotions of the prophets and the elect are devoid of an intimate symmetry with the forces of the body. Both Maimonides and his son, the Nagid, described a state of

[101] See *SM*, 132 and 129, respectively. [102] See *SM*, 134.

[103] It may be recalled that prostration corresponds to three experiences in prayer: glorification, thanksgiving, and supplication, on which see *SM*, 134–42. Of these three, the Nagid considered the first the most fundamental (*aṣl al-sujūd*) on account of its correlation to inner humility and awe before God. See *SM*, 139, for the designation of glorification as the most fundamental occasion for prostration.

[104] See *SM*, 169. [105] See *SM*, 175. [106] See *SM*, 185. See also *HW*, II:40, ll. 17–19.

[107] See *SM*, 126–8. [108] See *SM*, 129–30.

physical trembling and loss of self-control as a natural effect of prophetic inspiration, a state to which we turn our attention in the next chapter.[109] Whether for the prophets or their less inspired peers, the interior and exterior dimensions of worship mirror one another and merge into a single devotion, in accordance with the words of the Psalmist: "My heart and my flesh sing out to the living God" (Ps. 84:3).[110]

[109] See MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 7:2, and *Perush*, 309 (Ex. 19:16).
[110] See *SM*, 127.

Part 3

Prophecy and Messianism

5

The Return of Prophecy

The spiritual revolution at the heart of Egyptian pietism aimed at nothing less than a total revitalization of Jewish society. Pietist leaders cultivated a fellowship of close disciples while simultaneously working toward a renewal of devotional practice in the broader community. The twin goals of the movement were mutually reinforcing from the beginning. According to the model envisioned by Abraham Maimonides, pietists were themselves to take on a leadership role as models and guides of religious practice, in some cases being supported materially for their service to the community.[1] More importantly, the pietist revival was expected to lay the groundwork for the messianic redemption that would ensue when the people turned in repentance and devotion to the service of God. At the core of this messianic restoration—and its harbinger—was the belief in the imminent renewal of prophecy, believed by many pietists to be attainable through the ascetic discipline and meditative techniques that had come to define the pietist movement.

Much like the restorative purpose of Abraham's synagogue reforms, the quest for prophetic renewal sought to bridge the gap between the idealized pre-exilic past and the rehabilitation of the messianic age.[2] The restorative messianic vision of the pietists drew on traditional conceptions of exile as a temporary aberration that would in the fullness of time return full circle to its idyllic past. In the future redemption, not only was Israel to regain its kingdom and rebuild the Temple, but the spirit of prophecy would be restored and the divine presence would again dwell in the midst of the people.[3] By the medieval period, the idea had crystallized in the belief that "in the final [redemption],

[1] See *SM*, 112–13. As discussed in Chapter one, the reciprocity envisioned by Abraham Maimonides, modeled both on the biblical institution of priestly gifts and the rabbinic tradition of ten synagogue stewards (*'asarah baṭlanim*), is the closest the pietists came (in principle, if not in practice) to the Sufi model of the *khānqāh*.

[2] Pre-exilic here refers not to ancient Israel before the Babylonian exile as in biblical studies, but to the state of the Jews before the destruction of the second Temple and the Hadrianic dispersion. For Abraham, the exile was the beginning as much of a spiritual as of a physical degeneration. See *SM*, 161.

[3] See Tanḥuma Miqqets, 2, and Be-ha'alotekha, 6, 16, 28; Num. Rabbah 15; Deut. Rabbah 15:25, and see P. Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung vom heiligen Geist un der rabbinischen Literatur* (Munich: Kösel, 1972), 112–5, 143–4.

every one of the faithful will hear [the revelation] individually, without an intermediary,"[4] with the result that in the end of days "revelation will come (*yūḥā*) to every one of us, such that one person will not depend on anyone else in matters of religion."[5] According to this version of the tradition, Joel's enigmatic words were taken quite literally to mean that every Jew will prophesy in the anticipated redemption, with no spiritual hierarchy serving as a barrier within the community of Israel.

Many pietists adopted a similar belief in a restoration of prophecy in anticipation of messianic times, including the dream that the entire community would participate in the prophetic renewal in some capacity. But the pietist doctrine that has come down to us did not envision a radical equalization of prophecy as hinted at in the early midrashic sources and later formulated by Se'adiah Gaon and others.[6] Already in the rabbinic period, however, there are indications of a shift toward an idealization of prophecy as the sign of spiritual merit.[7] In philosophical and mystical circles of the medieval period, prophecy came to be viewed as the *summum bonum* of the religious life.[8] Egyptian Jewish pietism, in many ways, bears the double imprint of philosophical rationalism and ecstatic mysticism in equal measure, producing a unique synthesis of what has sometimes been described as intellectualist mysticism.[9] The philosophical tradition provided the pietists with the theoretical foundation for prophetic attainment, while Sufism supplied them with much of the language and technique of mystical illumination. Yet unlike either of these, the Egyptian pietists viewed their movement as vital to the renewal of biblical prophecy and the spiritual transformation of Jewish society, giving their mysticism a unique sense of urgency at the dawn of a new era.

[4] See the Judaeo-Arabic midrash included in J. Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue: A Study in the Cycles of the Readings from Torah and Prophets, as well as from Psalms, and in the Structure of the Midrashic Homilies* (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1971; reprint of vol. I of the 1940–66 Cincinnati edition), I:143–4 (Hebrew section). Like Se'adiah, the author of this midrash used the term *waḥy* for divine revelation. See H. Ben-Shammai, "On a Polemical Element in Saadya's Theory of Prophecy (Hebrew)," in M. Idel et al. ed., *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume*, vol. 1 (*Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 1988), 128–35.

[5] *Imanat wa-i'tiqadat*, VII:6, ed. Qafiḥ, 232, and see IX:11, ed. Qafiḥ, 285.

[6] According to Abaham Maimonides, even the revelation at Sinai was not uniform but differed according to the state of each individual. See *Perush*, 315 (Ex. 20:1), based on his father's remarks in *Guide*, II:32. It is nonetheless clear from Abraham's commentary that every Israelite prepared for and experienced some form of prophecy at Sinai. See *Perush*, 305–9 (Ex. 19:9–10, 16).

[7] This is evident in the stories of Hillel the elder and Samuel the younger, who were declared worthy of receiving the holy spirit, if only their generation was likewise worthy. See Tosefta Soah 13:4–5 and BT Soah 48b, and see *Tosefta ki-feshutah*, ed. Lieberman, VIII:736–7. The new conception of prophetic inspiration became the basis for preparatory stages leading to the reception of the holy spirit. See M Soṭah 9:15 and *Seder Eliyahu Zuṭa*, 15. See also the tradition of prerequisites for prophecy in BT Shabbat 92a and Nedarim 38a.

[8] On prophecy in medieval Jewish thought, see H. Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), esp. 587–640.

[9] On the concept of intellectual or philosophical mysticism, see p. 54, n. 43.

PROPHECY AND HUMAN PERFECTION

In its emphasis on mystical practice, Egyptian pietism was primarily experiential, rather than speculative, in orientation. Nowhere in the extant literature of Egyptian pietism do we find anything resembling the theosophical expositions of early Qabbalah or the esoteric musings of ibn al-ʿArabī and his school.[10] The content of divine gnosis (*maʿrifah*) was of little concern to the pietists compared with the mystical taste (*dhauq* and *dhawāq*) imparted by the illuminative experience.[11] In its inward orientation, no less than its mystical itinerary, the pietists drew extensively upon the multifaceted tradition of classical Sufism. But just as crucial was its adoption of a certain philosophical discourse regarding the nature and objective of prophetic attainment. At the heart of this discourse lay a conception of human perfection (*al-kamāl al-insānī*),[12] derived from Aristotelian and Neoplatonic notions of human nature and the teleology of the human soul.[13] While most pietist authors exhibited little independent interest in the philosophical literature behind this tradition, there was a considerable absorption of Maimonidean doctrines, which continued to exert a powerful influence on the movement for several generations. After addressing the pietist theme of human perfection and its philosophical background in what follows, we shall return to the Sufi conception of the prophetic path and mystical illumination further on in this chapter.

The doctrine of human perfection was adopted from the Arabic Peripatetic tradition articulated initially by al-Fārābī. Perfection, in this sense, was the completion of the natural process inherent in every species, the purpose or end (*ghayah*, from the Greek *telos*) of its existence. The purpose of each individual

[10] Fenton has noted the overwhelming absence of influence of ibn ʿArabī among the pietists. See P. Fenton, "Two Akbarī Manuscripts in Judaeo-Arabic Reception" (Hebrew), in *Ben ʿEver la-ʿArav: Contacts between Arabic Literature and Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages and Modern Times*, vol. III, ed. Y. Tobi (Tel Aviv: Afikim Publishers, 2004), 82–94.

[11] The term *maʿrifah* does appear in pietist literature, but it has no clear and consistent metaphysical content. See *HW*, II:146, ll. 10–11, where the term is linked to "sincerity of love" (*ṣidq al-ahavah*), as alluded to by exegesis on Ps. 91:14, and TS Ar. 46.71, 1, *verso*, ll. 5–6, where it is linked to "true awe, which is awe belonging to the revelatory state" (*al-yirʾah al-ḥaqīqīyah wahiya al-yirʾah al-maqāmīyah al-tajallīyah*). The latter text was published by P. Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," *JSS* 26 (1981), 63.

[12] For the doctrine of human perfection in Sufism, see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 273, 281–2, and, in general, 187–227. For its use in Egyptian Jewish pietism, see *HW*, II:54, l. 21; 378, l. 18; 380, l. 5. See also the collection of sources on the subject from Abraham's biblical commentary in Carmiel, C. Cohen, "An Introduction to the Educational Philosophy of Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Meʿaliyot* 14 (1994), 312–16, and E. Labaton, "A Comprehensive Analysis of Rabenu Abraham Maimuni's Biblical Commentary," Doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University, 2012, 304–60.

[13] On Maimonides' view of, and reliance on, Aristotle, see A. Altmann, "Defining Maimonides' Aristotelianism," in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. R. Cohen and H. Levine (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2000), 1–7.

was defined by the distinguishing trait of its species vis-à-vis all other species. Following Aristotle, al-Fārābī defined the human *telos* as the perfection of the rational faculty and the attainment of theoretical knowledge, consisting in the ultimate happiness (*sa'ādah*) of the species.[14] As Judah Halevi testified in the *Kuzari*, the doctrine was well established in Arabic Neoplatonic thought several decades before Maimonides.[15] According to al-Fārābī, human perfection is attainable only by philosophers who attain complete knowledge of the intelligibles through direct contact (*ittiṣāl*) with the active intellect.[16]

But here, as elsewhere, Maimonides charted a somewhat independent course. For him, it is not the philosopher but the prophet who is upheld as the model of human perfection.[17] Unlike his predecessor, for whom prophecy consisted of the perfection of the imaginative (rather than the rational) faculty, Maimonides declared the perfection of both faculties together the mark of true prophecy.[18] By restoring prophecy to its exalted rank, Maimonides did for subsequent Jewish philosophy and mysticism what ibn Sīnā did for their Islamic counterparts.[19] According to his definition in the *Guide*, prophecy consists of an "overflow overflowing from God" (*faiḍ yafīḍ min allāh*), via the active intellect, upon the rational and imaginative faculties. "This," he declared, "is the highest state for a human being and the ultimate perfection

[14] See M. Fakhry, *Al-Fārābi: Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 92–3.

[15] For aspects of Maimonides' indebtedness to al- Fārābī, see S. Pines, "The Philosophic Sources of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," in Pines, tr., *Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), lxxviii–xcii, and L. Berman, "Maimonides, the Disciple of Alfarabi," *IOS* 4 (1974), 154–78. See also L. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors*, tr. E. Adler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 101–33. In his polemical dialogue, known as the *Kuzari*, Judah Halevi presented this doctrine (in simplified and somewhat altered form) as representative of the philosophers of his time. See *Kitāb al-radd wa'l-dalīl fi'l-dīn al-dhalīl*, ed. D. Z. Baneth (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 3–5. See also Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 105–11, 118–25.

[16] See al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsah al-madanīyah*, 79. On the term *ittiṣāl* in medieval Jewish philosophy, see Vajda, *L'amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du Moyen Age*, 112, n. 2, Efros, "Some Aspects of Yehudah Halevi's Mysticism," 33, and Cogan, "What Can We Know and When Can We Know It?" 121–37.

[17] On the superiority of the prophet to the philosopher, see Maimonides' remarks in *Guide*, II:38, ed. Qafiḥ, 411, and see Gruenwald, "Maimonides' Quest beyond Philosophy and Prophecy," 150–2.

[18] See al-Fārābī, *Ārā ahl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, ed. A. Nader (Beirut, 1959), 115, 125, and *'Uyūn al-masā'il*, in *Alfarabi's Philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed. and tr. F. Dietrici (Leiden, 1890), 94, compared with Maimonides, *Guide*, II:36–8.

[19] According to Kreisel, Maimonides' evaluation of prophecy had more in common with ibn Sīnā than al-Fārābī. See H. Kreisel, "Sage and Prophet in the Thought of Maimonides and his Followers" (Hebrew), *Eshel Be'er-Sheva'* 3 (1986), 151–3. This raises its own set of questions, however, as Pines already noted in "The Philosophic Sources," ci–cii. It should, moreover, be said that al-Fārābī elsewhere identified the active intellect with Gabriel, the holy spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudsi*), and the faithful spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) in the Qur'ān. See al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsah al-madanīyah*, ed. F. Najjar (Beirut, 1964), 32.

(*ghāyat al-kamāl*) attainable for the species."[20] In a shift of decisive importance for the subsequent development of medieval Jewish thought, Maimonides combined in a single framework the psychology and naturalism of al-Fārābī with the spirituality and transcendence of ibn Sīnā.

Maimonides' renewed emphasis on prophecy—a leitmotif of his major writings—found a receptive audience in the pietist circles of the thirteenth century. Those pietists who, like Abraham, were grounded in the rationalism of Maimonides, adopted a number of the latter's presuppositions and preconditions regarding the nature of prophetic experience. Among the most regrettable lacunae of the pietist legacy is the loss of the final chapter of Abraham's *chef d'oeuvre* on prophetic attainment, the culmination of the pietist path. Mere fragments remain from this critical chapter, a number of which have only recently come to light.[21] From what has survived of this chapter and allusions to illumination in preceding sections, it is clear that Abraham looked to his father as a model in his account of prophetic experience.[22] The main features of this process, from the reception of the divine overflow (*faiḍ ilāhī*) to the interplay of the rational and imaginative faculties, are all present in Abraham's work.[23]

Key to Abraham Maimonides' doctrine of perfection is his rather idiosyncratic language of attainment—or, quite literally, "arrival" at the destination (*wuṣūl*)—a term long recognized as central to his mystical system. The concept of arrival is repeatedly linked with the image of traveling on the path (*sulūk*, *maslak*, *derekh hashem*), and thus pietists (and their prototypes in the legendary past) are frequently designated as wayfarers (*sālikūn*).[24] The precise

[20] *Guide*, II:36, ed. Qafiḥ, 402. The term *faiḍ* was translated by ibn Tibbon by the Hebrew term *shefa'*, although Maimonides seems to have preferred the term *nevi'ah*. See *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Y. Shailat (Jerusalem: Shailat Publishing, 1995), II:543, l. 2. Maimonides elsewhere described prophecy as an "abundant perfection" (*kamāl*), through which the human intellect attaches (*yuttaṣil*) to the active intellect. See his introduction to Pereq Ḥeleq in *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Y. Shailat (Jerusalem: Ma'aliyot, 1992), 371. For more on Maimonides' conception of the perfect individual, see *Haqdamot ha-Rambam*, ed. Shailat, 352–4, and see H. Kreisel, "Maimonides' Political Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. K. Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 206–8. Maimonides allowed for different degrees of perfection, corresponding to different levels of prophecy. See *Guide*, II:32–3, 35, and esp. 45, and MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 7:2, 6.

[21] Beyond the opening fragment that remains in *HW*, II:424, ll. 17–20, see the recent Hebrew translations of key fragments by P. Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment of R. Abraham Maimonides: Fragments from the Lost Section of *The Sufficient [Guide] for the Servants of God*" (Hebrew), *Da'at* 50 (2003), 113–19.

[22] Abraham referred the reader to his father's writings on the subject. See, e.g., *HW*, II:284, ll. 6–8, and 382, ll. 11–12.

[23] See *HW*, 286 and 374–86.

[24] For *sālik(ūn)* as spiritual wayfarer(s), see *HW*, I:134, l. 15; II:74, l. 11; 78, l. 21; 306, l. 5; 342, l. 19 (*sālikī derekh hashem*); 400, l. 3; 406, l. 6 (*al-sālikīn fī'l-masālik al-rafi'ah*); 412, ll. 13–14 (*al-sālikīn bi-istiqāmah fī al-masālik al-mu'aṣṣilah ilaihi*). As Israel Efros observed over seventy years ago, this term was already employed by Se'adiah for the attainment of divine illumination. See I. Efros, "Saadia's General Ethical Theory and its Relation to Sufism," *JQR* 57 (1967), 175, n. 26.

meaning of *wuṣūl* has been a source of confusion since Samuel Rosenblatt rendered it variously as "mystic union" or "reunion" in his translation of key sections of the *Compendium* in 1927 and 1938.[25] The only passage that speaks of a union of the human intellect with the active intellect, in which the two are said to "cleave" to one another and to "unite as one entity," appears not to be original to the text but a later addition.[26] The meaning of *wuṣūl* must be understood in accordance with its metaphorical usage: the culmination of the spiritual path, synonymous with the attainment of prophecy. As a result, "arrival" is usually best translated as "attainment," as in the following description of Joshua's extended solitude in the tent of meeting in the wilderness: "Joshua remained in continuous solitary meditation in this tent, pursuing the unique path (*sulūk*) aimed at attaining an attachment to God (*wuṣūl wuṣlat allāh*), may He be exalted, afterward, namely the attainment of prophecy (*wuṣūl al-nubūwah*)."[27] As we shall see, Abraham conceived of the ultimate arrival as only fully realized with the ascent (or return) of the soul to the rank of the angels in the world to come, yet it began in this life with the intellectual illumination of prophecy.[28] The perfection of prophecy was thus a limited perfection, the arrival or culmination of the soul's trajectory within the constraints and distractions of the flesh. The doctrine of attainment and that of perfection are intrinsically linked in Abraham's *oeuvre* and it is not uncommon for the two to appear as a pair, as in the following: "'But I am continually with You; You hold firm my right hand' (Ps. 73:23): [This is] an allusion to one's state following the attainment of complete perfection."[29]

[25] See esp. Rosenblatt's remarks in his introduction, *HW*, I:52, 96–101. Maimon has correctly pointed to the ambiguity of the term, although he plays down its connection with revelation, which he sees as exclusive to Moses and the Israelites at Sinai. See D. Maimon, "The Limits of the Encounter between Rabbinic Judaism and Islamic Mysticism" (Hebrew), *Aqdamot* 7 (1999), 57, n. 59.

[26] See *MH*, 66: "Then he shall know the Lord his God when his intellect and soul cleaves to the active intellect and the two unite as one entity" (*ve-ḥazar hu ve-hu davar eḥad*). On the addition of the printed addition, see Margaliyot's note, *MH*, 8, n. 6. That said, the passage echoes the language of "cleaving" (*devequt*) used by Abraham Maimonides in his chapter on *wuṣūl* (see *HW*, II:424, ll. 17–19), as well as the language of conjunction employed by his father, to wit "the survival of the soul with the survival of that which it cognizes, this and that becoming one entity (*wa-kaunuhā hiya wa-huwa shay' wāḥid*). See *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Shailat, 366. Note also the similar language in Halevi, *Kuzari*, I.1 and IV.13, in *Kitāb al-radd*, ed. Baneth, 5 and 164, respectively.

[27] *Perush*, 465 (Ex. 33:11). In the last phrase (*wuṣūl al-nubūwah*), *wuṣūl* has clearly become a technical term for attainment and cannot be read as arrival. Occasionally, however, the original meaning is still explicitly employed, as in "the reward of the wayfarers who arrive" (*ribḥ al-sālikūn* [sic!] *al-wāṣilīn*), in TS Misc. 24.152, 1b, *verso*, l. 14, translated into Hebrew by Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment of R. Abraham Maimonides," 113.

[28] See *MH*, 75, and esp. 61, and the references to angels in the works of Maimonides and his son in the following paragraph. On the return of the soul to the rank of the angels in the world to come, see the section below on the "taste of the world to come."

[29] TS Misc. 24.152, 1b, ll. 1–3 (*ba'da wuṣūlihi li-ghāyat kamālihi*), and see the Hebrew translation by Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment," 114. It was Abraham's strong emphasis

Interestingly enough, the language of *wuṣūl* and its cognates had previously been used by Maimonides in reference to the fullness of knowledge (in the world to come) and to intellectual attachment (in this world). As with Abraham after him, complete knowledge for Maimonides is only possible with the attainment of the angelic realm: "Felicity and the ultimate end consist in the arrival (*wuṣūl*) in the celestial retinue." The ultimate end or perfection of the soul consists in the conjunction of the human intellect with the angelic realm of separate intellects, both in the intellectual apprehension that occurs after death and in the imperfect apperception glimpsed in this life.[30] Even more significant is Maimonides' use of the critical term, *wuṣlah*, in reference to the intellectual bond between the human and the divine.[31] As just noted, Abraham used the term *wuṣlah* to denote the bond with God attained (i.e. as the object of *wuṣūl*) in the moment of prophecy. It is precisely this term which Abraham seems to have identified with its Hebrew counterpart, *devequt*, the biblical image he elicited to evoke the prophetic bond.[32] In light of the rare use of these terms in Sufi literature to denote the goal or end of the mystical path, Abraham's choice of the terms *wuṣūl* and *wuṣlah* (and their corresponding verbal forms: *waṣala* and, occasionally, *ittaṣala*) must be viewed as a deliberate extension of his father's sporadic use of these terms in the *Guide* to denote the attainment of prophetic knowledge and intellectual attachment to the divine.[33]

As did his father before him, Abraham identified the training associated with the prophetic path as a series of stages leading to ultimate perfection. "Prophecy," in Abraham's expression, is defined as "the highest state of

on human perfection as the end of the spiritual path that led his translator, Samuel Rosenblatt, to designate the work as *The High Ways to Perfection*. See Rosenblatt's remarks in *HW*, I:10.

[30] On the angelic realm and the angels as intellects, see Maimonides' remarks in *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Shailat, 366, and *Guide*, I:43, II:6, and those of Abraham, *HW*, II:378, ll. 1–6, and cf. *HW*, 392, ll. 16–21, and *Perush*, 85 (Gen. 28:12).

[31] See *Guide*, III:51, ed. Qafiḥ, III:676–7.

[32] See *HW*, II:424, ll. 17–19. For a similar use of both *wuṣlah* and *ittiṣāl* by Abraham ibn al-Rabīʿ, see TS Ar. 1b.7, 1, *recto*, ll. 4–6, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 50. As Vajda observed 60 years ago, the term was again employed by Abraham Maimonides,' son Obadiah, with the same connotation of the intellectual bond between human and divine. See G. Vajda, "The Mystical Doctrine of Rabbi 'Obadyah, Grandson of Moses Maimonides." *JJS* 6 (1955), 214, and cf. Bodl. Or. 661, 3, *verso* (chapter one), and 21, *recto* (beginning of chapter 16), published in P. Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqala al-Hawdiyya* (London: The Octagon Press, 1981), n.p., with the latter's translation on 76 and 105. See also TS Ar. 1b.7, 1, *recto*, l. 4, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham He-Hasid," 50. Vajda rightly noted that Samuel ibn Tibbon translated *wuṣlah* as *dibbuq*, Vajda, "The Mystical Doctrine," 214, n. 7, and cf. *Sefer Moreh Nevukhim le-ha-Rav Moshe ben Maimon ha-Sefaradi z"l be-haʿataqat ha-Rav R. Shemuel ibn Tibbon z"l* (Jerusalem: n.p., rep. 1960), 65. Other terms used for the connection of the soul with God are the related *ṣilah* and *ʿilāqah*, strengthened by the soul's ascent to its source, in *HW*, II:224, ll. 18 and 21, respectively.

[33] Far more than *wuṣūl*, Maimonides used the term *ḥuṣūl* to denote intellectual attainment. See, e.g., his remarks on Moses, Aaron, and Miriam in *Guide*, III:51, ed. Qafiḥ, III:684.

perfection of the soul" (*ghāyat al-kamāl al-nafsānī*),[34] the culmination of a path of intensive spiritual and intellectual preparation. In such a state, the prophet perceives the majesty of God through contemplation of divinity and creation and experiences an infusion of divine lights as a sudden illumination.[35] Yet human perfection, according to both father and son, was not cut from a single cloth, but varied according to the state of illumination of each prophetic type.[36] In good form, Abraham and his fellow pietists never equated their own form of mystical illumination with that of the ancient prophets. They identified themselves as followers and disciples of the prophetic path, "wayfarers on the [divine] path, the followers of the prophets," yet whose inner illumination, like the prophets themselves, resulted from being "perfected with both intellectual and religious perfection."[37] Even when careful to distinguish between prophets and saints,[38] Abraham asserted that both groups receive an illumination through the divine overflow, described in each case as "the ultimate perfection" (*al-kamāl al-aqṣā*) of human attainment.[39]

According to Abraham, the prophets and their followers combine two modes of perfection: one intellectual and universal (*al-kamāl al-ʿaqlī*), accessible by anyone prepared to receive it; the other addressed to the religious community governed by the law (*al-kamāl al-sharʿī*). For anyone who has not attained the prophetic rank, philosophy and the law remain completely separate, though equally valid, means of attaining perfection. As Abraham cautioned elsewhere, the philosophic path (*al-maslak al-falsafīyah*) is more involved and far more dangerous for the average individual, although with the proper preparation "it is without any doubt a path that leads to attainment."[40] By contrast, the path of religious perfection is acquired through the medium of tradition and prophetic instruction and is therefore "more accessible, simple, and secure from danger."[41] Significantly, it is the prophets (and their

[34] See *HW*, II:282, ll. 19–20.

[35] See *HW*, 380, l. 2 to 384, l. 9; 60, ll. 18–20; 410, ll. 12–14. See also I:142, ll. 1–4.

[36] See *Guide*, II:45 and III:51, and *HW*, II:290, ll. 1–2. See also TS Misc. 24.152, 2a, ll. 1–2, and see the translation of Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment," 114.

[37] See *HW*, II:136, ll. 16–19. See the section on the "disciples of the prophets."

[38] The twin categories of prophets and saints (*al-anbiyāʾ waʾl-auliyāʾ*), a major theme in Sufi literature, appears in its classic form in the "Duties of the Heart" of Baḥya ibn Paquda, although the latter adapted it in other forms, such as "the prophets and the chosen of God, the saints" among others. See *Kitāb al-Hidāyah ilā Farāʾiḍ al-Qulūb, Maqor ve-Targum*, ed. Y. Qafiḥ (Jerusalem: Yad Mahari Qafiḥ, 1991), 36 (*kutub al-anbiyāʾ waʾl-auliyāʾ*), 142, 293, 417, and cf. D. Lobel, *A Sufi–Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda's* Duties of the Heart (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 193–4.

[39] See *HW*, II:60, ll. 18–20. In a similar passage, Abraham chastised anyone who imagines that life ought to be devoted to anything other than "the attainment of true perfection" (*iqtināʾ al-kamāl al-ḥaqīqī*). See *HW*, 232, l. 9.

[40] II Firk. I.2924, 1a, ll. 7–15, esp. l. 9, and see Fenton's translation, "The Doctrine of Attachment," 115.

[41] II Firk. I.2924, 1a, ll. 15–16.

followers) who attain, in his view, the combined perfection of philosophy and the law. Not unlike Maimonides, Abraham viewed the rank of prophecy as a state of sustained contemplation of universal truths, "a glimpse of the majesty of His sanctity, may He be exalted, and His spiritual creatures, the angels, which are separate forms perceived by the intellect . . . or [conceived] as an image by the imaginative faculty in a prophetic vision."[42] The truth of prophecy and the foundation of the law, for father like son, are identical with the eternal verities demonstrated through philosophical analysis and perpetuated through prophetic tradition.[43]

The angels, identified here with the separate forms, play a key role in Abraham's account of prophetic experience. In so far as the angels represent pure intellect, unsullied by terrestrial matter, the highest state of human attainment consists in "adhering to something of [angelic] perfection." It is according to the purity of one's intellectual vision, represented symbolically as an angelic medium, that the prophets reach their perfection and attainment.[44] With a similar intent, Abraham wrote of anyone "whose objective is wayfaring [on God's path] and attainment, the angels grant him safe passage . . . "[45] But the intellectual sobriety of Abraham's prophetic doctrine is matched only by his description of mystical rapture in the moment of illumination.[46] The divine overflow is likened either to a brilliant light, producing an intensity of spiritual delight, or to a symphony of celestial sounds heard only by the select few.[47] The latter image was used by Abraham to describe the revelatory experience accessible through contemplation of the angelic world in a state of intellectual perfection.

> [T]he intimate ones—the angels[48]—"call out one to the other" (Is. 6:3), as the prophets and sages wrote, "standing in the celestial heights, making their voices heard . . . "[49] But this call and response and [celestial] symphony are not with voices like our voices or with a tongue like ours or with words like our words, but "with the words of the living God" (*be-divre elohim ḥayyim*) . . . This mystery [is]

[42] See *HW*, II:378, ll. 2–5.

[43] See *HW*, 382, ll. 2–13, and *Perush*, 473 (Ex. 34:5), referring to the "communion and intellectual perception" of Moses (*al-wuṣūl wa'l-idrāk al-ʿaqlī*). See also *Perush*, 487 (Ex. 34:29–31).

[44] See *HW*, 56, l. 17–58, l. 7 (*kamāluhum wa-wuṣūluhum*).

[45] See *Perush*, 393–5 (exhortation following Ex. 25:20: *sulūkan wa-wuṣūlan*).

[46] Abraham was careful to describe "the ultimate perfection" as "beyond comprehension in its true nature." See *HW*, 60, l. 19.

[47] For the terminology of overflow, see above, pp. 190–1 and n. 20.

[48] The reference to angels as the intimate ones (*al-malā'ikah al-muqarrabūn*) is well known in the Islamic tradition from the Qur'anic phrase, 4:172. Abraham reversed the order here (*al-muqarrabīn al-malā'ikah*), although see his use of the phrase elsewhere, also alluding to the intellectual essence of the angels, in *Perush*, 275 (Ex. 15:11).

[49] This passage is derived from the *yoṣer* benediction of the morning recitation of the *shemaʿ*.

> something which those who have reached perfection (*al-kāmilūn*), who are recipients of [divine] grace, understand . . . [50]

The theme of intellectual perfection remained an important feature of pietist mysticism as long as the thought of Maimonides held sway in some capacity. The philosophical background of the term, though applied in quite novel ways from its original conception, is unmistakable. The language of perfection was no more Sufi in origin than was the acute rationalism that inevitably came with it. An important link in this tradition was Abraham's son and literary heir, Obadiah, whose *Treatise of the Pool* is a virtual paean to the heights of philosophical mysticism. The very first chapter of Obadiah's treatise opens with a direct entreaty to the creative fusion of traditions sought by Maimonides and Abraham in their own works. In an intellectual climate increasingly hostile to philosophy and pietism alike, Obadiah made a forceful appeal to his coreligionists to acknowledge what he insisted were the mutually reinforcing messages of the prophetic and philosophical legacies.

> Know that all of the words of the prophets, of blessed memory, and those of the philosophers are an exhortation to devote oneself to the intellect and to distance oneself from physical pleasures, with the goal of preparing the path for the intellect to perceive what it can perceive of the Creator . . . [51] Know that nothing prevents one from attaining perfection any more than one is prevented from sin, as the pure Torah says: "Surely the man has become as one of us, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:22) . . . A person who is steadfast and perseveres and who does not succumb [to temptation] until the gate [of illumination] becomes resplendent will behold mysteries formerly concealed from him . . . and divine secrets will be revealed to him without him knowing whence they came.[52]

Pietist works from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries reflect a great diversity of orientation vis-à-vis the philosophical heritage bequeathed by Maimonides. There seems to have been a considerable divergence in approach between those inclined more toward exclusively Sufi models and those who perpetuated the delicate balance of intellectual mysticism found in Abraham and Obadiah. That balance is discernible not only in larger trends and assumptions, but in the technical vocabulary derived from these traditions. A number of anonymous works from this period testify to the creative interplay of Sufi and philosophical terms used to describe the ultimate state of illumination. An important example of this fusion of philosophical and

[50] *SM*, 189. Compare the later description of a glimpse of the "intellectual perception" (*al-idrāk al-ʿaqlī*) of angelic speech by David b. Joshua Maimuni in his *Doctor ad Solitudinem et Ductor ad Simplicitatem*, ed. P. Fenton (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1987), 74.

[51] MS Bodl. Or. 661, 3b, ll. 23–6, and see Fenton's translation, *Treatise of the Pool*, 76. See also 21a, ll. 1–4, and the translation , 105. On this last passage, see Vajda, "The Mystical Doctrine of Rabbi 'Obadyah," 214–15.

[52] MS Bodl. Or., 7a, ll. 4–7, 16–20, and see the translation, Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 81–2.

mystical language can be found in an anonymous commentary on the Song of Songs, which reads the biblical book as a dialogue between the soul and the intellect.[53] Here, too, we see a multitude of terms, including frequent reference to the attainment of perfection and a variety of Sufi states, including the state of passing away from corporeality (*fanā'*) in a state of quasi-union with the divine.[54]

An interesting result of the synthesis of lexical traditions is that the ideal of perfection was itself described in terms reminiscent of a mystical state. Not surprisingly, this is often identified with a form of prophetic revelation, the esoteric message of the Song in the view of the commentator. The pleasant aroma of vines in full blossom (Song 2:13) is thus an allusion to "the aromas of perfection" (*arā'iḥ al-kamāl*) which become fragrant when "the mysteries of [divine] representations are revealed."[55] In another passage, the lover is described as leaping and skipping over the hills (Song 2:8), hinting at the arousal of the soul in an experience of mystical delight before the soul achieves the perfection of divine revelation.[56] The interpretation of perfection as a state of illumination, by means of the soul's union with the active intellect, implied that it was less a state of being than a fleeting experience, lasting only as long as the illuminative experience itself.[57]

The attempt to identify prophecy with a form of individual perfection was by no means a natural one. While rabbinic literature hints at an early shift toward the idealization of prophecy as a private spiritual encounter, the idea has no clear biblical precedent and posed serious problems as to its credibility.[58] The

[53] There are indications that the author had in mind not the human intellect but the active intellect, by means of which all existence came into being. See II Firk. I.3870, 3b, l. 16–4a, l. 6 (Song of Songs 1:17), published by P. Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs in the Hand of David Maimonides II," in *Esoteric and Exoteric Aspects in Judeo-Arabic Culture*, ed. B. Hary and H. Ben-Shammai (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 554.

[54] See 17a (Song 6:3), published Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs," 574–5. For the practice of solitude described as a state of leaving one's body and ascending to the supernal realm, see 2a (Song 1:8) and 17b, published Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs," 550 and 575, respectively. Note also the important use of *fanā'* in an anonymous pietist treatise, Strasbourg BNU 4110, 61, noted on p. 218, n. 148, where Abraham Maimonides' use of this term is also raised.

[55] See 8a, published Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs," 560.

[56] See 7a, published Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs," 558. The final clause is a variation on the talmudic dicta in BT Pesaḥim117a and Shabbat 30b that "the divine presence cannot rest" on anyone who is not in a state of joy. In the commentator's version, the soul's perfection (*al-nafs lā takmul*) has replaced the resting of the divine presence as an allusion to the experience of prophetic inspiration.

[57] See 18a, l. 1 (Song 6:5): *fī ḥāl kamālihi*, and cf. 14r (Song 5:8), published Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs," 576 and 570, respectively.

[58] For the beginnings of this shift in the talmudic period, see p. 188 and n. 7. Note also Maimonides' reliance on the dictum of R. Pinḥas b. Ya'ir in the introduction to his Eight Chapters, *Haqdamot ha-Rambam*, ed. Shailat, 375: "The only rank higher than piety is that of prophecy, and the one leads to the other, as [the sages] said, 'piety leads to the holy spirit.' It is clear from their statement that training in the discipline of this tractate leads to prophecy (*al-'amal bi-ādāb*

foremost obstacle to the ideal of individual prophecy was the traditional role, and even responsibility, of the prophet toward the broader community. Maimonides' approach to this question was to divide prophetic attainment into two distinct types or domains, private and public. "Sometimes," he explained, "revelation (*al-waḥy*) comes that renders the prophet perfect, but no one else. Other times, it comes to him in such a way that he feels compelled to address and teach others and cause his perfection to overflow upon them."[59] Maimonides' description of the two prophetic types in the *Guide* appears to view the second, public, form of prophecy as the more powerful and more important of the two.[60] But in his summary of the prophetic personality in his code, Maimonides presented what appears to be a more neutral position toward the two types.

> Prophecy can come to a prophet for himself alone (*le-ʿaṣmo bilvad*), to expand his heart and broaden his mind,[61] such that he comes to know great things, the likes of which he never knew before. Alternatively, [a prophet] may be sent to a nation or to the inhabitants of a city or kingdom to prepare them or instruct them in what to do or what not to do . . . [62]

The two versions tell a rather different story of the public role of prophecy and its relationship to the individual experience of the prophet. The code presents the two on equal terms, as mere alternatives with no further qualification, while the account in the *Guide* points to a hierarchy in the reception of the divine overflow. But it is clear that even the doctrine of public prophecy of the *Guide* is based not on the exigencies of the people, but on a higher level of individual perfection reached by the prophet at the moment of revelation. Maimonides' precise position notwithstanding, it is clear that his emphasis on individual perfection and enlightenment as the primary characteristic of prophecy was of decisive importance in the subsequent development of pietist spirituality.[63] It is far less evident to what extent the notion of public prophecy

hadhihi al-masekhta muʾaddī ilāʾl-nubūwah) . . . " See the comments of H. Kasher, "Students of the Philosophers as Disciples of the Prophets: Written Directives for Prophecy among the Successors of Maimonides" (Hebrew), in *Joseph Baruch Sermoneta Memorial Volume* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 79–80.

[59] See *Guide*, II:37 (Qafiḥ, 408) (*wa-yafiḍ ʿalaihim min kamālihi*). See also his expression at the beginning of the chapter (*yafiḍ ʿan takmīlihi li-takmīl ghairihi*).

[60] Maimonides referred to the second type in the next sentence as "the greater perfection" (*al-kamāl al-azyad*). See H. Kreisel, "Maimonides' View of Prophecy as the Overflowing Perfection of Man," *Daʿat* 13 (1984), xxi–xxvi.

[61] Heart and mind in medieval Jewish philosophy are typically cognates. Here the expression functions as a hendiadys. See *HW*, II:378, l. 12 to 380, l. 1. See also the commentary of Abraham ibn Ezra to Deut. 6:5.

[62] MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 7:7.

[63] Although Maimonides did not use the term "perfection" in his account of prophecy in the code, note his remark that the prophet surpasses all others in knowledge (*nitʿala ʿal maʿalat sheʾar bene adam he-ḥakhamim*), 7:1, ad fin. This is especially interesting in light of the talmudic

played a meaningful role in the movement. In an explanation of Moses' hesitation before accepting the public role assigned him by God, Abraham argued that the communal task posed considerable impediments to the spiritual and intellectual perfection of the individual, suggesting that "[Moses] preferred to be in solitude with his own soul, immersing himself in attaining his own perfection (*takmīl dhātihi*)."[64] An individual may find himself in the necessary, if undesirable, position of overseeing the public welfare, but the task inevitably carries a heavy toll on the spiritual life of the leader.[65]

Not all pietists viewed the secondary, or public, task of prophecy as a matter of mere personal discretion. For some it was an integral part, if not the primary purpose, of the institution of prophecy. A curious example of this tendency is found in a treatise of philosophical pietism once attributed, interestingly enough, to Maimonides himself. The treatise, composed in the thirteenth century in Judaeo-Arabic and ostensibly written with a specific disciple in mind, was circulated in medieval Hebrew translation under the title, "Chapters on Felicity."[66] The relatively brief work is a remarkable example of the heightened aspirations for prophetic inspiration that characterize this period. The combination of philosophical and mystical elements is evident from the opening of the treatise, which exhorts the addressee to purify his heart like the saints (*al-auliyā'*) in order to enter the "company of

dictum (BT Bava Batra 12a) that sages are preferred over prophets, a passage that Maimonides never cited in the code. As we have seen, Abraham shared his father's view of prophecy as the most exalted human rank. There is a responsum attributed to Abraham defending this dictum over those who view prophets as greater than ordinary sages—an attribution which is highly questionable in light of his stated position on the subject. See *MH*, 117–22. The responsum is not included in Cod. Sim. Jud.-Arab 2, the manuscript in the David Simonsen collection in Copenhagen University Library, the second half of which comprised the bulk of the material in the Freimann-Goitein edition of Abraham's responsa.

[64] See *Perush*, 231 (Ex. 4:13).

[65] See *HW*, II:260, l. 16 to 262, l. 3, and esp. ll. 11–16. In light of much of what has been discussed in this book, however, it should go without saying that Abraham did, in fact, spend considerable effort and innumerable hours not only in managing the general affairs of the community but in serving as a spiritual mentor to his pietist disciples. Abraham's ultimate vision for Jewish society, as mentioned on more than one occasion, included the religious guidance provided to the community by members of the pietist elite.

[66] On this work and its author, see Davidowitz' remarks in his introduction to S. T. Davidowitz and D. Z. Baneth, ed., *De beatitudine* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1939). It is interesting to note that this intriguing work has, subsequent to its publication by Davidowitz, been attributed by scholars variously to Abraham Maimonides and to his son Obadiah. See N. Wieder, *Islamic Influences of the Jewish Worship* (Hebrew) (Oxford: East and West, 1947), 45–6, and Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 44–6, respectively. Although Fenton's identification with Obadiah, based on a number of thematic and terminological parallels, is certainly probable, the latter may also be due to the fact that both authors hailed from similar circles of intellectualist pietism. On the author of the "Chapters on Felicity vis-à-vis Maimonides and his interpreters," see Kasher, "Students of the Philosophers as Disciples of the Prophets," 76–80.

intellects."[67] The strengthening of the intellect leads to the attainment of the holy spirit, referred to elsewhere in the work as "prophetic apperception."[68] The ascent of the soul to the world of intellects makes one oblivious to all corporeality, allowing for visions and divinations of future events, a state called "the perfection of felicity."[69] But the author viewed this form of perfection as identical to the calling of the ancient prophets of Israel, each of whom bore a sacred responsibility to impart the fruits of their experience with the religious community.

> It is the obligation of the individual who has attained perfection to impart [his] perfection to others and to overflow onto people (*wa-yafīḍ ʿalā al-nās*) that which God overflowed onto him. This is as Solomon, of blessed memory, said: "Let your springs flow (*yafuṣu*) outward" (Prov. 5:16).[70] And Isaiah said: "You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters do not fail" (Is. 58:11). In this manner, the early [sages], of blessed memory, said of one onto whom God overflowed a constant overflow and uninterrupted attainment: "Unto him is revealed from heaven the mysteries of Torah and he is made into a spring that never ceases and a river that increases in power" (cf. M Avot 6:1).[71]

The impact of Maimonidean thought on thirteenth-century Jewish pietism, both in Egypt and beyond, has only just begun to be recognized for the critical role it played in shaping the intellectual life of the movement. Even as Maimonidean scholars increasingly draw attention to the role of philosophical mysticism in Maimonides' own writings, the rationalist component of Egyptian pietism remains largely unappreciated.[72] The mystical tradition cultivated by Maimonides' pietist heirs is a critical chapter in the development of the diverse Maimonidean legacies that flourished both east and west after the master's death. In the case of the doctrine of intellectual perfection, the fusion of philosophical and mystical elements is as significant as it is often subtle. But the intellectualist pietism cultivated by Abraham and his followers reflects a sustained engagement with Maimonidean doctrine, with which they expected their readers to be fully conversant. As we shall see throughout this chapter, Maimonidean precedent played a crucial role in the growth of prophetic

[67] See Davidowitz and Baneth, *De beatitudine*, 1, ll. 1–4.

[68] See Davidowitz and Baneth, *De beatitudine*, 4, l. 6 (*ruaḥ ha-qodesh*), and 12, ll. 9–10 (*al-idrāk al-nabawī*).

[69] See Davidowitz and Baneth, *De beatitudine*, 9, l.1 (*ittiṣāl kamāl al-saʿādah*). See the description of the visions from 7, l. 14 to 8, l. 12, in which one experiencing this state is referred to as "living, perfect, perceiving" (*ḥayy*, *kāmil*, *mudrik*).

[70] This is a clear literary echo of the Arabic and Hebrew verbs of similar meaning, a wordplay only possible in the linguistic context of Judaeo-Arabic. As Baneth noted (10, n. 12), ibn Janāḥ considered the Arabic and Hebrew verbs to be cognates.

[71] Davidowitz and Baneth, *De beatitudine*, 10, l. 9–11, l. 1

[72] On the concept of philosophical mysticism, see p. 54, n. 43.

speculation and the pursuit of mystical illumination that came to define the spiritual trajectory of the pietist movement.

MYSTICISM AND PROPHETIC ATTAINMENT

Without explicitly claiming to have attained a form of prophecy, pietist writers identified the prophetic experience—and everything resembling that experience—with a form of divine illumination and ecstatic vision about which they were more forthcoming. The range of terms for these states reflects the diverse traditions from which pietists drew inspiration. While some, including attachment (*ittiṣāl*), apprehension (*idrāk*), and perfection (*kamāl*), emerge from the philosophical tradition, others clearly derive from the mystical lexicon of classical Sufism. Among the latter, some project a sense of intimacy and immediacy, as in the language of sensation, such as taste (*dhauq*, *dhawāq*) or smell (*rā'iḥah*), while others speak of revelatory vision, such as beholding (*baṣar*, *mushāhadah*), illumination (*ishrāq*, *tanwīr*), and perception (*shu'ūr*, *istish'ār*). By far the most common term used by the Nagid, as already noted, is the term for arrival or attainment (*wuṣūl*), alluding to the culmination of the spiritual path (*sulūk* and *maslak*) pursued by spiritual wayfarers (*sālikūn*).[73] These terms are occasionally paired with more straightforward allusions to personal revelation (*waḥy*, *tajallī*), unveiling (*kashf*, *mukāshafah*), and divine communication (*amr ilāhī*).

The adaptation of Sufi mystical terms should not be misconstrued as a simple borrowing of language and ideas, but seen as a creative reuse of key terms within the framework of pietist prophetology. As Yohanan Friedmann and Jawid Mojaddedi have each shown in different contexts, the well-known distinction in the Sufi tradition between the prophets and the so-called friends of God (*al-anbiyā' wa'l-auliyā'*) was less rigid for some authors than for others.[74] From Tirmidhī in the ninth century to Ibn al-'Arabī in the thirteenth, one can detect a strain of classical Sufi mysticism that never aligned itself with the doctrine of prophetic finality in an absolute sense, increasingly advanced by mainstream *'ulamā'* from the ninth century on. I have recently added my voice to the growing scholarship that recognizes a distinct prophetic consciousness in Sufi mysticism, suggesting that this important, albeit underdetected, tendency

[73] See the discussion on pp. 191–2.

[74] See Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 49–93, and Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunnī Islam," *JSAI* 7 (1986), 177–215, and Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma: Rumi's Teachings on Friendship with God and Early Sufi Theories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), *passim*, esp. 28–62. See also the earlier observations of K. 'Abdul-Ḥakīm, "Religious Experience or the Prophetic Consciousness," *Islamic Culture* 16 (1942), 153–60.

in Sufism likely played a role in the rise of a parallel prophetic movement in the leadership of thirteenth-century Egyptian pietism.[75] An interesting illustration of how central this prophetic ideal was in classical Sufism can be seen from the comments of Ghazālī that the illumination experienced by Sufi mystics derives from the so-called "niche of lights" (*mishkāt al-anwār*) that he identified with the light of prophecy: "All of the movements and the cessations from movement [of the Sufis], their outer and inner [states], derive from the light of the niche of prophecy (*nūr al-nubūwah*), and there is no light of illumination whatsoever that is sought that does not come from the light of prophecy."[76] Those who never experience the taste of mystical illumination (*lam yurzaq . . . bi'l-dhauq*) will never grasp the "truth of prophecy" (*ḥaqīqat al-nubūwah*), but know of it in name only.[77] As I indicate in this chapter, the prophetic consciousness of Egyptian pietism was even more far-reaching than its Sufi prototype, including what is known of Egyptian Sufi circles, reflecting a marked tendency to associate all mystical experience with a form of prophetic illumination.[78]

According to the pietist interpretation of prophecy, a heightened mystical experience may be designated as belonging to the state of prophecy or something resembling such a state. One who arrives, for example, at a state of inner solitude, described by Abraham as a form of inner sanctification, "reaches through [this state] the fruit of prophetic attainment or something resembling it."[79] One who achieves a state of inner worship, whether purely of the mind or with minimal use of the body, has reached a level "similar to that attained by the prophets" (*shibh li-mā yuḥṣal li'l-anbiyā*), and "may in those moments speak with the holy spirit or something similar to it" (*bi-ruaḥ*

[75] This was the subject of my address at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jan. 2012), entitled "The 'Disciples of the Prophets' and Their Followers: The Quest for Prophecy in Medieval Egyptian Pietism and Sufism."

[76] See Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (n.e.) (Cairo, 1992), 40. On the image of the "niche of lights" and its connection with prophetic illumination, see Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, ed. and tr. D. Buchman (Provo, U.T.: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 12–13, 20, 37, 41. In the latter two references, Ghazālī wrote of the merging of the levels of the prophets and the friends of God, both of whom taste directly of the prophetic spirit and are beneficiaries of prophetic illumination. Note, for example, his depiction (Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, 37–8) of "the holy prophetic spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī*) that is singled out for the prophets and some of the friends of God."

[77] See Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh*, 41.

[78] It is intriguing to discover mention of one Sufi *shaikh*, Abū'l-'Abbās al-Tanjī (d. 1215/16), originally from Tangier but active in Giza and buried in Fustat, who was reported to have received "knowledge of the Muhammadan prophecy" (*ma'rifat al-nubūwah al-muḥammadīyah*) through the highest states of knowledge and revelation (*fī'l ma'ārif wa'l-kashf*). See the account by Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī'l-Manṣūr in *La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Ẓāfir*, ed. D. Gril (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1986), Ar. 63, Fr. 158 (91b–92a).

[79] See *HW*, II:402, ll. 11–12. Abraham defined inner solitude as "the final rung of the ladder of [prophetic] attainment and is attainment itself," "by means of which the prophets reached their state of perfection." See *HW*, 382, ll. 1519, and cf. 384, ll. 20–1; 394, ll. 12–15; 406, ll. 12–14; *SM*, 189; *Perush*, 465 (Ex. 33:7, 11).

ha-qodesh au qarīb minhā).[80] This is true as much of illuminative experience as of the character of the prophetic personality. The cultivation of the virtues, which for the pietists was synonymous with the transcendence of the ego and all base emotion, was a vital part of the prophetic path—designated by Abraham "the elevated pathways [characteristic] of prophecy."[81] An individual who has completely subdued all personal ego and rancor, who feels no emotion of revenge even when executing justice, is described by Abraham as having achieved "an extraordinary state of sainthood, very close to prophecy."[82]

In his allusion to individuals who have reached a state on a par with, or resembling, prophecy, Abraham was most certainly aware of his father's expressions to this effect.[83] In the *Guide*, Maimonides described "the rank of the prophets" as a state of total concentration on God and meditation on all existence with a view to its divine source, such that the mind is occupied with nothing other than God.[84] Expressions of this sort, together with Maimonides' naturalistic account of prophecy as the culmination of human perfection, have raised questions as to his self-perception as one capable of attaining, if not already having attained, such a state.[85] While Maimonides never made such an audacious claim, it is not inconceivable that he imagined himself to have reached something similar to such a state, as when he suggested that he received the inspiration for certain ideas in a state "resembling revelation."[86] Perhaps Maimonides' greatest contribution to the pursuit of prophetic, or

[80] See *SM*, 128. On the significance of purely interior worship of the mind, designated *al-ta'abbud bi-mujarrad al-fikrah*, *SM*, 127, and its connection to Maimonides' thought, see below, n. 90.

[81] See *HW*, I:182, l. 12 (*al-masālik al-rafī'ah al-nabawīyah*), and see 198, l. 3, in which he refers to the character conducive to, or characteristic of, prophecy (*khulq al-nubūwah*). An alternative translation would be "the elevated pathways [conducive] to prophecy."

[82] See *HW*, 184, ll. 11–12 (*darajah 'aẓīmah min al-wilāyah muqārabah li'l-nubūwah*). Compare this with Baḥya's account of one who has "reached the ultimate state of self-dedication to God and approaches the level of the prophets . . . " See *Hidāyah*, 10:6, ed. Qafiḥ, 422 (*qāraba al-anbiyā'*).

[83] Maimonides referred to the composers of the traditional liturgy as individuals "belonging to the rank of the prophets" (*fī manzilat al-anbiyā'*). See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1986), II:468, no. 254.

[84] See *Guide*, III:51, ed. Qafiḥ, 675 (*darajat al-anbiyā'*). Maimonides described this level of mental concentration on God as "that holy state" (*dhalik al-maqām al-muqaddas*), *Guide*, III:51, ed. Qafiḥ, 675.

[85] In a famous article written some sixty-five years ago, A. J. Heschel suggested that Maimonides not only believed the restoration of prophecy to be imminent, but may have considered himself among those uniquely prepared to receive prophetic illumination. See A. J. Heschel, "Did Maimonides Believe that he Attained Prophecy?" (Hebrew), in *Sefer ha-yovel li-khevod Levi Ginzberg* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), esp. 176–84. Heschel found support for his speculations on Maimonides in the prophetic path pursued by Abraham and the pietists of his generation. See Heschel, "Did Maimonides Believe," 184–7.

[86] See *Guide*, III:22, ed. Qafiḥ, (*shibh al-waḥy*). On the ambiguity of Maimonides' affirmations concerning his own state of perception, see Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 308–11.

near-prophetic, inspiration among the pietists was his account of revelation as a state of intellectual overflow, in principle not entirely out of reach—the culmination of extensive intellectual and moral training on the part of the individual. Even if certain external circumstances, such as the abject conditions of exile, impede its full manifestation, individual aspirants may still catch glimpses of its attainment and arrive at something resembling prophetic illumination.[87]

The general aversion to testimonials among the pietists did not altogether inhibit them from identifying the fruit of mystical experience or intellectual communion with illuminative states. One approach was to associate various terms for prophetic inspiration with differing degrees of spiritual attainment. An instructive example is the adoption of the rabbinic language of the holy spirit (*ruaḥ ha-qodesh*), associated by the classical sages with a high level of sanctity and virtue, yet designated by Maimonides as second in the hierarchy of divine inspiration.[88] Abraham, following his father, contrasted the highest form of divine communication with a lesser form "acquired as prophetic perception or [divine] speech through the holy spirit or something similar."[89] Yet for the spiritually adept, the attainment of the holy spirit is among the highest levels to which one may aspire. According to Abraham, it is accessible only to those who have achieved a purity of inner worship such that they are no longer in need of outer forms. While still obligated in the public forms of worship, such individuals have penetrated to a state of "true worship" known otherwise only to the prophets.

> [Pure inner worship] is realized only by the select few as a result of certain states, for it is the worship of those who have attained the fear, love, and devotion of God in the manner attained by the prophets . . . That exalted type [of worship], which has no outer form or express words, emanates from the purity of the concentration of the heart that precedes it. At such moments, it is possible to speak with the holy spirit or something similar.[90]

In the pietist doctrine developed by Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah, the holy spirit was likewise the highest level to which one may aspire, the point toward which the entire pietist path was oriented. His chapter on piety in the *Rectification of*

[87] For Maimonides' notion of the impeding conditions of exile, see *Guide*, II:36, ed. Qafiḥ, 406, and see the discussion in M. A. Friedman, *Maimonides, the Yemenite Messiah, and Apostasy* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002), 69–70, and n. 102.

[88] See M Soṭah 9:15 and *Guide*, II:45.

[89] See *Perush*, 245 (Ex. 6:10), and cf. *HW*, II:210, ll. 10–16.

[90] *SM*, 128. Abraham elsewhere described such individuals as "those who have attained [the state of] praising Him with the holy spirit" (*al-wāṣilīn li-tasbīḥihi bi-ruaḥ ha-qodesh*). See *HW*, II:404, ll. 16–17. For the notion of "true worship" (*al-ʿibādah al-ḥaqīqīyah*), reminiscent of the "intellectual worship" (*al-ʿibādah al-ʿaqlīyah*) of his father, see *Perush*, 327 (Ex. 20:21), and cf. *Perush*, 367 (Ex. 23:15) and 483 (Ex. 34:18). See also *Guide*, III:51, ed. Qafiḥ, 679.

Religion used the hierarchy of Pineḥas b. Ya'ir as a model, with other spiritual virtues culminating in the state of piety, which leads in turn to the attainment of the holy spirit.[91] Drawing on this background, the state of piety in this treatise was itself the culmination of considerable inner preparation for the indwelling of the divine presence. Daniel utilized a similar framework and terminology to his rival, Abraham, referring to the inner training as the path for the wayfarers and the prophetic attainment as the arrival at the culmination of the path. "When one remains steadfast on the path of the Lord's way (*sulūk derekh hashem*), he is raised little by little until he becomes attached to the level of piety, which is the preparation for the indwelling of the holy spirit."[92] Those who adhere faithfully to the pietist path, according to the treatise, remain at the level of disciples of the prophets, while those who have attained the final stages of piety have already reached the point of prophetic inspiration.[93]

But for Daniel, unlike some other pietists, current wayfarers on the path would have to content themselves with the state of piety as the highest rung, so long as the cessation of prophecy remained divinely ordained.[94] Other pietist authors were more optimistic as to the possibility of divine inspiration and occasionally wrote of the experience of this state. For Abraham's father-in-law, Ḥananel b. Samuel, anyone who has experienced a state of unveiling even once before willingly undergoes a rigorous inner training in order to receive another taste of its sweetness. "If it is granted but once a month, once a year, even once in one's lifetime, it would bring supreme ha[ppin]ess and extreme repose."[95] Ḥananel did not mince words when writing of the spiritual training necessary before such a state is conceivable. Like his son-in-law, Ḥananel wrote of the gradual subjugation of all physical desire and pleasure, "restraining the members of his body when in motion and when still," in order to open up the pathways of spiritual perception. Abraham, it may be recalled, had also written of the ecstatic vision and spiritual satiety that sets in after all physical hunger pangs subside.[96] In his own exhortation to the novice on the process of

[91] On the dictum of Pineḥas b. Ya'ir, see nn. 7 and 58. Ibn al-Māshiṭah's treatise is the first known work to utilize the scale of virtues listed by Pineḥas b. Ya'ir. It was later incorporated by David b. Joshua in his *Doctor ad Solitudinem et Ductor ad Simplicitatem*, on which see Fenton's remarks, *Doctor ad Solitudinem*, 13, 33–4, 42–6, and P. Fenton, *Deux traités de mystique juive*. (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1987), 195–225.

[92] II Firk. 1.3132, 11a.

[93] For Daniel's expression, "disciples of the prophets" (*talmide ha-nevi'im*), see II Firk. I.3132, 69b, in which he compared the pietists to disciples of the prophets, who put their trust in God and seclude themselves in the mountains and wilderness. For the relationship between *ḥasidut* and *ruaḥ ha-qodesh*, see II Firk. I.3132, 12a.

[94] See II Firk. I.3132, 73a.

[95] AIU V A 76, published by P. Fenton, "More on R. Ḥananel b. Samuel the Judge, Leader of the Pietists" (Hebrew). *Tarbiz* 55 (1986), 80.

[96] See *HW*, I:140, l. 21 to 142, l. 13, and see my discussion in Chapter two.

self-discipline, Abraham discussed the progression toward greater levels of illumination through a purification of desire, including the possibility of heeding a private divine mandate.

> Your aim in the welfare of your soul should be to purify it from [all] dross and to make it luminous in order to behold what it can of the lights that shine upon it from the overflow of His light, may He be exalted, of which it is said, "By Your light we see light" (Ps. 36:10).[97] It is likewise said on the desire to be infused with this light, "For You illumine my light; the Lord, my God, shines in my darkness" (Ps. 18:29). In accordance with this, you should then take measure of the states of your soul. If you observe that it becomes luminous from fasting, then fast. If you observe that it can endure hunger, endure it. And if God, may He be exalted, commands you with divine providence, with the likes of which He commanded His prophets to endure hunger for a certain number of days, then you should do so, such that were it possible for you to go your entire life without food and drink, you would do so.[98]

In accordance with a Sufi maxim cited in different forms by both Abraham and his father, the well-being of the soul was inversely proportional with that of the body.[99] The physical matter of sensation and desire was considered the most formidable impediment to spiritual luminosity and the possibility of divine illumination. Each pietist was therefore encouraged to undergo a regular process of self-examination to determine the appropriate regimen for his physical and spiritual constitution. In the early stages of the path, the novice required the guidance of a master to develop a realistic course of training, progressing from the simple to the more strenuous. Abraham warned his followers to solicit regular guidance on their progress and to not be overzealous in their quest for renunciation, so as not to lose the goal before its attainment.[100] But for the more advanced disciple, the process of examination required greater introspection and self-direction. One is bidden, in Abraham's words, to "measure the states of your soul" in order to determine

[97] On the school of illuminationism, with an emphasis on Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 259–63, and M. A. Razavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1997), esp. 78–91.

[98] *HW*, II:338, l. 14 to 340, l. 2.

[99] For the phrase (*marḍ al-nafs ṣiḥḥat al-badan wa- marḍ al-badan ṣiḥḥat al-nafs*), see II Firk. I.1717, 44a, ll. 1–2, partly published by A. Harkavy, *Ḥadashim gam yeshanim* (Warsaw: n.p., 1896), no. 10, 204, and cf. Fenton, *Handlist*, 111. Maimonides used a similar phrase (*kharāb al-nafs bi-ṣalāḥ al-jasad wa-ṣalāḥ al-nafs bi-kharāb al-jasad*) in the introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah in *Haqdamot ha-Rambam*, ed. Shailat, 354. For both men, renowned physicians and advocates of physical health, statements such as these must be taken as part of their strict counsel to the sage or pietist for inner refinement and self-discipline, rather than being intended for the average individual. A related manuscript, I.1719, partially published by Harkavy with the other, was published recently by Nissim Sabato, "A New Fragment from the Book, 'The Compendium for the Servants of God' of Abraham Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Me'aliyot* 25 (2005), 22–30.

[100] See *HW*, II:322, l. 20 to 324, l. 5.

the precise state of one's inner progress. In exceptional cases, one becomes privy to direct providential guidance, in the manner of the prophets, to extend the period of self-withdrawal according to the instigation of the divine command.[101]

The chief indicator of spiritual development, in Abraham's account, is the extent to which the soul responds to the diminishment of matter with a clarity or luminosity of vision. The ultimate objective of self-discipline (*mujāhadah*), through the cultivation of prolonged periods of fasting and meditation, is the inner state of illumination that provides the seeker with a glimpse of the divine nature: "[When] he is absorbed in intellectual reflection, he becomes transported to true sanctity and delights in the Creator on account of the inner illumination that emanated from the lights of the divine majesty . . . "[102] The theme of divine illumination, a key image in pietist writing, recalls the distinctive imagery of Sufi illuminationism developed by Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl in the twelfth century and anticipated in the earlier philosophical works of ibn Sīnā and ibn Ṭufail.[103] But, for a number of pietists, the example of Maimonides was at least as strong in shaping the use of illuminative imagery. Maimonides cited the same verse as Abraham to denote the prophetic overflow and the possibility of intellectual attainment through the reception of the divine light.[104] Equally important was the Maimonidean description of flashes of prophetic intuition, which likewise shaped Abraham's description of the illuminative vision in moments of intellectual and mystical rapture.[105]

[101] Abraham's expression, "if God commands you" (*in amaraka allāh*), recalls Judah ha-Levi's language of "the divine matter" (*al-amr al-ilāhī*), though the two are used with a very different sense. See S. Pines, "Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's Kuzari," *JSAI* 2 (1980), 177, and D. Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's* Kuzari (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 29–30. Abraham elsewhere referred to the divine command (*al-amr al-ilāhī*) that comes to prophets of a very high order, and it is worth speculating as to whether his language here reflects the same Shi'ite context as ha-Levi (or a direct influence from Halevi himself) and ought to be translated accordingly. See *HW*, II:96, ll. 14–15. See also the anonymous pietist fragment, TS Ar. 18 (1).179b, l. 16 (*iṭṭaṣala fihim al-amr al-ilāhī*), to which we shall return, and see Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 9.

[102] *HW*, I:142, ll. 1–3.

[103] For the contribution of ibn Sīnā and ibn Ṭufail to the illuminationist school, see ibn Sīnā, *Al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, IV.9.1–2, ed. Dunya (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960–8), 47, 58, and ibn Ṭufail, *Risālat Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, ed. and tr. L. Gauthier (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1936), 4, 7, 97, 108, 117, 120.

[104] See *Guide*, II:12 and III:52, ed. Qafiḥ, 304–5 and 685–6. Abraham, like his father, used the language of divine overflow (*faiḍ*) to denote the illumination of divine lights in the passage cited above: "the lights that shine upon it from the overflow of His light" (*al-anwār allatī tushraq 'alaihā min faiḍ nūrihi*). See *HW*, II:338, ll. 16–17, and cf. *HW*, 60, ll. 19–20, and 410, l. 12 to 412, l. 11. As Israel Efros has observed, a form of intellectual illumination from the created light of God was central to the thought of Se'adiah as well. See Efros, "Saadia's General Ethical Theory and its Relation to Sufism," 175–6, n. 26.

[105] See *Guide*, introduction, ed. Qafiḥ, 6, and *HW*, 382, ll. 7–8, and *Teshuvot*, 39, no. 30. For the theme of prophetic sleep in this last passage, see MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah,"

The theme of divine illumination, both in its Maimonidean and Sufi forms, became a dominant motif of pietist accounts of prophetic attainment. An interesting example is an anonymous treatise on the spiritual virtues, dating most likely to the thirteenth century, which culminates in a discussion of prophecy.[106] But the author was not content with mere speculation on the nature of prophecy, which he (like many pietists) identified with the state of perfection and felicity, but insisted that "the discussion of prophecy and prophets is not simply to be informative about these noble and great things but to instigate the soul to arrive at these sublime notions and realize them through action."[107] When the soul engages in constant remembrance and contemplation of the Creator, it becomes luminous with the divine light found in the soul. As it ceases to be aware of all external perception, "the soul will perceive a grandeur which will dazzle it to a point where its existence will be effaced. Thereupon the soul will find itself bathing in the presence of an overwhelming light, called the light of divine majesty. The soul will then perceive the mysteries appearing within this light . . . And this is prophecy."[108]

It is clear that the pietist preoccupation with prophetic attainment and the restoration of the entire prophetic tradition was, at bottom, a movement to revive the true object of the spiritual path at its very source. The masters of this path, some of whose words have come down to us through fragments of their voluminous writings, guided their disciples in the prophetic path in order to glimpse something of the divine majesty and the glory of the divine lights. The literary remains of this movement, impressive as they are fragmentary, can only provide us with a glimpse of the living instruction cultivated within the fellowship and disciple circles. Occasionally we are provided with a first-hand

7:2, and *Guide*, II:45, ed. Qafiḥ, 435; *HW*, II:394, ll. 12–15, and cf. 386, ll. 14–16. See also II Firk. I.1040, 10v, published by P. Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer and the Spiritual Quest from the Pietist Circle." *JSAI* 16 (1993), 154, and see Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 16–17. The Maimonidean image of flashes of light bears certain similarities to the Avicennan doctrine of intuition. But, as Pines demonstrated, the influence of ibn Bājjah may have been even greater, though Maimonides' use of the image remains *sui generis*. See Pines, "The Philosophic Sources," ci, civ–cvi, and on the epistemology of Maimonides in light of other Arabic philosophers, see S. Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. I, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82–109.

[106] Paul Fenton, who provided a description of the manuscript, tentatively suggested Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ as a possible author, although decisive attribution of the work remains elusive. See Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 303.

[107] See II Firk. NS 1223, 39b–40a, translated Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 325.

[108] See Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 326–7. The author developed an interesting schematization of the inner senses, Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 310–11, 328–9. For an important text on the awakening of the inner senses with the subduing of the outer senses, leading to a vision of the divine lights, see Obadiah's *Treatise of the Pool*, Bodl. MS Or. 661.12a, ll. 4–8, published by Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, n.p., and translated Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, 90. Note that Fenton cited this passage incorrectly as fol. 12, *verso*, in "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 54, n. 17.

view of the power of this instruction, albeit in literary form, with the survival of pietist letters from the Genizah. One powerful example, likewise anonymous, is a letter from a pietist master addressed to a disciple on the theme of individual revelation and illumination. The letter exhibits the same trend of intellectualist mysticism found in a range of pietist thinkers of the period, beginning with Abraham Maimonides himself. The fusion of philosophical and mystical themes is evident through the letter.

> [He[109] should trace all things back] to the Cause of causes, beholding the Creator in every creature, and in everything that moves, its Mover, Sustainer, and Shaper.[110] He shall commune with Him, in Him, and through Him, with all that He sustains, may He be exalted. Through His revelation he shall receive intuitions and ascensions (*mudhāqāt wa-tanazzuhāt*) in the visions of the gnostics. Then he shall ascend and drink plentifully from the source of life, after which he shall thirst no more for eternity. In him shall be granted the request of the prophet, "That glory may praise you without end" (Ps. 30:13).[111] By "glory" is meant the intellect . . . through which we pray and commune with [God], perceiving what may be perceived of the radiant divine light, as David said, "In Your light we see light" (Ps. 36:10).[112]

The path to communion with God to which the disciple is beckoned in this letter is a perfect example of the philosophically inspired mysticism exhibited by many Egyptian pietists. The means of ecstatic communion or attachment, for this pietist as for Maimonides, is a constant meditation on the power of God and divine causation at the heart of all existence.[113] The devotee who reaches the point of revelation (*fī tanzīlihi*), through the medium of the intellect, receives a proliferation of mystical "tastes" and "visions" known only to the gnostics.[114] It is accounts of this sort that help explain both the

[109] The recipient of the letter is addressed in the third person.

[110] The author of the letter used names for God common among philosophers and *mutakallimūn* alike. For an attempt to distinguish these designations for the divine, see Maimonides' remarks in *Guide*, I:69.

[111] "The prophet" is clearly a reference to the biblical David, a common occurrence in Judaeo-Arabic literature.

[112] ENA NS 10a (laminated 46), ll. 9–16, and margin, ll. 1–2, published by Fenton, "A Pietist Letter," 161–2. Fenton has suggested that this letter may too have been written by Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ. See Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Geniza," *HAR* 9 (1985), 161.

[113] The writer described the state of communion as a form of attachment with the divine (*ittiṣāl*), a familiar term in pietist sources. Note its use in TS Ar. 1b.7, 2, recto, ll. 15–16, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 51, in which Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ connected communion (*ittiṣāl*) with a form of unveiling (*mukāshafah*).

[114] The writer combined terminology characteristic of philosophy with that of Sufism. Perhaps the most interesting example is the use of the philosophical designation, "cause of causes" (*ʿillat al'ilal*: a, l. 9) with its Sufi counterpart, "truth of truths" (*ḥaqq al-ḥaqā'iq*: b, l. 2). For the Sufi language of "tasting" and "drinking" as suggestive of the immediacy of the divine encounter, see Qushairī, *al-Risālah al-Qushairīyah fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*, ed. M. al-Marʿashlī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī and Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1998), 135–6.

allure of pietist spirituality and its controversial quality. There is a strong tendency among the leading figures of the movement to read the illuminationist ideal back into scripture and, more importantly, back into the spiritual identity of the religious community. The reconstruction of the prophetic tradition, beginning at Sinai and transmitted through a succession of masters and disciples, was a crucial part of this project. For this reason, the pietist disciple could identify his individual quest for illumination as an integral part of the original mission of the people.

The fusion of pietism and philosophy, exhibited in this letter and in other documents from the period, may go some way in determining the nature of the prophetic illumination sought and cultivated by the pietists. On more than one occasion, Abraham Maimonides alluded to his father's doctrine of intellectual illumination at key moments of his exposition of the prophetic encounter, intimating that the two doctrines, for all of their apparent differences, were in Abraham's eyes one and the same. He explicitly identified the glimpse of the divine essence (*lamḥ wujūdihi al-ʿaẓīm*)—the culmination of the pietist path—with the knowledge of God discussed by his father in the *Guide*.[115] The illumination attained by the souls of the righteous in the world to come and already glimpsed, if only partially, in this world is identified by Abraham with his father's doctrine of intellectual attainment.[116] Yet Abraham's embrace of his father's philosophical doctrine was tempered by a concern for its impact on the pietist faithful, for whom the well-worn way of the prophets and saints offered more assurance of safe passage.

> There are two paths leading (*al-muwaṣṣilah*) to this exalted perfection. One of them is long and arduous, filled with numerous and highly perilous pitfalls, while the other is more accessible, less arduous, and free from peril . . . The long, arduous, and perilous path is the path of philosophy. This is the path of inquiry, investigation, and logical demonstration, and there is no doubt that this path leads to attainment (*ṭarīq al-muwaṣṣil bi-lā shakk*). Yet the reason for it being long, difficult, and perilous, as we have explained, is that one must delve into their views and maybe get caught in their errors concerning the most important doctrines, [such as] the creation of the world and [divine] knowledge of particulars.[117] Whoever gets caught in this is like someone who went for a stroll and fell into a deep pit leading to his demise. This is similar to what happened to Elisha [b. Abuya], the "other," and his ilk.[118]

[115] See *HW*, II:382, ll. 2–13. Note Maimonides' image of the flashes of light in prophetic illumination and lesser forms of intellectual attainment in his introduction to the *Guide*, ed. Qafiḥ, 6.

[116] See *MH*, 61 and cf. 75 and the Nagid's treatise on rabbinic homilies, *MH*, 89–90.

[117] The perilous philosophical views described here are those of Aristotle. See Maimonides' discussion in the *Guide*, II:15–22, 25, 27–8, and III:17. See also Abraham's cautious acceptance of Aristotle's views not connected with these two pillars of faith in his epistle of rabbinic homilies, *MH*, 86.

[118] II Firk. I.2924, 1a, ll. 3–14, and see the Hebrew translation in Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment," 115. On the fall from grace of Elisha b. Abuya, known in rabbinic literature as

The path of philosophy and that of pietism may ultimately lead to the same end of intellectual illumination, culminating in the perception (or glimpse) of the truth of divinity, but their devotees undergo radically different conditions and obstacles along the way to attainment. Unlike its philosophical counterpart, which is riddled with pitfalls for the unsuspecting seeker, "the path of the prophets and saints [consists in] sound faith, virtuous action, and upright character."[119] As important as the intellectual content of the illumination was to the rationalist pietism of Abraham and his colleagues, it was the practical cultivation of virtues and dispositions, rather than the logical demonstration of first principles, that constituted the heart of the prophetic path.[120]

At the heart of the effort of Egyptian pietism to reconstruct the prophetic path was a delicate synthesis of the individual aspiration for illuminative experience with the collective mission of the religious community as a whole. Perhaps the most original effort to bridge the individual and the collective can be found in the mystical commentary of Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ on the Song of Songs. Here, as we shall see in the following chapter, Sinai was interpreted as a moment of collective solitude as the people prepared themselves for prophetic illumination. The commentator made no attempt to obscure the fact that the prophetic encounter, even amidst the throngs at the foot of the mountain, was at heart a solitary path of inner preparation culminating in a form of individual perfection. The searching lover of the biblical canticle was indeed the individual seeker, longing for a vision of the divine beloved in a world of diversion and distraction. The quest is not to be undertaken lightly and without the prerequisite preparation. But for the seeker who perseveres on the path, following in the footsteps of the generation in the wilderness, the gates of divine illumination remain open now as they were long ago.

> Whoever wishes to pursue the path in the way of the Lord leading to His gate and is granted an opening of the gate will attain a noble overflow (*faiḍan*) from Him, may He be exalted, through which he will behold all that proceeds through the gate. Then he will experience an unveiling (*mukāshafah*) and he will gaze upon

"other" (*aḥer*) on account of his heresy, see esp. BT Ḥagigah 14b–15a, and see G. Stroumsa, "Aḥer: A Gnostic," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. II, ed. B. Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980–1), 808–18, and Y. Liebes, *Elisha's Sin: The Four who Entered the Orchard and the Nature of Talmudic Mysticism* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Academon Press, 1990), 29–51. On the novel approach to the heresy of Elisha in light of the medieval Islamic environment, see S. Stroumsa, "Elisha Ben Abuya and Muslim Heretics in Maimonides' Writings," *MS* 3 (1995), 173–93, and S. Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: A Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 42–9.

[119] II Firk. I.2924, 1a, ll. 20–2.

[120] Maimonides likewise famously emphasized that the philosophical investigations at the heart of the *Guide* were only to be undertaken by one who is sound of body, secure in faith, proficient in the law, and virtuous in moral disposition. See *Guide*, esp. intro. and I:32–35 (including a similar reference to Elisha *aḥer*).

> wondrous mysteries and behold beautiful forms to which he will long to draw near and commune. He will surely dissolve out of love for them and will grieve at their parting. This is what is meant by "the flame of the revolving sword" (Gen. 3:24).[121] The vision of the form and the beauty of what he is given to behold depends on the capacity and strength of the attainment of each individual.[122]

Even with their clear emphasis on individual illumination, pietist writers testified to a sense of the larger mission of their revival in the spiritual life of the people. As we shall see, the importance of the Sinaitic revelation, for many pietists, was its testimony to the original destiny of the people as a whole. Equally important, the biblical narrative records the wish that all Israel attain the rank of prophecy, and foresees a time when the people will return to its original destiny at the end of days. One anonymous pietist commentary captures the perception that the prophetic chain has been broken and that the promise of Sinai, in its original form, remains unfulfilled until messianic times. Only in the final redemption will Israel be restored to its original mission. "Moses ordained that the elite (*al-khawāṣṣ*) of Israel—and, in the days of Moses, all of them were of the elite—be guided toward the path of those who experience proximity to [God], may He be exalted . . . [God] originally intended that all of them become prophets, as it says "You shall be unto Me [a kingdom of priests and a holy nation]" (Ex. 19:6). We have, however, been promised the same [for the future]: "You shall be called priests of the Lord" (Is. 61:6).[123]

A TASTE OF THE WORLD TO COME

Prophetic attainment, as we observed earlier in this chapter, was conceived by the Egyptian pietists—and the philosophical and mystical traditions that set the stage for their prophetic doctrine—as the pinnacle or perfection of human nature. The language of "perfection" (*kamāl*) suggests a fulfillment of natural human capacity, in accordance with Aristotelian teleology. Yet the philosophical tradition articulated by Maimonides and his Muslim predecessors, such as al-Fārābī and ibn Bājjah, insisted that any intellectual perception attained within the confines of a corporeal body was necessarily limited and incomplete. The extent to which Maimonides acknowledged the possibility of

[121] Compare Maimonides' use of this verse in reference to transient illumination, *Guide*, I:49, ed. Qafiḥ, 110.

[122] TS Ar. 1b.7, 2 r, ll. 5–15, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 51. For a similar vision of the opening of the divine gate, see MS Bodleian Or. 661, 12, *recto*, published by Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, n.p., and his translation, Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 90.

[123] TS Ar. 16.60a, ll. 18–19, 25–7, and cf. Fenton, *Treatise of the Pool*, 10.

attaining metaphysical knowledge has been debated among modern scholars, with one camp arguing that the doctrine of negative theology precludes any such knowledge (hence the impossibility of the immortality of the soul, which is contingent upon cognitive conjunction with the active intellect) and the other maintaining that Maimonides did allow for true metaphysical knowledge.[124] A third view posits an intermediary position, whereby cognitive knowledge is indeed unattainable yet a mystical illumination may be experienced in lieu of direct knowledge.[125]

I suggest a more modest reading of Maimonidean epistemology, according to which human beings are capable of metaphysical knowledge within the limits of ordinary mortal cognition (thus allowing us to take Maimonides' significant remarks on the immortality of the soul at face value), yet with the caveat that the full grasp of this knowledge is only attainable after the soul's departure from its bodily fetters. This reading of Maimonides, as we shall see, was apparently the one preferred by his son, Abraham, who similarly considered a full grasp of the divine grandeur to be the privilege of souls in the world to come, while allowing for a perception, or "taste," of this ultimate cognition in this life by the righteous and pious. The general context for Abraham's remarks on the world to come was clearly that of prophetic attainment, although prophecy is not mentioned directly in these passages. While the relevant passages appear in more than one place, some of the more tantalizing among them are found in fragments from the lost final chapter of the *Compendium*, on prophecy. A full contextualization of each passage will only be possible if and when the final chapter is discovered in its entirety.

In his introduction to "Pereq Ḥeleq," Maimonides implicitly described the world to come as an extension of intellectual-prophetic attainment or, more accurately, as its culmination and completion. In so far as prophecy (as Maimonides defined it succinctly in the sixth principle of faith in the same introduction) was conceived as the perfection of intellectual illumination in this life, the knowledge of the divine in the world to come was thus the crown

[124] See Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge," 82–109, and H. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *MS* 3 (1995), 49–103. In her work on the philosophical conception of ultimate felicity, and that of Maimonides in particular, Sara Stroumsa has argued that we need not view these positions as a mutually exclusive binary. In her view, it is entirely possible that the same thinker who expressed optimism at one moment may express skepticism at another, given the daunting challenge of attaining metaphysical knowledge. See S. Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, 164–5.

[125] See A. Altmann, "Das Verhältnis Maimunis zur jüdischen Mystik," *MGWJ* 30 (1936), 305–30, D. Blumenthal, "Maimonides' Intellectualist Mysticism and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. I, ed. D. Blumenthal (Chico, C.A.: Scholars Press, 1984), 51–67, and D. Blumenthal, *Philosophical Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2007), 128–51, and see the remarks of M. Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought*, tr. J. Linsider (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 301–11.

and full realization of the soul's intellectual attainment. It is in this sense that the conjunction of the soul with the intelligibles constitutes for Maimonides the "ultimate end" (*al-ghāyah al-quṣwah*) that is only attainable in the world to come when human nature has been perfected in an individual before death.[126] Seen in this light, the world to come constitutes a state of ultimate metaphysical knowledge, a state which was never, and could never be, fully realized in this life, immersed as it is in physical sensation and bodily appetite. As Maimonides put it toward the end of his "Book of Knowledge," "There is no way for one to attain and know the supreme good of the world to come in this world, for in this world we only know and desire the good of the body . . . "[127] But, as his remarks in the *Guide for the Perplexed* intimate, this worldly veil may serve to obfuscate intellectual vision, yet it does not eliminate it altogether.

> Matter is a great veil preventing the apprehension (*idrāk*) of that which is separate from itself . . . As a result, whenever our intellect seeks to apprehend the deity or one of the intellects, this great veil intervenes between the one and the other. It is alluded to in all the books of the prophets that we are separated from God by a veil and hidden from us by a cloud . . . This is the meaning of the verse, "Clouds and darkness surround Him" (Ps. 97:2) . . . Similarly when it speaks of His manifestation (*tajallīhi*), may He be exalted, "in a thickness of the cloud" (Ex. 19:9), and in "darkness, cloud, and fog" (Deut. 4:11), this was also intended to hint at this meaning. For everything that is apprehended in a vision of prophecy (*yudrak fī mar'eh ha-nevu'ah*) is merely a parable for a certain meaning. And although that great assemblage was greater than any vision of prophecy and beyond any analogy, it also indicated a meaning, namely His manifestation, may He be exalted, "in a thick cloud."[128]

As with many passages in the *Guide*, Maimonides' words in this chapter express two realities simultaneously. The straightforward message is relatively transparent. Matter serves as a barrier or veil to a human intellection of metaphysical truths. Any manifestation of divinity or of the separate intellects by the human mind is necessarily veiled by the coarse matter enshrouding our nature. Yet, itself partly veiled by Maimonides' skeptical epistemology, the reference to divine "manifestation," to a "vision of prophecy," and to the mental "notion" that is the true site of prophetic illumination point to an underlying, albeit subtle, acknowledgment: that some degree of divine manifestation in the form of prophetic mental vision exists for those who have perfected their mortal natures, no matter how enveloped that vision may currently be in "darkness, cloud, and fog." Unlike ordinary intellection, prophecy represents the highest level of perfection attainable by a human being in this life, grasping at least part (through a "thick cloud") of the

[126] See *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Shailat, 368 (*idha ḥaṣala insān kāmil*).
[127] MT, "Laws of Repentance," 8:6.
[128] *Guide*, III:9, ed. Qafiḥ, 474–5.

brilliance of divine truth.[129] It is the partial manifestation of metaphysical knowledge in this life that allows (through the survival of the soul) for the full mental clarity that, according to Maimonides, is finally manifest in the post-mortem mental state known as the world to come.

The pietist doctrine of the world to come remains shrouded in obscurity, although a key to unlocking one of its uses can be found, not surprisingly, in the writings of Abraham Maimonides, who built on the philosophical foundation of his father, while adding a Sufi-inflected emphasis of his own. As with his father, who revealed what he considered "mysteries of the Torah" in that he believed the times demanded a temporary breach of the demand for esotericism ("It is time to act for the Lord"),[130] Abraham invoked the need to reveal the inner meaning of the rabbinic homily on the future vision of the righteous in the Garden of Eden:[131] "It contains a mystery . . . and the mystery is not in accordance with its plain sense. I shall explain it—'It is time to act for the Lord:' The 'circle of the righteous' is a parable for the delight of their souls in the Garden of Eden . . . 'and He stands in the middle of them' is a parable for their knowledge."[132] In a parallel passage in the *Compendium* on the interpretation of rabbinic homilies, Abraham further depicted the pleasure of the world to come with intellectual perception: "The reward of the righteous mentioned as the world to come is their apperception of Him (*idrākuhu*), may He be exalted, which apperception is not possible in this world."[133] Like his father, Abraham identified the pull of earthly matter as the barrier between the soul in this world and full perception.[134]

Yet Abraham was far more explicit than his father in affirming that the soul may still attain a high degree of perception in this life, even if it pales in comparison with the world to come: "Human perfection in this world, *as great as it is*, is quite small in comparison with the complete perfection which it will attain."[135] The reason, as he continues to elaborate, is due not to the prophetic

[129] See *Guide*, II:36, ed. Qafiḥ, 402, and II:38, ed. Qafiḥ, 411. See Gruenwald, "Maimonides' Quest beyond Philosophy and Prophecy," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. J. Kraemer (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 150–2, and my remarks on prophecy and perfection above.

[130] See his introduction to the *Guide*, Part I (Pines tr., I:16).

[131] For the rabbinic teaching in question, on the vision of the righteous in Eden, see the concluding passage in BT Ta'anit 31a.

[132] *MH*, 75, the end of Abraham's epistle on the alleged burning of his father's books, and cf. *MH*, 61. For the pleasure of the mind in the world to come, see Maimonides' remarks in his introduction to Pereq Ḥeleq, in *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Shailat, 365–6, and MT, "Laws of Repentance," 8:6–7. It is intriguing that one of the verses cited by Abraham Maimonides on the spiritual delight of the world to come was Ps. 19:11: "[Its words are] sweeter than honey and from the drippings of the honeycomb" (*ve-nofet ṣufim*). Was this a literary echo of the Arabic *ṣūfī*, the primary spiritual model for the pietist revival?

[133] AIU II.A.1, 1 *verso*, ll. 15–17, and cf. the Hebrew translation of this passage, based on Bodl. Opp. 585, in *MH*, 89.

[134] See, e.g., *HW*, II:54, l. 1.

[135] *HW*, 52, ll. 1–2 (emphasis mine).

perception itself but to its duration on account of hunger, fatigue, and other biological functions.[136] The very same language used for the "apperception" of the soul in the world to come (*idrāk*) is applied to the prophetic experience elsewhere in the *Compendium*, suggesting that the soul of the prophet is indeed capable of grasping a measure of the world to come in this life.[137] As with Maimonides, Abraham identified the intellectual form of the divine soul as the means by which a human being "cognizes and apprehends what he apprehends of his Creator."[138]

Implicit in the notion of the survival of the soul in the world to come is the Neoplatonic doctrine of the soul as articulated by Abraham Maimonides, namely its origin as a "noble divine form, cut off from the supernal world," and its ultimate return to its exalted place among the active intellect(s) in proximity to God, described as "the ascent of this form [i.e. the soul] to its source."[139] The nature of the divine soul, and its connection with the body, is depicted as a fundamental mystery of creation. Yet it is the destiny of this human soul to "sublimate itself and ascend and yearn within itself to reach its spiritual, celestial world" (*li-ʿālimihā al-rūḥānī al-malakūtī*).[140] In other words, the ascent of the soul to the spiritual world is a process that must begin with rigorous training in this world.[141] I would suggest that the "spiritual, celestial world," from which the soul is said to originate, is identical with what he elsewhere calls the "world to come," toward which it is meant to return. In a fragmentary passage from the lost final chapter of the *Compendium*, Abraham Maimonides made an explicit connection between the two: "How full of delight is the world to come and all contained within it! Know that the soul (*neshamah*) is a divine light, whose purpose is to sublimate the self (*nafs*) to increasingly higher levels." The *nafs*, he explained, ascends gradually from the nutritive level to the animal level, from which it ascends to the level of humanity and ultimately "to the active intellects, which are the roots of the souls and the source of the sciences and the virtues, and which are in proximity to their Lord." The mission of each soul emanating from the celestial realm is thus to sublimate itself back to the rank of the angels (i.e. active intellects), and in this manner to demonstrate "the nobility of their world in contrast with the lowliness of this world."[142]

[136] See *HW*, ll. 3–6.

[137] For the language of *idrāk* in the context of prophecy, see *HW*, II:382, ll. 2–13, esp. 7.

[138] See *HW*, 224, ll. 19–20.

[139] See *HW*, ll. 8–9 and 20–1. The terminology for the soul is not entirely consistent, with *nafs* (and its equivalent, *nefesh*) and *neshamah* serving as overlapping terms for the divine element in the human being. See the proof texts in *HW*, II:224, ll. 11–13, and 330, ll. 16–18.

[140] See *HW*, 306, ll. 15–17.

[141] Abraham distinguished between scientific studies (*ishtighālāt*) and moral and religious disciplines (*riyāḍāt*), *HW*, ll. 18–19.

[142] II Firk. I.2926, 1, *recto*, ll. 1–9, translated into Hebrew by Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment of R. Abraham Maimonides," 118.

There is little doubt that Abraham, even more than his father, acknowledged the possibility of attaining a measure of the "world to come" in this life, albeit brief and incomplete. We have already seen that Maimonides conceded that the prophet (unlike the mere philosopher) could obtain a "prophetic vision" (*mar'eh ha-nevu'ah*), a glimpse of metaphysical truth "in the thickness of the cloud," that is, through an epistemological veil. But while Maimonides laid the primary intellectual groundwork for Abraham's conception of prophetic perception as a veiled glimpse of the world to come, he was by no means the sole influence. We have already observed the impact of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the descent and ascent of the soul in this regard, which conceived of the soul as in a perpetual state of flux, allowing for an ascent to different levels of consciousness within its earthly abode, beginning with the nutritive and culminating in the purely intellectual, the realm described as the world to come in contrast to this material world. Yet, as we have seen time and again, it was the Sufi tradition that played a key role in the development of Abraham's spiritual worldview and especially his terminology, often in a creative synthesis with Jewish and other motifs. In one notable example, Abraham sought to explain why the Bible at no point promises, let alone describes, the world to come as the reward of the righteous, preferring to speak of the blessings of this world. In the process, he offers a further clue to his conception of the world to come as a perception partially accessible in this life:

> Since, then, the law is for the entire nation, and [since] the hopes of most of them, according to the nature which God, may He be exalted, has implanted within them as an inborn disposition, are tied up with the world and enamored with it—"Not many are wise!" (Job 32:9)—God, may He be exalted, set their reward for obedience in this world, in accordance with their desire . . . [God], therefore, did not describe in his scripture the precise nature of the good of the afterlife (*khair al-ākhirah*), for it is something which most people do not grasp or desire, except one who has tasted something of it or smelled its fragrance in this world (*man dhāqa shay'an minhu au ishtamma rā'iḥatahu fī dār al-dunyā*). These are the ones of whom the sages, of blessed memory, say: "They entered the Garden of Eden in their lives."[143] Such people are extremely rare, as one of them said: "I have seen the elect and they are few."[144]

Like his father, Abraham conceded that the full apprehension of the world to come is "not possible in this world," but left open the possibility that the select few may indeed perceive something of its essence during their lifetimes.[145] At this point, however, language seems to fall short of articulating the mystery of

[143] See *Derekh Ereṣ Zuta*, 1:18, *Masekhet Kallah Rabbati*, ch. 3 *ad fin.*, and cf. *Yalkut Shimʿoni*, no. 367 (Ezek. 28).

[144] *HW*, II:274, ll. 9–13, 15–21, citing from BT Sukkah 45b and Sanhedrin 96b.

[145] See AIU II.A.1, 1 *verso*, ll. 16–17 (*lam yumkin*). Note that the addition of "in no way" (*be-shum panim*) in the printed Hebrew edition is not in the Judaeo-Arabic original. See *MH*, 89.

this otherworldly knowledge. While the experience is most certainly an attachment of the human intellect to the active intellect(s) in that "spiritual, divine realm," the language Abraham reached for to depict this experience is not, strictly speaking, intellectual but sensory. Drawing on a well-known motif in Sufi literature, Abraham depicted the state of knowledge in terms of a "taste" or "smell" of the world to come, much as he earlier spoke of a taste of divine providence for the elect or a taste of the fruit of prostration or mystical prayer for the pious.[146] A similar tendency to describe the mystical experience as direct sensation (taste, smell, and even drinking) can be found in a variety of pietist works from the period, and points to the pervasiveness of the motif.[147] It is in the same vein that we ought to understand the language of light and illumination discussed at length earlier in this chapter. All sensory images, from seeing to tasting, serve to underscore both the directness of the experience and its fundamental untranslatability into ordinary epistemological language.[148]

[146] See *HW*, II:204, l. 14, and *SM*, 131, 133, and 188–9. In *SM*, 133, Abraham concludes his discussion by citing from Ps. 34:9—"Taste and see [that the Lord is Good]."

[147] See, e.g., ENA NSI 10 (laminated 46), *recto*, ll. 12 (*mudhāqāt wa-tanazzuhāt*) and 13–14 (*fa-yashrab min 'ayn al-ḥayāt*), published by Fenton, "A Pietist Letter from the Genizah," 162, and II Firk. II.1223, fol. 59–60 (*mudhāqāt rūḥānīyah*), noted in P. Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Perfection, Providence and Prophecy from the Jewish Sufi Circle," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 313–14, and see the composite pietist text published by Fenton, "A Mystical Treatise on Prayer," 147 (second paragraph, third line).

[148] In addition to utilizing the language of "the world to come" (*'olam ha-ba* and *al-ākhirah*) and the "Garden of Eden" to denote the experience of the soul beyond the constraints of this world, Abraham drew on the term "permanence" (*baqā'*), referring to the "state of permanence" (*ḥāl al baqā'*). It is tempting to interpret this as a creative reuse of the classic Sufi concept known by the same name, classically coupled in Sufi literature with the state of "annihilation" (*fanā'*)—the loss of selfhood or individual consciousness in the unity of divinity. This combination of *fanā'* and *baqā'*, derived from their coupling in the Qur'an (55:26–7), is attributed in Sufi tradition to Abū Bakr al-Kharrāz (d. 899), on which see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 55. While *fanā'* in the classic Sufi sense (as articulated by Ghazālī in the *Iḥyā*) does feature in a very interesting fragment from the lost final chapter of the *Compendium* (Strasbourg BNU 4110, 61, esp. *verso*, ll. 5–9), it is not found in the extant work of Abraham Maimonides. In TS Misc. 24.152, 1a, *recto*, ll. 11–13, Abraham wrote of *ḥāl al-baqā' ba'd al-mufāraqah*. The choice of *mufāraqah* ("separation" of the soul from the body) instead of *fanā'* indicates that he was indeed referring to the survival of the soul after death rather than a mystical attainment of the world to come in this life. In this usage, Abraham followed the precedent of his father, who wrote in his introduction to Pereq Ḥeleq of the "permanence of the soul with the permanence of its *intellectum*" (*baqā' al-nafs bi-baqā' ma'lūmihā*), and in the *Guide* that "the soul's perception gains strength at the moment of separation (*mufāraqah*) . . . and the intellect remains in that eternal permanence (*dhalik al-baqā' al-dā'im*) . . . " See *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Shailat, 366, and *Guide*, III:51, ed. Qafiḥ, III:685, respectively. In the same fragment (TS Misc. 24.152), Abraham alluded to a fuller discussion later in the same final chapter of the *Compendium*, but we can only speculate as to its contents.

6

From Prophecy to Redemption

Behind the heightened aspirations for prophetic attainment in thirteenth-century Egypt lies a far more fundamental problem. What contemporary purpose, if any, was reserved for prophecy in post-biblical Judaism? Did the talmudic tradition not stipulate that prophecy, once the dominant religious institution of ancient Israel, had ceased to exist once and for all? Talmudic accounts vary widely on the exact termination of prophecy, from the period of Jeremiah to that of Alexander, but all versions concur that divine revelation was a thing of the past well before the destruction of the second Temple.[1] Pietist writers did not attempt to deny such a deeply ingrained tradition, and openly described the cessation of prophecy as a watershed event in the spiritual history of Israel.[2] The approach of Egyptian pietism to this traditional conundrum was twofold. The first, rather technical, solution was to refer to prophetic inspiration not by the classical biblical term (*nevu'ah*) but by a variety of alternative expressions, including the rabbinic (and Hellenistic) concept of the holy spirit (*ruaḥ ha-qodesh*).[3] The second and conceptually more interesting solution was the belief that the cessation of prophecy was not a matter of theological doctrine but a historical accident with tragic consequences. Ongoing revelation was considered the ideal for all times, as much for the guidance of the community as for the perfection of the spiritual elite. Unlike the Islamic tradition, which came to view prophecy after Muḥammad as inimical to its doctrine of scriptural finality, the Hebrew Bible testified to

[1] For a review of these traditions and their significance, see E. E. Urbach, "When Did Prophecy Cease? " (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 17 (1945), 1–11.

[2] See *Perush*, 427–9 (Ex. 28:30), based on BT Yoma 9b and parallels, and cf. MT, "Laws of the Vessels of the Sanctuary," 10:10. See also Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah's *Taqwīm al-adyān*, in II Firk. I.3132, 76, *recto*, ll. 10–11 (note the *lapsus calami* in P. Fenton, "Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭa's *Taqwīm al-Adyān*: New light on the original phase of the Maimonidean controversy," in *Geniza Research after Ninety Years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 75, citing folio 67, *recto*), and *De beatitudine*, 31, ll. 3–4, referring to Malachi as "the seal of the prophets" (*khātimat al-nabiyīn*), alluding to (and deliberately co-opting) the designation attributed to Muḥammad in the Qur'ān, 33:40.

[3] As we have seen, the attainment of the holy spirit had already surfaced as a spiritual ideal in rabbinic literature from at least the second century of the common era. See M Soṭah 9:15.

numerous prophets who arose after Moses, each of whom played a vital role in the spiritual life of the people while affirming the message of the Mosaic law.

The absence of prophecy, according to the pietists, was thus not caused chiefly by a divine decree but was the lamentable result of exile, which detached the people from their source and cast them in alien surroundings.[4] With the loss of their physical and spiritual center, the people gradually lost a firm hold on the tradition and fell prey to myriad foreign influences. This state of affairs was no less true of the crisis of ritual praxis that Abraham worked tirelessly to rectify. In the view of the pietists, prophecy was as vital to Jewish life as prayer or other essential rituals. The restorative vision of the pietists thus looked backward to the original blueprint of the biblical and talmudic canons for spiritual direction. Though much had been lost over the period of the exile, traces of what they considered the prophetic tradition were reconstructed from scattered allusions in sacred writ and stories of the prophets. At the heart of this vision lay the belief that the prophets had established a system of discipleship and training to perpetuate the prophetic tradition for future generations. For Abraham Maimonides and his colleagues, the chief task of those in positions of religious and communal leadership was to restore the legacy of the prophets and early sages to its original state prior to exile.

The challenge for the pietists was not merely to reconstruct the prophetic tradition from the biblical record but to reclaim it as an integral part of the Jewish heritage. As Abraham and a number of his fellow pietists acknowledged, the traditions of the prophets were not altogether lost. Parts of the prophetic path were faithfully preserved, albeit in fragmentary form, in the mystical rites of Islamic Sufism, whose adherents allegedly modeled their movement on accounts of the ancient prophets that circulated in their time.[5] By asserting the Jewish origin of the cardinal rites of Sufi mysticism, the pietists sought to naturalize and integrate key elements of the Sufi tradition in their quest to revive the legacy of biblical prophecy.[6] But unlike the restoration of prostration and other devotional postures, to which Abraham ascribed a Jewish origin while rejecting the very possibility of Islamic influence, Abraham considered the Sufis a valuable resource in his own effort to reconstruct the prophetic tradition.[7] His lament at the Sufi appropriation of

[4] The pietists were not the first to attribute the loss of divine revelation to the conditions of exile. The view of the ultimate restoration of prophecy was commonly accepted among medieval Jewish thinkers. See the discussion in the previous chapter.

[5] In addition to first-hand observation of Sufi rites, attested somewhat enigmatically by Abraham himself, Egyptian pietists had direct access to a wide array of classical Sufi texts, not only in the original but, in some cases, as noted in Chapter 1, transcribed into Hebrew characters and preserved in the Genizah.

[6] On the assertion of original wisdom in medieval Jewish thought, see A. Melamed, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Science and Philosophy* (Hebrew) (Haifa and Jerusalem: University of Haifa Press, Magnes Press, and Hebrew University Press, 2010), esp. 94–157, although the book does not cover Abraham Maimonides and the Egyptian pietists.

[7] See, e.g., *HW*, II:266, ll. 4–10.

the prophetic path is as much a powerful rebuke of his coreligionists for their willful neglect of their own heritage.

> We witness the Sufis of Islam practicing spiritual discipline in restricting their sleep, which they perhaps derive from the sayings of David, "I will give no sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids" (Ps. 132:4), and "I arise at midnight to give thanks to You" (Ps. 119:62), and others like them. It may also be discerned from the report of the messenger, of blessed memory,[8] regarding his seclusion in the mountain with the divine presence: "I lay prostrate before the Lord for those forty days and forty nights" (Deut. 9:25), indicating that he was in the same state both day and night, without sleeping or eating . . . Take note of these marvelous traditions and grieve at how they were transmitted from us (*nuqilat ʿannā*) to another religion and have [all but] disappeared from among us! It is in reference to such things that [our sages], of blessed memory, remarked in their interpretation of the verse, "If you do not heed [God's word], my soul shall weep on account of pride" (Jer. 13:17): "What is the meaning of 'on account of pride'? On account of the pride of Israel that has been taken from them and given to the nations of the world" (cf. BT Ḥagigah 5b).[9]

For each rite practiced among the Sufis, Abraham adduced a corresponding exemplum of the prophets attesting to its antiquity in the Jewish community.[10] The related disciplines of nightly vigils and meditative retreats, which as we know were incorporated into pietist practice, were accorded a measure of legitimacy by being anchored in biblical models. That the "Sufis of Islam" represented the living link to these ancient rites is openly acknowledged, but is the occasion for a two-pronged polemic. The entire Sufi movement, though admirable in itself, is portrayed as a mere subsidiary and faint echo of its biblical predecessor. But the primary target of his polemic was not Sufism but the Jewish faithful, who permitted their prophetic legacy to be appropriated by Islam with little regret. The task facing the pietist leaders was thus deeply paradoxical. They appealed to Jewish pride by exposing the Sufi imitation of the prophetic tradition, while openly turning to the latter as a spiritual model requiring emulation. In this fashion, Egyptian pietism hoped to reclaim the mantel of the prophets from their illegitimate heirs within Islam. Paradoxically, the renewal of Jewish life and the restoration of its spiritual legacy were only conceivable through a deep engagement with the living model of Islamic piety.[11]

[8] The term "messenger," ubiquitous in the Islamic tradition, is common in medieval Judaeo-Arabic literature. For some other examples in the Nagid's writings, see *HW*, II:134, l. 5; 204, l. 2; *SM*, 102; *Teshuvot*, 47, no. 44 (*al-sayyid al-rasūl*).

[9] *HW*, 322, ll. 5–13, 15–20.

[10] David's quasi-prophetic status in the Bible is confirmed and amplified in the Islamic and medieval Judaeo-Arabic tradition. For other examples, see *HW*, II:176, ll. 10–11; 202, l. 7; 278, l. 20; 376, ll. 1–2; *SM*, 127; *Teshuvot*, 17; *Perush*, 187 (Gen. 48:1), and see n. 9 ad loc.

[11] See my "Respectful Rival: Abraham Maimonides on Islam," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, ed. A. Meddeb and B. Stora (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), and the Introduction.

In the final analysis, the renewal of the prophetic path in the religion of Israel cannot be understood apart from the messianic aspirations of the pietist revival, a subject to which we shall return toward the end of the chapter. In its own way, the messianism of Egyptian pietism, while not focused on a charismatic individual or overarching messianic doctrine, must be regarded as more active than passive in nature.[12] The emphasis on religious reform and pietist revival, including the renewal of the ancient prophetic tradition, were conceived of by Abraham Maimonides and his circle as an integral part of the termination of the exile and the dawn of the anticipated redemption. As we shall see, the prophetic thrust of Egyptian pietism was built on clear Maimonidean foundations, even as it transformed them thoroughly in the process. Whereas Maimonides wrote of the *return* of prophecy on the eve of the messianic age, his son sought to promote the *restoration* of prophecy as a harbinger of the redemption. The fact that Maimonides preserved a family tradition on the imminent return of prophecy and even conceded that the prophetic claims of one of his contemporaries, Moses Dar'ī, may be a sign of the return of prophecy in his own day, was no doubt highly significant to Abraham's generation. Yet, while these views certainly contributed to a new wave of messianic and prophetic consciousness in the thirteenth century, they are not in and of themselves sufficient to explain the decisive direction the pietists would ultimately take. The pietist revival was predicated not merely on the renewal of prophetic *experience* but on the restoration of the prophetic *tradition* as a whole, the interruption of which (like the exile itself), was no more than a temporary aberration. Before turning to the messianic underpinnings of Egyptian pietism, we must then assess its conception of the prophetic tradition that served as the vital link between the imagined past and the idealized future.

THE PROPHETIC TRADITION

I. Disciples of the Prophets

Crucial to the pietist revival was the need to establish a direct link between its own activities and the tradition of ancient Israel, enshrined in scriptural and rabbinic lore. This was accomplished in two mutually reinforcing ways. The first was the development of a highly nuanced hermeneutical tradition in

[12] On the difference between active and passive messianism in the Jewish tradition and Maimonidean thought and their connection with more recent developments, see A. Funkenstein, *Maimonides: Nature, History and Messianic Beliefs*, tr. S. Himelstein (Tel-Aviv: Naidat Press Ltd., 1997), 70–81.

which ancient texts on prophecy and the holy spirit were read through the lens of mystical experience, heavily inflected by the technical lexicon of classical Sufism. Closely connected with this was the retelling of archetypal stories of the ancients as a spiritual drama exemplifying the quest for prophetic attainment. The second was the identification of the adherents of the pietist path with a class of people aspiring to prophecy in ancient Israel, known in one biblical source as "the disciples of the prophets" (*bene ha-nevi'im*).[13] This expression, used only minimally by the sages, had already developed an interesting history before its adoption by the pietists. Both Baḥya ibn Paquda and Judah ha-Levi associated this group with a particular spiritual tendency toward increased asceticism that could in principle manifest itself in any generation.[14] For neither author, however, was there an immediate application of the class to contemporary aspirants or a sustained appeal to a particular mode of piety.

An important turning point in the history of the expression comes in Maimonides' discussion of prophecy both in the *Guide* and the code. His use of the concept of prophetic disciples was closely linked to his view of prophecy as the natural culmination of "moral and intellectual perfection." Unless otherwise prevented on account of the divine will, Maimonides asserted that "the natural occurrence is that one who has perfected his disposition and disciplined himself with cultivation and training will prophesy."[15] In the code, Maimonides identified the training for prophetic attainment as a particular mode of intellectual concentration achieved in solitary meditation.[16] In both sources, the group associated with this form of prophetic training is identified with the disciples of the prophets. Significantly, Maimonides did not refer to this group as a historical phenomenon but as a general designation for anyone pursuing divine revelation. He described them as individuals who "are constantly absorbed in preparation,"[17] and who "follow the path of prophecy until they prophesy."[18] With his consistent discussion of the path leading

[13] For this expression, see esp. II Kings, 2, 4–6, and 9. For the rabbinic use of the expression, see Sifre Devarim, va-Eṭḥanan, no. 34, ed. Finkelstein, 61.

[14] See Baḥya, *al-Hidājah ilā Farā'iḍ al-Qulūb des Bachja ibn Jōsēf ibn Paqūda aus Andalusien*, ed. A. S. Yahuda (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1912), 9:7, 374, and ha-Levi, *Kitāb al-radd wa'l-dalīl fī'l-dīn al-dhalīl*, ed. D. Z. Baneth (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), III:1, 90–1.

[15] *Guide*, II:32, ed. Qafiḥ, 393. On the difference between Maimonides' naturalistic approach to prophecy and the theory of divine grace (*donum dei*) advanced by Aquinas, see A. Altmann, "Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas: Natural or Divine Prophecy?," *AJS Review* 3 (1978), 1–19.

[16] See MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 7:4: "they concentrate their minds . . . in isolation" (*mekhavenim da'atam . . . u-mitbodedim*). Note the contrast with ha-Levi's emphasis on the communal training of the disciples of the prophets in *Kuzari*, III:1 (*lā mutafarridīn bi'l-jumlah*), ed. Baneth, 90.

[17] See *Guide*, II:32, ed. Qafiḥ, 393 (*bene ha-nevi'im mushtaghilīn dā'iman bi'l-tahayyu'*).

[18] MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 7:4 (*mehalekhin be-derekh ha-nevu'ah 'ad she-yenabb'u*). Maimonides' language of those who pursue the path of prophecy (*mitnabe'im* and *mevaqeshim le-hitnabe*) is an important departure from his initial language of divine agency (*ha-el menabbe et bene ha-adam*). The shift toward a reflexive human language reflects

toward revelation and the training of the disciples of the prophets, Maimonides not only laid the groundwork for a new spiritual ideal but established the designation that was to take center stage in the following generation.

From the earliest years of the movement, the Egyptian pietists appropriated Maimonides' doctrine of prophetic illumination as the culmination of the spiritual and intellectual path, and infused his words with practical significance. The object of the quest was clearly articulated in terms of divine revelation and was integrated into a highly developed regimen of training and discipleship. On occasion, pietist writers described the inner illumination resulting from their spiritual exercises, a revelation of divine mysteries that some in the movement believed constituted a renewal of prophecy in their day. The pursuit of inner illumination was conceived of, first and foremost, as the revival of the prophetic tradition and of the ideal represented by the ancient disciples of the prophets. The latter were frequently invoked as a model and inspiration for contemporary seekers. The pietist and traditionalist, Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah, with whom Abraham found himself at odds, described the practices of "the pietists and students of the prophets," such as solitary retreats in pursuit of inner illumination (*istinār*), as a familiar sight to any observer.[19] Abraham, in turn, enjoined his fellow pietists to pursue the same preparatory paths as the disciples of the prophets of old, as if to make themselves disciples of the disciples.[20]

While singling out the spiritual elect, who strive to walk in the footsteps of the prophets and their disciples, Abraham was careful to emphasize that such a path must coincide with a dedication to the law in all its aspects. In his final chapter of the *Compendium*, devoted to prophetic illumination which is the culmination of the path, Abraham made this point abundantly clear: "Anyone who strives to attain the end that is the object of [his path] (*al-wuṣūl al-maqṣūd*), must necessarily occupy oneself with the study and practice of the commandments—the occupation of the pietists and men of stature—and the knowledge of the purposes of the commandments (*maʿrifat ghāyāt al-miṣvot*) and the inner purposes of the law and a firm grasp of its principles and applications, for this is the elevated path traversed by the disciples of the prophets and those who are like them" (*al-maslak al-rafīʿ alladhī salakahu bene ha-nevi'im wa-naḥwahum*).[21] The same theme with which he ended his

Maimonides' notion of the relationship between the source of the divine overflow and its recipient. The active intellect is described as constantly overflowing in relation to that which has prepared itself to receive it (*fiʿluhu dā'im kullamā tahayya'a shai' qabila dhalik al-fiʿl*). It is precisely in this sense that God is said to cause his knowledge to overflow to the prophets (*afāḍa ʿilmahu ʿalā al-anbiyā'*). See *Guide*, II:12, ed. Qafiḥ, 303.

[19] See II Firk. I.3132, 69a, l. 8 (*al-ḥasidim wa-talmide ha-nevi'im*).

[20] See *HW*, II:322, l. 20 to 324, l. 3.

[21] See II Firk. I.2924, 2b, ll. 11–16, and see the Hebrew translation of P. Fenton, "The Doctrine of Attachment of R. Abraham Maimonides: Fragments from the Lost Section of *The Sufficient [Guide] for the Servants of God*" (Hebrew), *Daʿat* 50 (2003), 117.

work is the very one with which he began the fourth part, devoted to pietist practice. It is likely that the repeated emphasis on practical observance was a reaction to the antinomian element within the nascent pietist movement, which sought the prophetic path outside of the normative structure of the law.[22] Abraham sounded a note of caution to all who aspired to follow the lofty example of the prophets and their disciples, both ancient and modern.

> You who seek to ascend to the level of the elite and to walk in God's elevated paths, the way of the pious of Israel and the disciples of the prophets, who seek the path of divine favor and succor, so as to reach the object of your quest, as [the sages] said, "He who seeks purification is assisted" (cf. BT Shabbat 104a)—maintain the common, outer path, fulfill it, and do not be remiss in your obligation. Only then shall you pursue the special path.[23]

While underscoring their direct link with the prophetic tradition, the designation of the pietists as disciples or followers of the prophets served the additional purpose of avoiding the pitfall—or accusation—of spiritual hubris. By adopting the label of discipleship, they effectively assumed the mantle of the prophets and saints without overtly identifying themselves as such. Even a pious seeker, a mere "beginner in [the course of] training," may therefore be included as one of "the followers of the prophets and saints," and may emulate their ways in order to achieve a state of divine illumination.[24] In the absence of recognized prophets in their own day, the pietists relied on allusions to modes of spiritual discipline recorded of the biblical prophets and rabbinic sages and even the living example of modern-day saints, and proposed to make themselves disciples of the latter.[25] But even at such a remove from the tradition of the ancients, the pietists designated their own saints as modern-day disciples, "wayfarers on the divine path and followers of the prophets."[26]

The cultivation of spiritual discipleship quickly became a centerpiece of the pietist movement and was crucial to their broader aspirations. To identify with

[22] See the discussion of antinomianism in Chapter one.

[23] *HW*, I:146, ll. 15–18. The expression "the way of the pious of Israel and the disciples of the prophets" (*derekh ḥaside yisrael u-vene ha-nevi'im*) was echoed several generations later in the pietist tract of David b. Joshua, Abraham's great-great-grandson, who referred to "the foundation of the path of piety and of the disciples of the prophets and of those who prophesy." See Bodl. MS Hunt. 382, 26b, l. 15 (*aṣl derekh ḥasidut u-vene ha-nevi'im ve-ha-mitnabe'im*), and see Bodl. MS Hunt., 4v, l. 21, and 31a, ll. 8–9, published by Fenton: *Doctor ad Solitudinem et Ductor ad Simplicitatem*, ed. P. Fenton (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1987), 42, 6, and 48, respectively.

[24] See *HW*, II:248, ll. 16–17 (*tubbā' al-anbiyā' wa'l-auliyā'*).

[25] See *HW*, 254, ll. 3–5 and *MH*, 95, in which the path of the sages is equated with the path of the prophets, who likewise had prophetic visions (*ma she-rau be-mar'ot ha-nevuah*), and cf. *MH*, 97–8.

[26] See *HW*, 136, ll. 16–18 (*sālikūn ṭarīqahu wa-tābi'ūn anbiyā'ahu*), and cf. *HW*, 232, l. 11 (*al-tābi'*).

the disciples of the prophets went far beyond the mere emulation of the ancients. At its core was the desire to restore the ancient model as a living institution and perpetuate it in the community. Such a goal presumed that the disciples of today were to become the spiritual mentors of the next generation. While the path itself was fundamentally a private one, cultivated in moments of solitude and often in the dark of night, it was concentrated around fellowship circles under a recognized master, an institution known to Sufis and pietists alike by the term *ṣuḥbah*.[27] The practice of spiritual discipleship was envisioned as a re-enactment of the ancient institution cultivated, then as now, for the sake of prophetic attainment, a state designated by Abraham as arrival (*wuṣūl*).[28] A spiritual seeker, described as a wayfarer on the path, must first become a disciple and attach themselves to "one who has arrived" (*wāṣil*), on the model of the disciples of the prophets, who attached themselves to the prophets for instruction.

> Whoever travels the path without a guide will experience difficulties and encounter obstacles in his quest for attainment. Such a person will ultimately deviate from the path or else come to believe that he has reached attainment when he has not, as occurs with many false prophets. But with the guidance of a master who has reached attainment, a seeker who is worthy and is a good disciple will reach attainment.[29]

Abraham's account, as in so many cases, shifts seamlessly between the prophets, their disciples, and the contemporary seeker. The fusion of ancient Jewish models with current practice was as natural as it was necessary. The system of prophetic discipleship, the initial inspiration for the very notion of a prophetic tradition, became the mechanism of its own restoration. From the outset, pietist disciples turned not only to scriptural models but cultivated living mentors who had already undergone a process of inner training and had "emerged unscathed from its dangers and reached its ultimate attainment."[30] The master determined the particular course of spiritual training appropriate for each disciple in accordance with his temperament and capacity.

The emulation of the ancient prophets thus took on two dimensions. The practical regimen of ascetic withdrawal and solitary devotion was conceived as the spiritual successor to what Maimonides and Abraham each designated "the path [leading to] prophecy."[31] But equally important to the movement was the restoration of the very model of discipleship established to perpetuate

[27] On the role of the pietist fellowship, see Chapters one and two, especially p. 94 and n. 23.
[28] On this key term, see my discussion of prophecy and human perfection in Chapter five.
[29] *HW*, II:422, ll. 16–21. [30] See *HW*, 326, ll. 10–11.
[31] See MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 7:4 (*derekh ha-nevu'ah*), and cf. 7:6, and *Perush*, 325 (Ex. 20:17: *maslak al-nubūwah*).

the prophetic tradition for future generations. The "arrival" described by Abraham and his colleagues was conceived as a form of mystical illumination, a state which pietist devotees could only hope to reach after extensive training under the direction of "one who has arrived." While not explicitly equating arrival, or attainment, with biblical prophecy, Abraham drew attention to the fact that the corruption of this exalted state—by those who set out upon the hazardous path alone, without the aid of an experienced guide—is nothing short of the false prophecy of which the Bible repeatedly cautioned.[32]

II. The Sinaitic Tradition

The central drama at the heart of the medieval Jewish speculation on prophecy was the scriptural account of the theophany at Sinai. As prophecy was increasingly interpreted not only as a divine utterance but as a mark of intellectual and spiritual perfection, interest in the Sinaitic narrative shifted from the theological event itself toward the collective experience and prophetic vision of the people.[33] But what served as philosophical fodder for earlier thinkers was of far more than theoretical interest to the pietists. There is an awareness of the theological conundrum of divine speech or the spectacle of a visible theophany, but the overriding concern was practical in nature.[34] The question was not so much what transpired at Sinai but what lessons of inner preparation leading to prophetic attainment may be drawn from the experience of the people at the mountain. The hermeneutical key to the pietist reading of scripture is the inner drama of the spiritual quest, reflected as much in the collective experience of the Israelites in the wilderness as in the stories of individual prophets. The first task of the interpreter was to recognize the signs and stages of the inner life within the outer contours of scripture.

In the hands of pietist interpreters, the wandering tribes came to represent a fellowship of disciples, each at a different point along the path and, as a result, capable of a different reception of the divine overflow. Taking their cue as much from Maimonides as from talmudic and midrashic tradition, the pietists maintained a spiritual hierarchy among the Israelites that allowed for multiple

[32] See Deut. 13: 2–6 and 18:20–2; Jer. esp. 14:14–18, 23:15–40, 27:9–18, 21, and 29:8–9. See also MT, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 9:2–3, and 10:1–2.

[33] This was especially the case with ha-Levi and Maimonides. See D. Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's* Kuzari (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 35–40, 93–5, 139–45, and H. Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 100–1, 192–3, 23–9.

[34] For the Saadyanic tradition of created light and speech in the Nagid's writings, see *Perush*, 281 (Ex. 16:7) and 309 (Ex. 19:19), and see the same in Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah's *Taqwīm*, II Firk, I.3132, 51a and 52a.

levels of attainment.[35] Every aspect of their experience in the wilderness, including the very length of its duration, was interpreted as part of the inner discipline by which the people were prepared for the moment of prophecy.[36] Seen in this light, even hunger and thirst became vehicles of spiritual growth and foreshadowed the practice of daily fasting adopted by the pietists in their day.[37] The ascetic discipline was established by Moses in order to bring the generation of the wilderness to a state of perfection understood as a readiness for prophetic attainment.[38] In an interesting exegetical move, the pietists adopted a key Sufi term designating a mystical state or station (*maqām*) for the communal witness of the divine revelation at Sinai. The term served a double purpose by casting the image of the people standing at the mountain in terms of the private state of inner illumination and meaning, quite literally, standing before God.[39]

The heightened interest in the revelation at Sinai took on new urgency in pietist spirituality. More than a model of mystical experience, Sinai was the paradigmatic moment of the divine directive to the people as a whole. According to ibn Abi'l-Rabīʿ, whose teaching and writing were crucial to the early development of the movement, the Sinaitic injunctions came in two

[35] See *Perush*, 309 (Ex. 19:16): "'All the people trembled': in the state of all who prophecy . . . for they all strove to become prophets" (*li-an kulluhum tanabba'ū*). On the differing ranks of prophecy at Sinai, see *Perush*, 283–5 (Ex. 16:11–12), 315 (Ex. 20:1), 325 (Ex. 20:18), 445 (Ex. 30:42), and compare ibn Abī'l-Rabī"s interpretation recorded by Abraham, *Perush*, 379 (Ex. 24:10). On the different ranks of prophecy in general, see *Perush*, 177 (Gen. 46:1), 195 (Gen. 49:1), 247 (Ex. 7:1), and cf. *Guide*, II:45. See also P. Fenton, "Mystical Treatise on Perfection, Providence and Prophecy from the Jewish Sufi Circle," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 329, 330–1. A different approach was taken by Daniel ibn al-Māshiṭah, who maintained that the people did not exhibit any facilities of prophetic illumination and relied exclusively on the intermediacy of Moses. See II Firk. I.3132, 55a–b.

[36] See *HW*, II:390, l. 20 to 392, l. 4.

[37] See *HW*, II:326, ll. 11–17.

[38] See *Perush*, 463 (Ex. 33:6). As their guide on the prophetic path, Moses continued to pray, even after the sin of the golden calf, that the people attain the rank of prophets. See *Perush*, 455 (Ex. 32:4). On his subsequent prayer that they all attain prophecy, see *Perush*, 477–9 (Ex. 34:9).

[39] For the use of *maqām* (lit. "standing") as a substitute for the Hebrew phrase *maʿamad har sinai* (lit. "standing at Sinai"), see the commentary of ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ to the Song of Songs, TS Ar. 43.108, 1b, ll. 8–9, published by P. Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi," *JSS* 26 (1981), 61, and see *Perush*, 315 (Ex. 20:1); 325 (Ex. 20:15, 17); 383 (Ex. 24:11). The Nagid did occasionally use the Hebrew phrase (*maʿamad har sinai*), such as *Perush*, 231 and 247 (Ex. 4:14 and 7:1 respectively). For *maqām* used for prophetic attainment in general, see *SM*, 279; *Perush*, 229 (Ex. 4:10; 241 (second exhortation); 405 (Ex. 26:30); 473 (Ex. 34:2–3); 477 (Ex. 34:8–9). On the double valence of the pietist use of *maqām*, which was already used by Maimonides himself both for the individual state of prophecy and for the revelation at Sinai in *Guide*, III:51, and elsewhere, see B. Septimus, "*Maʿamad Har Sinai* and other *Maʿamadot*," in *Shaʿare Lashon: Studies in Hebrew, Aramaic and Jewish Languages Presented to Moshe Bar-Asher*, ed. A. Maman et al. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), 19–21. This evidence may serve as a sufficient response to the remarks of G. Cohen, "The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni," *PAAJR* 35 (1967–8), 84, n. 24.

forms. The first was reflected in the outer system of law that remained the bedrock of the religious community. The second, also directed at the people as a whole, was the mandate to preserve and transmit the form of divine revelation modeled by the collective experience at the mountain. Each generation was expected to pass on not only the written record but also the oral tradition of this collective experience as a spiritual heritage alongside the outer structure of the law. The Sinaitic revelation thus provided not only a historical model, but a framework of obligation in order to perpetuate the prophetic tradition. For the pietists, the scriptural witness—along with vestiges of the prophetic path preserved by the Sufis—was all that remained to reconstruct the people's prophetic beginnings. Yet scripture continued to call anew to each generation to reassert its spiritual patrimony. In an oblique rebuke to his coreligionists for having abandoned this heritage, Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī' spoke of the double injunction originating at Sinai.

> Proximity to Him, may He be exalted, consists of many levels, the highest of which is the proximity of revelation (*tajallī*), the state of unveiling, and of witnessing, with its delights and divine gifts to whomever he singles out for it. The standing at Sinai was Israel's state of unveiling and the first of its states . . . "For what nation [is so great] as to have its God so near . . . and what nation is so great as to have such righteous statutes and laws . . . " (Deut. 4:7–8)?[40] The first meaning grasped by spiritual intuition is the proximity of revelation and the unveiling of outer and inner visions and illumination.[41] The second [verse refers] to the giving of the statutes and laws . . . Preserve both of these noble doctrines and practice them, the first of which is the state of unveiling and revelation through . . . preparation and sanctification, the path of divine attainment which I have explained to you for your benefit and the purifications which I have entrusted to you, by which you may ascend to that state.[42] So bequeath and teach them to your descendants so that they will be an inheritance that will never be severed, such that your descendants will transmit the wayfaring path (*ṭarīq al-sulūk*) received from their ancestors . . . [43]

In the prophetic doctrine of Abraham ibn Abī'l-Rabī', divine revelation was not merely the mechanism for giving the law but the culmination of a path of preparation and sanctification.

According to his interpretation of the days of separation leading up to the revelation, the people prepared themselves for the experience with an extensive

[40] The words "is so great" are part of the original, but were omitted in Abraham the Pious' citation.

[41] The verb translated as "grasped by spiritual intuition" is *yudhāq*, based on the Sufi concept of spiritual taste, on which see e.g. p. 111, n. 111.

[42] Here again ibn Abī'l-Rabī' referred to "that state" (*dhalik al-maqām*), alluding to the state of unveiling first experienced by the people at Sinai.

[43] TS Ar. 43.108, 1b, ll. 4–9; 2a, ll. 10–15; 3a, ll. 11–15, 17; 3b, ll. 1–4; published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 61–2.

process of solitary meditation and a gradual withdrawal from all food and water. "The entire holy congregation, according to their various levels [of attainment] . . . were isolated unto Him, may He be exalted, during that period of solitude which they experienced at the holy mountain, until they reached the perfection of proximity and worship which they sought . . ."[44] In a remarkable rereading of the biblical narrative, ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ imagined an entire community isolated in individual cells or otherwise withdrawn in meditation for the sake of prophetic illumination. Even when experienced as a community, the form and result of what he called the "state of unveiling" (*al-maqām al-kashfī*) remained utterly private in nature. But the prophetic path, while undertaken by individuals within the community, was to be transmitted to the people as the ultimate aspiration of Torah, as it once had been at the foot of the mountain. As he put it elsewhere, the mystical knowledge imparted from divine illumination is "the most perfect of all forms of knowledge and is the prophetic knowledge which was intended for Israel."[45]

The exegetical position adopted by ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ on the Sinaitic revelation was amplified by Abraham Maimonides in his own commentary. There again, we find the theme of communal sanctification achieved through a form of outer and inner solitude. The people strove for a state of inner sanctification, described as a purification and a focusing of the mind in anticipation of what he, like his colleague, called prophetic perfection. The path to prophecy is likewise achieved through the practice of inner solitude even in the midst of the entire congregation. So it was at Sinai, and so it was ordained for future generations. In his interpretation of the enigmatic words of Moses following the Decalogue that "God came but to test you" (Ex. 20:17),[46] Abraham commented that the divine test could either refer to an actual trial or to the means by which the people were "tested," or readied, for prophecy. "If the meaning is a training, then the intention is to train you in the path of prophecy (*maslak al-nubūwah*) and its means [of attainment], in order for those of your

[44] This interpretation of ibn Abī'l-Rabīʿ was preserved in its entirety by Abraham Maimonides in his own commentary on Exodus. See *Perush*, 379. The three days of separation in preparation for the revelation appear in Ex. 19:14–15.

[45] See TS Ar. 46.71, 1b, ll. 11–12, and 2a, l. 1, published by Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments," 63 (*wa-hiya al-maʿrifah al-nabawīyah wa-hiya al-maqṣūdah li-yisrael*). As Gerald Blidstein has observed, Maimonides, too, appears to have viewed a prophetic chain of tradition as part and parcel of the inheritance of Torah received at Sinai. See G. Blidstein, "The Institutionalization of Prophecy in the Legal Teaching of Maimonides" (Hebrew), in *Maimonides in Daʿat: A Collection of Maimonidean Studies* (Hebrew and English) (Ramat Gan: University of Bar Ilan Press, 2004), 95: "It follows that the wisdom of the Torah and the prophetic attainment were given at one and the same time to Israel, and both traditions stem from the fact that Moses passed it on to Joshua."

[46] The biblical narrative puts the reaction of the people after the Decalogue. According to rabbinic interpretation, the congregation witnessed the first two commandments directly and then asked Moses to serve as prophetic intermediary on their behalf. See Ex. 20:14–17 and BT Makkot 23b–24a and parallels.

descendants who have reached perfection to attain prophecy similar to that which you have attained."[47]

Seen in this light, the revelation at Sinai was far more than a historical event, marking the site of a divine revelation in the distant past. It was, in the hands of the pietists, a living model for future generations of seekers, wayfarers on the path of prophetic attainment, to claim as their own. Remarkably, the pietists did not consider the original Sinaitic theophany itself, which produced the holy scriptures—not to be annulled or (in the language of Muslim-Jewish polemics) abrogated for all time[48]—a sufficient reason why the event was recorded in so much detail in the Bible. Alongside the actual content of the Sinaitic revelation was the imperative to transmit the experience that produced it among the people (apart from what was experienced by Moses), in the expectation that it would lead to new revelations among their descendants and disciples, from one generation to the next in an unbroken chain of prophetic tradition.[49] After generations of neglect in the long exile, it was now the duty of those seekers of the present generation to reconstruct and restore the sacred inheritance to its rightful place within the prophetic community. By the very act of restoring exilic Judaism to its ancient luster by undoing generations of neglect, the pietists imagined themselves to be the vanguard that would witness an end to the exile as they knew it and help usher in the long-awaited redemption.

FROM PROPHECY TO REDEMPTION

The revival of the original spiritual mission of Israel was, according to a number of pietist sources from the period, a vital step in the unfolding of the final messianic redemption. The physical and spiritual depravity of Israel in exile, it was believed, constituted the primary impediment of the people in its realization of its historical destiny. The ascent of the nation of Ishmael over its ancient rival, a reversal of the divine blessing from its rightful heir, was a source of lament and a sign of the exile. The ultimate redemption of Israel was

[47] *Perush*, 325 (Ex. 20:17).

[48] On the polemic over abrogation (*naskh*), see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), esp. 35–41, and see the survey of Muslim–Jewish polemics by M. Perlmann, ed., "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, M.A.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 103–29.

[49] The prevailing view was that prophecy was intended for the entire community and is destined to once more return to the people. See TS Ar. 18(1).179b and TS Ar. 16.60a, discussed below and see P. Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqala al-Hawdiyya* (London: The Octagon Press, 1981), 9–10.

expected to restore the original hierarchy, with temporal and spiritual dominion returning to the covenantal community.[50] But, for the pietists, Israel's relationship with Islam was not altogether without eschatological purpose, even in its present condition. In this view, Islam was itself the recipient of a divine blessing as the propagator of pure monotheism throughout the world.[51] While Islam, according to Abraham Maimonides, may have borrowed the fundamentals of its faith from its Jewish predecessor, it was evident that Islam continued to exert a salutary influence over the Jews of its realm and that, ironically, provided the spiritual model through which the exiled community could hope to reestablish and re-exert its religious mission in the world.[52]

The messianic aspiration of Egyptian pietism, unlike the messianic fervor of the preceding century, never exhibited itself in explicit declarations of the messiah's arrival or in individual pretentions as to the identity of the messiah.[53] Nor, as has been suggested, did the rhetoric of redemption among the

[50] See *Perush*, 79 (Gen. 27:29), and cf. *Perush*, 303 (Ex. 19:6) and *SM*, 152, and see my "Respectful Rival," 860–2.

[51] See *Perush*, 43–5 (Gen. 21:13), and see my note in "Respectful Rival," 863, n. 31. See the analysis of Abraham's relatively positive approach to Ishmael and to Muslims more generally in N. Ilan, "Hagar and Ishmael in the Commentary of Abraham Maimonides and in the Midrash *Or ha-Afelah:* Two Positive Attitudes toward Muslims" (Hebrew), in *Jewish Culture in the Eye of the Storm: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Joseph Aḥituv* (Hebrew), ed. A. Sagi and N. Ilan (En Zurim: United Kibbutz and Jacob Herzog Center, 2002), 308–12, and see also A. Kosman, "Giving Birth between the Horizontal and the Vertical: The Sarah-Hagar Narrative and its Impact on the Medieval Jewish Attitude to Islam," in *"Im vollen Licht der Geschichte": Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung*, ed. D. Hartwig et al. (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2008), esp. 272–7. As M. A. Friedman noted in "A Note on Abraham Maimonides' Commentary to the Torah" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 114 (1994), 103, and in *Maimonides, the Yemenite Messiah, and Apostasy* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002), 99–100, Maimonides' reading of the Ishmael verse had a notably different reading, emphasizing the physical, rather than spiritual blessing. See *Iggeret Teman*, ed. Halkin, 40–2. Maimonides nevertheless reserved a role for Christianity and Islam in the ultimate redemption of Israel, as is clear from the uncensored version of MT, "Laws of Kings and Wars," 11:4. For a thorough study of Maimonidean messianism and eschatology, see Friedman, *Maimonides, the Yemenite Messiah*, esp. 50–83, Hartman's discussion in A. S. Halkin and D. Hartman, *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), 171–200, and see the bibliographical survey in J. Dienstag, *Eschatology in Maimonidean Thought: Messianism, Resurrection and the World to Come* (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1983), xiii–cxx.

[52] See my comments in the Introduction.

[53] Brief messianic excitement seized Egypt *c.*1180 under Yaḥyah (Zuṭa) Sar Shalom. Maimonides' public opposition to this imposter was celebrated in a short chronicle known as "The Scroll of Zuṭa," published by A. Neubauer, "Egyptian Fragments: מגילות, Scrolls Analogous to that of Purim, with an Appendix on the First נגידים," *JQR*, o.s. 8 (1896), 544–51, and see Friedman, *Maimonides*, 23 and 151. On a messianic movement in Baghdad earlier in the century, see Bodl. MS Heb. f 56.13b–19a, published by S. D. Goitein, "A Report on Messianic Troubles in Baghdad in 1120–1," *JQR* 43 (1952), 57–76, and by M. Gil, *In the Kingdom of Ishmael* (Hebrew), 4 vol. (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1997), II:228–34, no. 87, and see Gil, "Messianism and its Crisis in Twelfth-Century Baghdad" (Hebrew), in *Between History and Literature: Studies in Honor of Isaac Barzilay*, ed. S. Nash (Tel Aviv: ha-Ḳibuts ha-meʾuḥad, 1997), 55–73. For a good overview of Jewish messianic unrest in the twelfth century, see Friedman, *Maimonides*, 15–23.

pietists assume a political character, with the explicit or implicit aim of asserting a position of Jewish power over the community's quondam Muslim overlords.[54] The thrust of the movement lay not in public declarations of imminent salvation but in the call to inner purification and spiritual renewal as prerequisites for redemption. What gave this messianism a sense of urgency was the belief that the restoration was at hand if the community were to undertake sincere repentance. The communal enactments that came to define Abraham's career should be viewed in part as laying the foundation for the spiritual transformation that would usher in the messianic era. The communal reform took two directions, the first aimed at the restoration of prophecy among "the remnant whom the Lord calls" and the other at a complete renewal of religious life among the people at large. While the prophetic revival of the pietists was viewed as a harbinger of the future redemption and could, it was hoped, stimulate greater piety in the broader community, it could not hasten the messianic era alone.

Behind the heightened expectation of redemption in the early thirteenth century was a series of pronouncements by Maimonides to the effect that the

Note also Samau'al al-Maghribī's mockery of Jewish messianic longings in M. Perlmann, ed., *Samau'al al-Maghribī: Ifḥām al-Yahūd, Silencing the Jews* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1964), 72–4, and see the references in G. Cohen, "Soteriology" (part II), 52, n. 148.

[54] The suggestion that the messianism of the pietists had "an overtly political goal since it would mean an end to Islamic rule and the beginning of a new Jewish state" was made by Nate Hofer in his recent dissertation, on thirteenth-century "Sufism, State, and Society in Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1309," Dissertation, Emory University, 2011, 20–21. Hofer, moreover, argued that Egyptian pietism should be understood as a form of "subaltern Sufism," in so far as it reflects the desire of a group outside the current religio-political hegemonic structure to assert itself and upend that very structure. Hofer suggested that the Jewish adoption of Sufi institutional models was "for a revolutionary end," including "the liberation of the people of Israel from foreign rule," and that Egyptian pietism was therefore motivated by a desire "to create an organized messianic movement" that would signal the beginning of Jewish political domination over Islam. In light of this approach, Hofer argued that "[Abraham Maimonides'] overarching project was to organize the [pietist] movement into a more unified collectivity for the purpose of political emancipation." Hofer views the political aspirations of pietist messianism as not limited to the land of Israel, or even Egypt, but global in scope: "The Pietists were careful and deliberate thinkers and writers who attempted to create what they saw as a better world in which Jews would be politically sovereign." See Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society," 220, 222, 225, respectively. Given that such a global, or even a local, political messianic movement is nowhere alluded to in the pietist sources, Hofer suggests that it should be understood as "the 'hidden transcript' of the *Kifāya* and the Pietist movement as a whole," alluding to the postcolonial theory of subaltern political aspirations functioning as "hidden transcripts," or critiques of the current power structure. See Hofer, "Sufism, State, and Society," 277, and cf. 224, n. 25. As I argue later in this chapter, Abraham Maimonides did envision a reversal of the spiritual and temporal hierarchy between the children of Isaac and the children of Ishmael, but this messianic vision of the end of the Jewish exile ought not to be exaggerated so as to attribute a revolutionary and political dimension to the pietist movement. If Abraham Maimonides and other pietists imagined a reversal of fortunes in the spiritual destiny of Israel, this should not be misconstrued as a struggle for political emancipation in Egypt or any other land under Islamic rule.

Jewish people were on the eve of the messianic era and were perhaps even living in its early stages. In his commentary on the Mishnah, Maimonides declared that, in anticipation of the messiah, certain defunct religious institutions would be revived and a period of religious renewal would ensue.[55] But in his epistle to the Jews of Yemen, in which he provided strength and solace to the persecuted community, he speculated that the troublesome events of those years were themselves a sign of the imminent redemption: "My heart is weakened, my thoughts confused, and my strength sapped from the terrible calamities and persecution brought upon us at the two ends of the earth, east and west . . . There can be no doubt that these are the birth pangs of the messiah . . . "[56] Later in the epistle, Maimonides listed a number of speculations as to the precise date of the end of the exile, to which he urged great caution. But before taking leave of the subject altogether, Maimonides revealed that he too was privy to a tradition regarding the end time, which he proceeded to relate.

> The exact determination of the date [of redemption] is unknown. But I am in the possession of an extraordinary tradition, which I have received from my father and grandfather and his father and grandfather, of blessed memories, from the beginning of our exile from Jerusalem in Sefarad, as the prophet testified by calling it "the exile of Jerusalem that is in Sefarad" (Obad. 20),[57] contained in the story of Balaam's prophecy, in which there is an allusion to the return of prophecy after its cessation . . . [W]e have a tradition that Balaam's words, "At this time it will be told to Jacob and Israel what God has wrought" (Num. 23:23),[58] contain an inner meaning, that one should count from . . . creation until that time, at which point prophecy will return to Israel and the prophets will say "what God has wrought . . . "[59] According to this estimate, prophecy will return to Israel in the year 4976 since creation.[60] There is no question that the

[55] See Maimonides' commentary on M Sanhedrin 1:3, and the discussion in Friedman, *Maimonides*, 78–80.

[56] *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Halkin, 4, in reference to the religious persecutions perpetrated in Yemen under the Banū Mahdī and in al-Andalus and the Maghreb under the Almohads. For the historical background to the epistle, see Friedman, *Maimonides*, 37–48.

[57] The verse from Obadiah was frequently taken by medieval Iberian Jews to refer to their communities. See *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1986), 548 (no. 293), and see the references in Friedman, *Maimonides*, 67–8.

[58] I have translated the word *ka-'et* (at this time) in accordance with Maimonides' interpretation. The new JPS translation renders the expression "at once."

[59] The messianic calculation is based on the numerical value of the verse in Numbers. On the precise year envisioned by Maimonides as the time of the restoration of prophecy, see Friedman, *Maimonides*, 80–3.

[60] This corresponds to the year 1215/16 in the Christian calendar. For the textual variations as to the precise date in Maimonides' tradition, see Friedman, *Maimonides*, 80–3. It is possible that the original date of this calculation was intended to correspond to the end of the fourth millennium in the year 1240. The history of the tradition is not known beyond the little information given by Maimonides in the epistle. As Kraemer has noted, the tradition was not mentioned by Maimonides' father, R. Maimun, in his Epistle of Consolation, or by Maimonides

> return of prophecy is among the forerunners of the messiah, as it is said, "Afterwards I will pour out [My spirit upon you] and your sons and daughters shall prophesy." (Joel 3:1)[61]

Maimonides famously declared in the *Guide* that the cessation of prophecy among the people was on account of the tribulations of exile.[62] As Mordechai Friedman has recently demonstrated, Maimonides' language in the *Guide* may very well be read to mean that prophecy as a general phenomenon is not possible in the exile, but that individuals may indeed prophesy on the eve of the anticipated redemption.[63] Toward the end of his epistle to Yemen, Maimonides testified to this effect with respect to a well-known pious sage from his father's generation and erstwhile disciple of R. Isaac Migash, Moses Dar'ī, who upon settling in Fez began to preach of the imminent advent of the messiah. He then announced certain predictions of symbolic portents which transpired as he foretold. As Maimonides related, people flocked in large numbers to Moses Dar'ī on account of his predictions and began referring to him as a prophet. At this point in his narration of the episode, Maimonides paused to clarify the legitimacy of such a claim. "This," he acknowledged, "is not impossible from the standpoint of the Torah, according to what I have related to you concerning the return of prophecy before the advent of the messiah."[64] The error of Moses Dar'ī's augurs, according to Maimonides, was not the claim to prophecy, which he acknowledged may be truthful, but his mistaken prediction of the imminent arrival of the messiah, with fateful consequences for his followers.[65]

According to the family tradition related by Maimonides in the epistle, while no fixed date may be given to the redemption proper, one may cautiously determine the date for the restoration of prophecy, a sign and harbinger

himself in his Epistle on Persecution. See J. Kraemer, "On Maimonides' Messianic Posture," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. II, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 119–20, n. 37.

[61] *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Halkin, 80–4.

[62] See *Guide*, II:36, ed. Qafiḥ, 406.

[63] See Friedman, *Maimonides*, 69–70.

[64] *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Halkin, 101–3. It is striking, however, that Maimonides mentions this episode as an example of the possible revival of prophecy in this age after having earlier given a date for the renewal of prophecy for almost a century after Moses Dar'ī's time.

[65] After Dar'ī's messianic augurs did not materialize, he was forced to flee al-Andalus to Crusader-held Palestine. Maimonides continued to marvel at his true predictions—or prophecies, as he called them—until his death in Palestine. See *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Halkin, 102 (*qad wa'ada . . . bi-kull mā ṭariya fī bilād al-maghrab ṣaghīrah wa-kabīrah*), indicating that, for all of the error and danger of the Dar'ī affair, he continued to maintain that his prophecies were true and perhaps were a harbinger of the return of prophecy. On the term *wa'ada bi-* as an expression of prophecy in Judaeo-Arabic literature, see J. Blau, *A Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 771, s.v. *wa'ada*. On Maimonides' view of the messianic time, see A. Ravitzky, "'As Much as is Humanly Possible'—The Messianic Era in Maimonides' Teaching," in *Messianism and Eschatology*, ed. Z. Baraz (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1981), 191–220.

of the messianic era. From this tradition and his statement regarding the possible prophecy of Moses Darʿī, Maimonides most likely believed that he was living in the period of prophetic renewal and the dawn of messianic times.[66] The revelation of such an important family tradition on the return of prophecy, publicized and proudly affirmed by Maimonides in the epistle, puts the prophetic movement cultivated by his son's generation in starker perspective. We have seen the deep imprint of Maimonidean thought throughout the warp and woof of pietist spirituality. The extraordinary revival of the prophetic tradition in the early thirteenth century, with pietists identifying their quest with that of the prophets and their disciples of old, can only be seen as the realization—and institutionalization—of the prophetic renewal predicted by Maimonides.[67]

In light of this background, it is all the more significant that Abraham and his colleagues invested so much writing on the attainment of prophecy and the holy spirit and so little on the ostensibly more pressing question of the messianic era itself. In Abraham's writings, the final redemption was the subject of pious prayer and abiding faith in the divine promise, but without the faintest allusion to the anticipated end.[68] From Maimonides' remarks in the epistle to Yemen and other writings, there were two main reasons for this reticence. The first and most pressing was the danger of raising false hopes among the people, "which lead masses of people astray and fills them with delusions when the foretold time arrives and [the messiah] has not come."[69] From this perspective, sages and leaders bear a special responsibility not to fan vain hopes or encourage speculations that could lead to desperation in the community. The second explanation for the general reticence on the messianic arrival was the belief that the moment was determined not by fixed calculations but according to the state of the people. Only a return to the foundations of religion and sincere repentance could hasten the arrival.

[66] See the contrasting views of Hartman in *Crisis and Leadership*, 190–3, and Friedman, *Maimonides*, 59, n. 48, and on Friedman's review of other skeptical readings of Maimonides' family tradition, Friedman, *Maimonides*, 52–63. It is interesting to note in this context that Maimonides identified the anticipated messiah not merely as the culmination of prophetic revival, but its very embodiment. The messiah, in his view, would himself be filled with the holy spirit (*ruaḥ ha-qodesh*). See MT, "Laws of Kings," 12:3.

[67] According to an early study by Gerson Cohen, it is "almost unthinkable" that Abraham Maimonides should not have been privy to this most important of family traditions. See G. Cohen, "The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni" (part II), 55–6, and see the more recent discussion by P. Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237): Founding a Mystical Dynasty," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, ed. M. Idel and M. Ostow (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 150–1.

[68] See *HW*, II:208, l. 15 to 210, l. 10; 400, l. 17 to 402, l. 1; *Perush*, 193–5 (Gen. 48:21).

[69] See *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Halkin, 62, referring to the curse of R. Yoḥanan in BT Sanhedrin 97b against anyone who speculates on the date of the messianic arrival, and compare his remarks on the dangers of determining the date further in *Epistle to Yemen*, 98–104.

In light of Maimonides' comments in his epistle, it is not surprising that the first indication of messianic fervor in the thirteenth century emerged not from Egypt but from Yemen.[70] There is some indication that Maimonides' prediction of the imminent redemption may have even helped set in motion an activist movement in Yemen hoping to stimulate religious reforms in its own community.[71] On the very year foretold by the Maimonidean family tradition, a series of questions sent by the Jews of Yemen arrived in Fustat for the son of Maimonides. Most of the questions dealt with various legal controversies dividing the Yemenite scholars into two opposing camps, one in favor of religious reform and the other defending local custom, for which they sought Abraham's adjudication.[72] But the last of the thirteen questions sent to Abraham was not legal at all but turned to the theme of the messianic era and its estimated time. The Yemenite scholars asked Abraham for any further information on the messianic arrival and to elaborate on the tradition received from his father. Abraham's brief but pointed response reflects his deep reluctance to encourage messianic speculations.

> With regard to the report of the end time transmitted by my father and teacher, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing, my answer on this matter is that he already related whatever [information] he possessed in his epistle to Yemen, which you have. In his epistle, he said all that needs to be said on this matter. I myself will not transmit anything concerning this subject other than what the Torah states, namely that the [redemption] is contingent upon repentance, as it is said, "When you return unto the Lord your God," etc., "then the Lord your God shall return your captivity," etc. (Deut. 30:2–3). We pray that God, may He be exalted, will straighten our path to [repentance] and will remove the obstacles leading to it, as He promised, "I shall remove the heart of stone from your flesh" etc. (Ezek. 36:26)[73]

[70] There is no indication that the Maimonidean family tradition had any impact outside of Egypt and Yemen. Heschel once speculated that the French émigrés in the early thirteenth century traveled to Palestine in anticipation of the messianic redemption on the authority of this tradition. He further suggested that they traveled via Egypt in order to greet Abraham and inquire into further details of this messianic prediction. See A. J. Heschel, "Did Maimonides Believe that He had Attained Prophecy?" (Hebrew), in *Sefer ha-yovel li-khevod Levi Ginzberg* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 183–4. A recent reformulation of the connection between the Maimonidean family tradition of the arrival of the messianic era and the French immigration to Palestine (in many cases via Egypt), see I. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 272.

[71] See Friedman, *Maimonides*, 187–99. On the possible belief that Maimonides himself may have been the expected redeemer, see Friedman, *Maimonides*, 194, and see I. Yuval, "Moses *redivivus*: Maimonides as a Helper to the King Messiah" (Hebrew), *Zion* 72 (2007), 161–88.

[72] See *Teshuvot*, 107–20, no. 82, and see M. A. Friedman, "An Exchange between a Yemenite Scholar and Abraham Maimonides on the Stipulated Amount of Money in a Ketubbah and on the Authority of Tradition" (Hebrew), *Te'udah* 14 (1998), 139–92, and Friedman, *Maimonides*, op. cit.

[73] *Teshuvot*, 136, no. 94.

Two interesting points emerge from Abraham's condensed and somewhat unceremonious reply. The first is that, while Maimonides viewed prophecy as a harbinger of the redemption, his tradition said nothing whatsoever of the actual arrival of the messiah.[74] From Abraham's response, it is evident that the original question of the Yemenite scholars was concerned not with the return of prophecy per se but with the precise calculation of "the end time" (*al-qeṣ*).[75] All other dates and calculations from the medieval period fixed the "end time" with the arrival of the messiah, and there was no reason to expect the Maimonidean tradition to be any different.[76] But Abraham maintained that the absence of any precise date in the epistle, other than that signaling the onset of a new era of prophecy, was not accidental. No further information was given, he declared, because nothing further may be known other than the necessary preconditions for redemption recorded in scripture.

But behind his disavowal of any additional information concerning the Maimonidean tradition, Abraham suggested that he simply would not transmit anything further on the matter. The language and terseness of his reply suggest a considerable discomfort with the subject altogether. His abrupt refusal to expatiate on the subject, beyond a mere allusion to the biblical promise, is particularly unexpected in a letter to the very community that had turned to his father for solace in the midst of persecution and that had fallen prey, only one generation earlier, to false messianic augurs. The brusque tone of his response strongly suggests that he sought to discourage any further speculation on the matter. But Abraham's caution should not be taken as a sign of indifference. As it happens, the Maimonidean tradition of the end of days surfaces somewhat enigmatically in a Genizah fragment of an otherwise missing chapter from the *Compendium*. As he did on more than one occasion, Abraham lamented the decline of religious knowledge and practice in his generation. Alluding to a rabbinic prediction of a time—not unlike his own—when the religious law would fall into desuetude, he consoled his readers that a similar prediction of great antiquity has been preserved concerning the time of

[74] Maimonides did refer to the return of prophecy as coinciding with the "end time," in so far as the messiah was to come on the heels of its return. See *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Halkin, 80–4.

[75] This term and its plural (*al-qiṣin*) was used by Maimonides throughout the epistle. See, e.g., *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Halkin, 58–60. On this term, see Se'adiah, *Kitāb al-Mukt̲ār fī'l-Imānāt wa'l-I'tiqadāt*, ed. Y. Qāfiḥ (Jerusalem: Ha-Amanīm Press, 1999), VIII.3, 245–6.

[76] See, e.g., Se'adiah, *Imānāt*, VIII.3–VIII.4, and Maimonides' review of early and more recent messianic predictions in his *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Halkin, 58–104. For messianic speculations among the Jews of medieval Christendom, see Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 258–74, and E. Kanarfogel, "Ashkenazi Messianic Calculations from Rashi and his Generation through the Tosafist Period," in A. Grossman and S. Japhet, ed., *Rashi: The Man and His Work* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2009), 381–401.

the awaited redemption, corresponding to a time "when the Torah will be forgotten in Israel" (cf. BT Shabbat 138b).[77]

As Maimonides reminded the Yemenite Jews in his epistle, the family tradition on the return of prophecy was "the most accurate [tradition] of the end time that has come down to us." The authenticity of the tradition was due, in large part, to the fact that it originated not in the fanciful calculations of a single individual but was a continuous tradition from the original exiles of Jerusalem, preserved and transmitted faithfully from one generation to the next among Iberian Jews: "I am in the possession of an extraordinary tradition, which I have received from my father and grandfather . . . from the beginning of our exile from Jerusalem in Sefarad, as the prophet testified by calling it "the exile of Jerusalem that is in Sefarad."[78] Abraham's reference to the tradition of "the sages of the west" (*'ulamā' al-maghreb*) regarding the advent of the final restoration at the end of days is without a doubt an allusion to the Iberian tradition related by his father.[79] But, as in his response to the Yemenite scholars, Abraham let the matter go without further elaboration or clarification.

From his suggestive remarks in the *Compendium*, there is every reason to believe that Abraham accepted the veracity of the Iberian-Maimonidean tradition and imagined himself, like his father before him, to be living at the dawn of messianic times. What prevented the fulfillment of the expected hour was the diminished state of religious knowledge and practice in the present generation. Like many others in the medieval period, Abraham reconciled the belief in a preordained time with the tradition that only a virtuous generation will be worthy of redemption.[80] As he hinted in his responsum, the moment of redemption will continue to be postponed until a large-scale repentance and restoration of religious life is undertaken by the people. According to his interpretation of the scriptural prophesies concerning the generation of the

[77] See Bodl. MS Heb. d. 23, 9v, blurred in many places. See Friedman, *Maimonides*, 68–9, n. 100; 72, n. 109; 110, n. 111; 192, n. 24.

[78] See above, p. 234.

[79] On the association of Sefarad and Maghreb, see Friedman, *Maimonides*, 67–9.

[80] The question of a predetermined date for the advent of the messiah was debated among the talmudic sages, with some calculating the time of redemption with relative precision and others asserting that the messiah will only come when the generation is worthy. See BT Sanhedrin 97a–98a and Rosh ha-Shanah 11a, and cf. E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1969), 649–92. Se'adiah Gaon supported the idea of a fixed date which would ensue unless mass repentance is undertaken in advance, on which see Se'adiah, Imānāt, VIII.5–6. According to the Yemenite Jewish theologian, Netanel ibn al-Fayyūmī, the father of the recipient of Maimonides' epistle, a lack of repentance could postpone the set time for redemption: "Far be it from the omnipotent Creator, praised be His name and exalted His glory, to fulfill His threat (*wa'idahu*) and to abandon His promise (*wa'dahu*). He is truthful and will not disappoint your hopes . . . We hope for [the fulfillment of his promise] every moment! He will graciously grant it to us in the time ordained by His [providential] knowledge and sealed by His unshakable decree. And if our sins delay [its fulfillment], He knows our feeble condition in the exile and our disobedience to His laws!" See *The Bustan Al-Ukul by Nethanael ibn al-Fayyumi*, ed. and tr. D. Levine (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1966), 71, and translation, 113.

redemption, the entire community, "from the youngest to the oldest" (Jer. 31:33) will come to know God and repent from their former ways.[81] In its fullest realization, every member of the community will experience a form of prophetic illumination, albeit to differing degrees.[82] The belief in the total restoration of the prophetic tradition, to be fulfilled in its final form only in messianic times, was the primary objective and driving inspiration of the entire pietist movement.

In light of the prophetic messianism preached by Egyptian pietists, Abraham's extraordinary effort to reform the spiritual state of the community at large comes into full relief. "My purpose," Abraham declared, "is not to rehabilitate the worship of the pious of Israel but to rehabilitate the entire community . . . It must not be made the exclusive domain [of the pious] but of everyone alike."[83] His position as head of the Jews afforded him the opportunity to undertake the spiritual reforms he envisioned as the path leading to redemption. He believed himself to be in a unique position to assume the burden of this renewal on a mass scale.[84] Like his father before him, Abraham considered the task of the generation on the eve of redemption to be to pave the way for greater levels of purity and devotion among the people.[85] This was the generation consecrated for the renewal of prophecy that would touch, in some measure, every member of the community, from the youngest to the oldest. In the meantime, however, the age intended to usher in the redemption remained mired in a state of ignorance and indifference. Abraham's call for a radical reform of synagogue worship was intended, first and foremost, to rouse the people from their slumber and return them to the path of their ancestors.

> "It is time to act [for] the Lord—they have neglected Your Torah" (Ps. 119:126).[86] How long will we remain in this drunken state on account of our sins . . . and not awaken from this terrible indifference . . . ? We are not sincere in our quest for Him, may He be exalted, [though] scripture tells us that there will be no redemption from the affliction of this long exile except through Him:
>
> "From there shall you seek the Lord your God and find [Him] when you pursue Him with all your heart and all your soul" (Deut. 4:29).[87] What is the path to

[81] See Bodl. MS Heb. d 23, 10a, ll. 6–7.

[82] See Bodl. MS Heb. d 23, 10a, ll. 5–6, where Abraham cited from Joel 3:1. There is an interesting echo of this idea in Abraham's epistle to Montpellier, where this verse is likewise cited. See *MH*, 66–7, although there is strong reason to doubt the authenticity of these lines, as the verse does not appear in the original manuscript. See, however, Friedman, *Maimonides*, 71–3.

[83] See *SM*, 186, and my discussion in Chapter three.

[84] See his remarks on the duty of religious leaders to guide the community toward greater sanctity, no matter the burden, *SM*, 185–6.

[85] See Friedman, *Maimonides*, 74–5.

[86] The preposition "for" in the verse was omitted in the text.

[87] The term for redemption (*faraj*) was standard in Judaeo-Arabic literature since the translations of Se'adiah Gaon.

> achieve this? The Temple is destroyed on account of our sins. Sacrifice and all that is connected with it is not available to us.
>
> But prayer and other [devotions]—no one pays any attention to them! People perform them as mere habit[88] and make a sport of them. How can anyone of strong faith and sound reason possibly believe that in the midst of all of this we will be granted the fulfillment of our prayers?![89]

Time and again, Abraham lamented the diminished state of the religious life of the people in exile.[90] Misguided customs and engrained habit, over the course of many years, gradually took the place of sincere and authentic worship. It is for this reason that so much of his spiritual energy as head of the Jews was devoted to the renewal of the devotional life of the people. "It is time to act for the Lord:" the time of religious awakening has come to purge the people from "the ways of the exile."[91] The only path out of the physical exile was for the community to first cleanse itself of the spiritual grip of exile. The promise of redemption required a profound challenge to the status quo. Prayer became the sole means of achieving a form of atonement and of total return to God. It was, first and foremost, intended as a path of return to the ancient worship of Israel in its purest form. But how were the people expected to find their way back from the corrupting ways and stunted mentality of the exile in order to recapture—perhaps even to reconstruct—their original heritage?

The answer to this enigma was among the most extraordinary propositions of the Egyptian pietist movement. According to Abraham and his colleagues, the Jewish community, though heirs of the prophets and bearers of the divine revelation, could not undertake such a monumental task in a spiritual vacuum. As with the restoration of the prophetic path, which was modeled in large part on the living example of Sufism, the road to Jewish origins was expected to pass through the matrix of Islam. Even more than his father, Abraham expressed a deep admiration for the faith and piety of the religion of Ishmael.[92] As he lamented the corrupt faith of his brethren in Christian Europe, Abraham proudly pointed to the purity of monotheistic belief among the Jews of the Islamic world. Yet in other respects, Abraham observed, Islam maintained ancient Jewish rites long after they had been abandoned by the religion of Israel. The Jewish community, though believed to be the original

See Blau, *Dictionary*, 493. It is interesting to note that, among Jews of the classical Genizah period, the Arabic kunyah, Abū'l-Faraj, was typically given to men with the Hebrew name Yeshuʿah. See S. M. Stern, "A New Description by Rabbi Judah al-Ḥarizi on his Travels to Iraq" (Hebrew), *Sefunot* 8 (1964), 147–8.

[88] For this expression (*ke-le-aḥar yad*), see BT Shabbat 153b.

[89] *SM*, 184.

[90] See *SM*, 161, and B. Goldberg, ed., *Sefer Maʿaseh Nissim* (Paris: n.p., 1867), 107.

[91] For this expression (*aʿmāl al-galut*), see *SM*, 204.

[92] See my "Respectful Rival," 856–64, and my discussion in the Introduction.

inspiration for the Islamic religion, was forced to turn to its erstwhile imitator to reconstruct its ancient heritage. We are fortunate to possess a citation from a missing portion of Abraham's *Compendium* that puts the paradoxical relationship of Judaism and Islam, and the challenge of the moment, in full relief.

> Our honored and saintly Rabbi Abraham has explained in the *Compendium* that [part of the law] has been transferred (*muntaqil*) to the nations among whom they reside, and [thus] it has become established within Israel from [the influence of] the nations (*waqa'a fī yisrael min al-goyim*). [Divine] wisdom [has ordained] that [the law] will [initially] disappear from among them while they reside [in exile],[93] until they repent and turn in repentance unto God, on account of which they will be delivered [from exile]. Thus the nations will become the instrument for the rebirth of [Israel] and of the restoration of their dominion.[94]

According to another surviving fragment from the last chapter of his *chef d'oeuvre*, cited above, Abraham believed that the end of the Jewish exile would coincide with a period in which the Torah would be forgotten by large segments of the Jewish community.[95] As we know from similar statements elsewhere in the same work, Abraham believed that the ancient premonition of the rabbis had come to fruition in his own generation. Plagued by the conditions of exile and by their own indifference, the people had lost touch with the living tradition of ancient Israel. The community stood at the threshold of redemption but searched in vain for the fulfillment of their prayers. The only way out of their predicament, Abraham believed, was to initiate a restoration of the most basic forms of divine worship. For this, they looked not only inward at the original sources of the tradition, but also outward at the example of their Muslim neighbors and ancient rivals.

In the most remarkable attestation of the intertwined destinies of the two religions, Abraham expressed the intricate role played by Islam in the rebirth and ultimate redemption of Israel. In the dual vision of exile and redemption at the heart of Abraham's pietist eschatology, the political order is a mirror image of the spiritual order. Ishmael's blessing is a function of the fulfillment of its spiritual mission on the world's stage. By extension, it served as the primary instrument for Israel's return to its own pre-exilic mission. According

[93] The object of this statement appears to be Israel itself. According to this reading, parts of the law (such as prostration and the like) will come to disappear among the Jews while taking root among the "nations"—by which is intended the Muslim community. For a different reading of these lines, see P. Fenton, *Deux traités de mystique juive* (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1987), 75–6.

[94] TS Ar. 22.12, ll. 10–16, and cf. Fenton, *Deux traités*, 75–6, and P. Fenton, "More on R. Ḥananel b. Samuel the Judge, Leader of the Pietists" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 55 (1986), 82, n. 20.

[95] See pp. 238–9 and n. 77.

to providential design, each community remained deeply enmeshed in the religious psyche of the other, each one serving as a mirror for the religious destiny of its rival.[96] In the messianic aspirations of Egyptian pietism, Islam had become both the outer crucible and the inner conduit of a spiritual revolution in the heart of Israel.

[96] According to the fragment of the final chapter of the *Compendium* just cited, Jewish tradition and practice will transfer to Islam, only to return to its ancestral heritage via Islamic influence after it has long since been forgotten in the Jewish tradition. All of this, according to Abraham Maimonides, continues to unfold as the fulfillment of providential wisdom (*bi'l-ḥikmah*).

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