

A Comparative Study: The Abstinence Motif of Ibn Gabirol, Rābi'a al'Adawiyya, and Abū al'Atāhiyya

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Abstract

I intend to examine motifs and subjects that were an integral part of poetry that moved between the sacred and the secular. The article focuses on specific Muslim and Jewish poets, who are representative of the period, poets who referred to abstinence (الزهديات), Fate, and the love of God. In the Middle Ages secular Hebrew poetry was not analyzed as more than poetic ornamentation, and that is one of the reasons that even modern research has not dealt at length with this genre for its own sake. The examples and motifs to which I shall refer in this article concern abstinence poetry, as well as philosophical and ethical poetry that are close to sacred poetry in character. The study focuses on two concrete poets who wrote poems about abstinence. Both of them express Sufi ideas that they incorporated in their poetry on abstinence. The first is Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (717 - 796)¹ and Abu Ishāq, known as Abū al-'Atāhiyya (748 - 828), the poet of the *zuhdiyyat* (شاعر الزهد), who preceded R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021 - 1058) by two centuries. Ibn Gabirol was born in Malaga, lived in Saragossa, and died in Valencia. For the purpose of comparison and discussion of the influence of his predecessors on Ibn Gabirol, a number of his poems were selected that deal with abstinence, the relation between man and his Creator, the interaction of body and soul, and the use of motifs related to time and the Cosmos.

Keywords

Zuhd, Sufi, Soul and Body, Ibn Gabirol, 'Adawiyya, al'Atāhiyya, Ibn Paquda

1. Zuhd Poetry in Arabic and Hebrew

Examining the poetry of Hebrew poets in the Golden Age of Spain in general, and

¹See Melchert, 2020: pp. 5-6.

the work of Solomon Ibn Gabirol in particular, and that of al-'Adawiyya in 8th century Iraq, the similarities between them are remarkable. Despite the great difference between the two poets and the periods during which they operated, they had in common the composition of sacred poetry, glorifying God for his creation, and poems they wrote, perhaps among the first on love of God, which continued to be recited centuries later both among the Jews and the Muslims.

The poets discussed in this study conducted a special way of life that is identified with the Sufi movement. Ibn Gabirol, entitled rabbi, was an outstanding philosopher, influenced by Plato and by such Muslim philosophers as Alfarabi (873 - 951), who was called "the second philosopher", because he was considered (in Arabic philosophy) the successor of Aristotle. Alfarabi's philosophical thought was influenced by the writings of Plato and Aristotle. He wrote commentaries and elaborations on Plato's "Book of Laws" and "The Republic", and developed philosophical, theological, and political thought that integrated the systems of Plato and Aristotle with the tenets of Islam. He greatly influenced Muslim philosophers who succeeded him, and also Jewish philosophers, such as Maimonides. Ibn Gabirol wrote books in Arabic, which indicates his proficiency in Muslim literature and philosophy that influenced him. He developed a love of God as he described in his book *Fons Vitae* ("The Fountain of Life"). He maintained distance from his surroundings, choosing the way of abstinence and seclusion, since he regarded people as wicked and parting from the way of God. Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, who preceded Ibn Gabirol by many years, conducted a liberal way of life arrived at faith and recognized without question the greatness and omnipotence of God. She repented and spent her days fasting and her nights in prayer. She expressed her love of God in Sufi poetry in praise of God, uniting herself with God spiritually. Like her, the Abbasid poet Abū al'Atāhiyya, who believed in God, despised the life of debauchery and preached abandoning it and coming close to God. He described in his poetry life and death, but refrained from writing about life after death. He regarded the world as a predator that one must keep at a distance, abandoning the cheap life and pursuing the worship of God.

This concept of the distinction between life and death, between the physical world and infinite time comprised the strong basis of the development of the Sufi ideal, which informed the way of life of the poets. The idea of meditation and investigating the world and its creatures aroused deep philosophical thinking through which they could examine the works of God.

The Sufi movement (Tasawwuf تصوف) developed in the Muslim world at the end of the 8th century among a small group of people who were called "those who walk in the paths of the spiritual way" (اولئك الذين يسرون في سبل الطرق الروحانية), among them Ibrahim Ibn Adham (718 - 777).

Sufism is neither poverty (فقر—*faqr*) nor abstinence (*zuhd*), but a term that includes the ideas of both, together with additional concepts. Without these additional qualities a person is not a Sufi even though he may engage in abstinence (*zahd*) or live in poverty (*faqir*). The poor man maintains his poverty coura-

geously and recognizes its great value. He prefers it to wealth, because he yearns for divine compensation, in which he has faith. And the more that he considers eternal rewards, he refrains from the passing pleasures of this world.²

Later on famous Sufis include: Hussein ben Mansur al-Halaj (858 - 922), Abu Hamad Al-Ghazali (1058 - 1111), Jalal Adin al-Rumi (1207 - 1273), and Mohi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi (1156 - 1240), who added a philosophical dimension to the mysticism. However, some claim that the Sufi movement anteceded the 8th century and goes back to the beginning of Islam, founded by pietistic and ascetic Muslims (زهاد), who strove to live simple lives.³

The love of God, which a human being should take upon himself through sanctification (*Tasawwuf* تصوف) and his heart by purification (*tankiya* تنقية) by abandoning all the objectionable behavior and adopting all the good qualities.⁴ In his guidebook, “The Duties of the Heart”, Bahye Ibn Paquda (1050 - 1120) says: “Abstinence is the gateway towards love of God, because the abstinent, who disdains this world, is free to worship God and to love Him. Love of God is the highest level of the believer in the ladder of duties of the heart.”⁵

According to Ibn Paquda, “We understand wisdom by means of the mind, the power and the mercy that are widespread in the world, and the duty to obey God and serve Him according to what He deserves because of his general and particular lovingkindness, and likewise the mind grants validity (بالعقل يصح لنا كتاب الله).”⁶

Paul Fenton,⁷ who has been studying the influence of Sufism and its rituals on the Jews in the Muslim world in the Middle Ages and contacts between Jews and Muslims in the area of mysticism, displayed a profound understanding of Muslim Sufi writers using two manuscripts that he examined, preserved in Judeo-Arabic (Arabic in Hebrew script, as practiced by Jews in the Muslim world for generations).

According to Fenton, he has learned not to be astonished by the openness of the Jews towards Muslim mystical ideas in the classical period. Ever since the mystical poetry of al-Halaj and until “theory of the dawn”⁸ (*al-ishraq* الاشراق) of al-Saharirdi (1154 - 1191) Jewish mystics were attentive to Sufi voices, and they copied major Sufi ceremonies in Hebrew letters for their own use. Moreover, regarding some texts these are the only copies that have been preserved.

But on the other hand, it is astonishing that there is no mention in Jewish sources of the writings by Mohi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi, who is considered by some to be the greatest Sufi thinker of all time. This fact is all the more remarkable con-

²Einat-Nov, 2012: p. 31; Melchert, 2020: pp. 21-23.

³Mahmud & Anabassa, 2020: p. 162.

⁴Hilme, 2011: p. 31.

⁵Ibn Paquda, 2019: p. 21, 99.

⁶Ibn Paquda, 2019: p. 99.

⁷Prof. Paul Fenton, professor of Jewish studies at the Sorbonne, wrote an important article in the third volume of the research compilation, *Bein 'ever ve'arab*, 2004. See: Fenton, 2004.

⁸Shihab Abu Alfathuh, known as Alshaharudi Alhalabi, born in Sarhud, northern Iran, was a philosopher and scholar influenced by the teachings of the Ismaelites. Because of his extreme opinions he was murdered by religious sages at a young age.

sidering that he was active precisely at the same time as the Jewish pietistic movement in Egypt led by Abraham Maimonides (1186 - 1237), who did not hide his admiration for Muslim Sufi mystics.⁹

Arabic poetry and literature influenced Hebrew poetry by incorporating the ethical-philosophical subject into the “scientific” discipline. After the appearance of Islam, Arabic poets started to write poetry based on religious values. They created “wisdom poetry” (*hikma* الحكمة) and religious homiletic poetry (*w'at* وعظ) and poetry of abstinence (*zuhd* زهد) that took their ideas not from Islam but also from Greek philosophy, and mainly from Neo-Platonic, which was also absorbed into *zuhd* poetry.

The expression, the concepts, and the primary philosophical ideas in “Duties of the Heart” are taken from the “Letters of the Brethren of Purity.”¹⁰ R. Bahya Ibn Paquda cites three of the five reasons for love of God that appear in Algazali. The fifth reason that Algazali gives is the longing of the soul for something like itself, that is, for a spiritual essence.¹¹

Rabbi Bahya said: What is the meaning of love of God? Giving the soul itself and its longing for God: It will rise up in order to cleave to the supreme light. This because the soul itself is a simple, spiritual essence, and it longs for spiritual essences like itself, and distances itself because of its nature from material bodies that are opposed to it by their nature.¹²

Tova Beeri points out in her book *Le-David Mizmor*, that David Hanasi ben Hezekiah the Exilarch was the first Jew to compose a Sufi composition. Until recently the first Jewish work of Sufism was thought to be “The Duties of the Heart” (*Aidāya ila farāi' d al qulūb*, الهداية الى فرائض القلوب) by Bahya the Judge from Saragossa, written circa 1070. Beeri says that some years ago she cast doubt whether this could have been the first work of Jewish Sufism because it is such a sophisticated book.

Recently published discoveries reinforce the opinion that Jewish Sufi works preceded “The Duties of the Heart”. Beeri speaks of notably Sufi motifs in her book, and the appointed times for recitation of the liturgical poetry suggest Sufi usages. Consequently, the question arises whether to consider them Sufi poetry or at least poetry inspired by Sufism. She presented her opinion cautiously, succinctly, and in an edifying way. The meaning of her words in principle is that from now on at least one Jewish Sufi composition from Iraq is recognized, written in the first half of the 11th century.¹³

Many legends regard the Rashidun Caliphs (الخلفاء الراشدون), such as Abu Baker and Ali, as the founders of the Sufi orders. At any rate the movement was not an organized group like the Sufi movement. In the 8th and 9th centuries we can identify two parts in this movement:

⁹Fenton, 2004: pp. 8-15.

¹⁰A compilation 52 letters of the Brethren. About the Brethren, see above note 103.

¹¹Abrahamov, 2019: pp. 56-59.

¹²Ibn Paquda, 2019: p. 315.

¹³Beeri, 2009: pp. 67-76.

- 1) Moderate Sufis who make do with little.
- 2) Extreme Sufis who repress all their appetites and rely on God alone.

In the 11th century the Sufi movement is recognized as a religious institution, especially upon the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate that aspired to religious authority. Algazali was the first to distinguish between Orthodox Islam and spiritual Sufism, and he sought to bridge the gap between Muslim law and mysticism.

Alkushairi (986 - 1072) explained that the name “Sufi صوفي” is not a word in Arabic, but a kind of nickname, and Ibn Khaldūn agreed with him, explaining that it stems from the word for wool (*alsuf* الصوف) because the Sufis were famous for dressing in wool alone, as opposed to people who showed themselves off in expensive clothing.

The Sufis stood out for the values that guided them, among them the belief that man distinguishes himself from the other creatures thanks to his awareness, which is divided into two kinds:

- 1) Awareness of science and recognition of certainty, faith, skepticism, and illusion.
- 2) Awareness of existing situations of joy and sadness, retaining and releasing, acceptance and anger, patience and thanksgiving etc.¹⁴

Solomon Ibn Gabirol had a religious world view that made him unique among his contemporaries. Although he was God-fearing, he did not make do with the opinions he inherited from his predecessors, but examined their foundations anew. He was a great mystic, influenced by Arabic and neo-Platonic philosophy, which reached Spain in Arabic guise and aroused his curiosity. Consequently, he sought to clarify the deepest problems, such as matter and form, the origin of the world, the essence of its Creator. In his book *Fons Vitae (Meqor Hayyim)*, which he composed in Arabic, he raised the question: What should occupy the thought of a man in this life? And his answer: Man must seek knowledge, and that which he should seek the most from knowledge is to know himself, because thereby he will know what is essential for him.¹⁵

In his book “The Improvement of the Moral Qualities” (אצלאה אלאכלאק), a lyrical philosophic composition written by Solomon Ibn Gabirol circa 1045, when he was about 23 years old, he deals with the moral qualities of a person who wants to achieve the highest moral and spiritual level, eternal happiness, to which he aspires in the intellectual world, i.e., the end of time.¹⁶

Ibn Gabirol’s internal examination and aspiration to reach the highest qualities, are a process of purification of the soul. Ibn Gabirol negates the approach whereby a person says “a calamity will not strike me”. Calamities are an inseparable part of existence, and their negation is like negation of the existence of the world, which would be like negating the existence of individuals in the world. According to Ibn Gabirol the appropriate philosophical system perceives calamities as if they had

¹⁴Ibn Khaldūn, 1966: p. 211.

¹⁵Schirmann, 1956-1961: pp. 180-182.

¹⁶Ibn Gabirol, 1951: p. 8.

already occurred. He refers to courage, and defines it simply: It is the ability to stand on principles and not give in to things you hate; true courage is insistence on the truth and overcoming one's appetites. The brave person who adheres to the truth will prefer to give up his life and die sanctifying his principles rather than live a life that allows his appetites to overpower his intellect. According to the view of believers, they accept the calamities that they encounter, and regard them as a kind of blessing from Heaven (a divine test), by which they advance one more step towards God and paradise. This view is characteristic of one who chooses abstinence-*Zuhd*, since he understands that the world betrays mankind and it is a station on the way to the end of days.

Beyond any doubt, it can be asserted that trends of abstinence and asceticism were reinforced in the cultural milieu in which Ibn Gabirol operated. He was familiar with the words of the early ascetics of Islam and the traditions regarding their way of life and customs, which were preserved in the book of Andalusian *Adab, Al'aqad al-farid* by Ibn 'Abd Rabba. He surely knew that among the names the *Zuhād* (زهاد) were called one of them was also the title *bakaa'un* (بكاؤون, "those who weep"). Because weeping and remorse over sins and fear of the approaching Judgment Day were one of their trademarks.¹⁷

The comparative study of the poetry of Abū al'Atāhiyya and Ibn Gabirol will focus on a comparison of two poems by Abū al'Atāhiyya "Oh to my soul which went far in love" (أَلَا مَنْ لِنَفْسِي فِي الْهَوَى قَدْ تَمَادَتْ) and "The catastrophe of a man is love of the world" and two poems by Ibn Gabirol: "Bow before God"¹⁸ and "Know, my soul."¹⁹

The comparison will focus on the following questions:

- Did the Hebrew abstinence poetry imitate the Arabic Zuhd poetry?
- To what degree are the Quran and the Bible reflected in abstinence poetry?
- In what ways are Hebrew abstinence poetry and Arabic Zuhd poetry similar and in what ways different?

The comparison will deal with the growth and development of the genre of abstinence, and discuss the characteristics of both poets, Ibn Gabirol and Abū al'Atāhiyya. The purpose of the comparison will be to clarify the influence of Arabic Zuhd poetry on Hebrew abstinence poetry.

This research concerns the relations with God woven into the poetry of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Abū al'Atāhiyya in the eighth century and a parallel phenomenon by the Andalusian Hebrew poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol. All three poets expressed fervent love of God and conducted abstinent lives, and the Arab poets were considered the greatest of the Ṣufi stream. A significant part of the research will be devoted to the similarities and differences between the Arabic poets and Ibn Gabirol.

In this research we shall focus on three poets, two of whom influenced the third,

¹⁷Levin, 1986: pp. 137-140; Lazarus-Yafe, 1970: pp. 317-378.

¹⁸Schirmann, 2006: p. 273.

¹⁹Levin, 2007: p. 151.

specifically the influence of the Arab poet Abu Ishaq, known as Abū al'Atāhiyya (748 - 828) and Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (717 - 796) on Solomon Ibn Gabirol, who lived 250 years later. Abū al'Atāhiyya was active in the court of the Abbasid Califs, a contemporary of Bashār Ibn Bard and Abu Nuas. His poetry is notable for its asceticism and repugnance towards the vanity of the material world. The comparative study of the two poets will focus on the corpus of abstinence poetry written by both of them, with reference to similarities between them and the differences that make each one unique.

Scholars of Arabic poetry in Spain distinguish between philosophical poetry, *zuhd* poems, and mystical, *taṣawwuf* poems (شعر التصوف). *Zuhd* poems deal with questions of life and death, the worthlessness of man, his need to keep away from vanity, and the role of man to prepare himself for the end of days; they are generally written clearly and realistically. The poems of the Sufis, on the other hand, differ from them, dealing with the love of God, making extensive use of metaphors and the language of love poetry that is accepted in secular poetry, and they are written in an allegorical style.²⁰

This philosophical poetry is Nihilistic, poetry of despair and hopelessness; its extreme conclusions are the negation of life and total abstinence, at times even to the degree of negating moral-human value. This poetry recalls death without reference to life after death—to what awaits man in paradise or in hell.²¹

This tone is so dominant in the poems of Abū al'Atāhiyya, which are basically religious poems, that he was accused of philosophical heresy, because he did not mention in his poems revival of the dead or reward and punishment in paradise and hell, but only death alone.²²

A brief poem, of two verses in his *Diwan* refers explicitly to paradise, and another short poem says:

نَعْمُ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا الدُّنْيَا
يَا لَنَا دَارُ إِقَامَةٍ
إِنَّمَا الْغَيْبَةُ وَالْحَسْرَةُ
فِي يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ

We shall live long in this world, but the world is not our place of residence.

There is neither profit nor pain, but on the day of resurrection.²³

Abū al'Atāhiyya, negates entirely the value of this world as opposed to the world to come when the resurrection of the dead will occur. And in another brief poem he casts doubt on the advantage of the living over the dead.²⁴

سَاكِنِي الْأَجْدَاثُ أَنْتُمْ
مِثْلَنَا بِالْأَمْسِ كُنْتُمْ
لَيْتَ شَعْرِي مَا صَنَعْتُمْ
أَرْبِحْتُمْ أَمْ خَسَرْتُمْ

You, who dwell in graves were like us only yesterday.

²⁰Tobi, 2000: p. 189; Tajrid, 2022; Shu'ar alzuhd fi al'axr al'abasi-drasa musu'ayyah faniya, Majlet wadi alnil, no. 34, Port Said, pp. 265-322; Tobi, 1993: p. 20; Ban, 2013: p. 66. For further information, see Seraj al-Din, 1987.

²¹Tobi, 2000: see ch.7.

²²Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 7.

²³Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 405.

²⁴Regarding nihilism ('adamuiyya) in the view of Abū al'Atāhiyya, see Sharaf al-Din, 1985: pp. 162-163.

If only I knew what you did, did you gain or did you lose?²⁵

As opposed to secular philosophical poetry, that included religious ideas, as we made clear in the previous research, poetry that was liberated from Jewish national bonds, from the subject of exile and redemption, that dominated the *piyyut* in the East, dealt with basic issues of faith. This poetry concerned itself with the man of faith, whoever he was, without reference to his specific religion, with the relations between him and his God. Indeed, it did contain clear preaching of abstinence and of refraining from the pleasures of this world, but against an entirely different background than advocating abstinence in secular philosophical poetry. Indeed, the motif of abstinence and the idea of preparing for the next world are mentioned frequently in the poems of Abū al'Atāhiyya (pp. 232-233); If only al'Atāhiyya (pp. 232-233); and perhaps there is no essential difference between secular philosophical poetry and religious philosophical poetry, but only a matter of emphasis: The one stresses Nihilism, and the other stresses religious abstinence. Sa'adya dya Gaon used nihilistic concepts in a literary way, but always took care to conclude with a religious approach, unlike Abū al'Atāhiyya, who emphasized his Nihilism. And the Jewish poets in Spain gave expression in their philosophical secular poetry to Nihilism, while their liturgical-sacred philosophical poetry was imbued with the mystical spirit.²⁶

The motif of love of God is widespread in Arabic religious poetry, and the Jewish poets in Spain followed in their footsteps and adopted it in their poetry. This motif was particularly developed by Ṣufi poets, and not by the poets of the Orthodox Islamic trend.²⁷ The poetess Al-'adawiyya—the Saint (717 - 796), born in Basra, is considered by many a central figure in early Sufi mysticism. She is reported to have stood in prayer all night. She would say:

الهي: غارت النجوم، ونامت العيون، وغلقت الملوك أبوابها وخلا كل حبيب بحبيبه، وهذا مقامي بين
يديك

“My God! The stars have lit up and the eyes have slumbered and the kings have shut their doors, and every lover has united with his beloved – I stand before You!”²⁸

The Sufis espoused a life of *Zuhd*, and the subject of cleaving to God is also one of the characteristics of Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain, which is full of philosophical ideas. One of the philosophical sources that had a great influence on the sages of Spain was the Letters of the Brethren of Purity (رسائل اخوان الصفا).²⁹ The Brethren of Purity was an intellectual movement that flourished in Basra and Baghdad towards the end of the 10th century, and it set as its goal harmonizing traditional Islam together with neo-Platonic philosophy.³⁰ The following are some pertinent quotes:

²⁵Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 398.

²⁶See Mirsky, 1992.

²⁷Scheindlin, 1992: 137ff; Ratzaby, 1991: pp. 352-359.

²⁸Ibn Al-jawzī, 1422 AH: p. 246; Levin, 1986: p. 114.

²⁹Ikhwān al-Ṣafa, 1986: pp. 1072-1071, The Encyclopedia of Islam, vol. iii.

³⁰Al-Hamadānī, 1979: pp. 345-353; Tibawi, 1955; Ratzaby, 2007: p. 16.

Accordingly, the Sufi poet sings to God:

Know that the believers, the wise, and the prophets remove themselves from this world, abandon temporal desires, pursue the world to come, and seek its distant good because the truths of the world to come became clear to them and the superiority of its good over the good of this world. And they see the world to come in their heart's eye and in their mind's light, the way that the sons of this world perceive with their senses matters of the world.³¹

I spoke with you without words, I saw you without your appearing as a body, one sees [God] abstractly, seeing without an eye. When ecstasy revealed your presence/I saw you without a place. I spoke with your presence without words/and I saw awareness without eyes.³²

The ascetics would address God with open hearts and confess their actions. Alḥarizi says: "Another one said, one woman of the Arabs her custom was to pray saying: 'Master of the World, if I have offended you, my guilt will not harm you, and if you forgive me, you will not lack forgiveness, but my God, forgive me with that which will not harm you, and give me that which you will not lack.'"³³

And compare the following Sufi remark:

Al-Asmai said: I heard a Bedouin saying his prayer: "God, my sins towards you cause you no harm. Your mercy for me will bring you no loss. alas Forgive me then for what does you no harm, and extend to me what you will not lack."³⁴

The poets of Spain repeat this motif succinctly. Ibn Gabirol:³⁵ "He who stands before his God as a sinner, says in his confession: אָם תִּבְקַשׁ לְעוֹנֵי, אֶבְרַח מִמֶּךָ אֱלֹהֵי ["And if you seek out my sin, I shall flee from you and to you."]³⁶

At the time of its height, in the "Golden Age" of Hebrew poetry in Spain, the influence of the extreme way of life of the ascetic poetess Al-'adawiyya is apparent in the highly personal sacred poetry that was adopted by the poets who were familiar with her poetry.

The feeling of spiritual love for God in its most comprehensive meaning is expressed in terms that could also apply to human love. However, spiritual love for God fills the heart of man to the point that no place is left for any other passion.³⁷

One of the paradoxes in sacred poetry presents the two aforementioned aspects of religious experience as a movement between two extremes that are one.³⁸ A well-known expression is the following passage in *Keter Malkhut* by Ibn Gabirol:³⁹

³¹Ikhwān al-Ṣafa, 1986: p. 168, Rasa'il, Vol. 4. (See: Alzarkali, 2018).

³²Al-Shibli, 1967: p. 109.

³³Alḥarizi, 1952: p. 340.

³⁴Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 1986.

³⁵Ibn Gabirol, 1995: pp. 50-60, *Keter Malkhut*.

³⁶Schirmann, 1966: p. 241.

³⁷Nicholson, 1960: pp. 233-235; Hurvitz, 1997: p. 42.

³⁸Einat-Nov, 2012.

³⁹Ibn Gabirol, 1971: passage 35, Vol. 2.

My God, if my sin is too great to abide, what will you do for your great name?
And if I cannot seek your mercy, who besides you will forgive me?
Therefore, if you kill me, I will hope for you.
And if you demand for my sin, I shall flee from you to you. I will hide from
your anger in your shade.
And I shall hold onto the fringes of your mercy, and not let you go until you
bless me.

Every sentence in this passage expresses contradictory extremes of religious experience. Sin raises the fearful images of the God of Judgement, while the great name of God refers to the opposite aspect, the beneficent, merciful God in the second verse. In the third verse once again the image of a threatening God who might harm a man and kill him, and in the following hope for mercy is expressed again, for protection from a beneficent God. And in the fourth verse sin is mentioned, and the image of the God of Judgement, and afterwards two paradoxes of religious experience, fear of God, "I shall flee from you...from your anger" and "I shall flee to you...and I hide in your shade". The last verse mentions God's power to do good and also his fearful power to abandon man.

2. The Relation between the Soul and the Body According to Ibn Gabirol and Abū al'Atāhiyya

Ibn Gabirol maintains that knowledge and action free the soul from the captivity of nature and purify it from its gloominess and darkness. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that there are limits to human investigation, there are things that a man cannot fathom, i.e., that are beyond human comprehension. He distinguishes between three stages:

1) Knowledge of matter (the example of matter and form is the human body and its form). 2) Knowledge of the will (the example of the will is the soul). 3) Knowledge of the first cause (the example of the first cause is God, and the will is the power of God, who created everything and motivates everything).

And in fact one of the sages of Islam was Abu Hamad Al-Ghazali (1054 - 1111), the great scholar who is regarded as the renewer of Islam and symbolized the event in which mystical views penetrated legalistic Islam.

Al-Ghazali, a famous teacher and writer in both areas, was one of the leading pillars of the highest school, Almadrasa-Netamiyya, founded in Baghdad. His books are considered among the basic works of the Shafi'i school.⁴⁰

The idea that the wholeness of the body is a condition for internal wholeness and warning against extreme asceticism were not innovations of Al-Ghazali, but can be found not only among rationalists, like Maimonides, but also in pietistic circles, and even in monastic circles that usually stress the contrast between the flesh and the spirit. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of concentration (خشوع) and humility as the important thing in prayer and practicing silent prayer

⁴⁰The Shafi'i school is one of the four schools that developed in Islam. Its founder was Muhammad al-Shafi'i, born in Gaza.

(مناجاة). Fear, according to Al-Ghazali is especially important for novices at the beginning of their way, but they should not overdo it, on the other hand, even in the later stages of worship of God.⁴¹

In Sufi literature, the soul is described as the source of appetite and passion. In Hebrew poetry the soul is referred to by five terms: *nefesh* (soul), *ruah* (spirit), *neshama* (breath), *haya* (living), and *yehida* (unit). The last two terms are like the terms that refer to God. The soul shares some qualities with God: It is one, eternal, and there is nothing else like it. According to the Sufi view of the world, man can come close to God in several ways: repentance, restraining the soul and its appetites, becoming a recluse, and making do with little.⁴²

Among the Sufis an essential question arises: What is the vessel through which one longs for Allah and seeks to approach him? The answer is through the heart and not the body. By “heart” they do not mean the chunk of meat that one could perceive with the senses; but a secret among the secrets of Allah that cannot be reached with the senses. In medieval literature the heart symbolizes faith, and among the Muslims there are three kinds of heart: the normal and complete heart that is pure and full of faith, its normality symbolizing the normality of the body, the sick heart, that is defective, like every limb of the body that can be damaged (the faith within it is damaged), and the dead heart that is far from the reality under discussion and far from the worship of God.⁴³

The Sufi way of life was characterized by modesty and frugality. Aljāhiz (776 - 868) attributes the concept to Hassan: “Alhassan said: ‘Son of man, if it is enough for you in this world that which is given to you, then the little there is in it will suffice for you, But if what you are given in this world is not enough for you, nothing in the world will suffice for you’” (وقال الحسن: ابن آدم, ان كان يغنيك من الدنيا ما)⁴⁴ (يكفيك فأدنى ما فيها يغنيك وان كان لا يغنيك منها ما يكفيك فليس فيها شيء يغنيك).

Alḥarizi in the book of *Tahkemoni*, influenced by Arabic literature, refers to the same subject: “Another one said:

If you ask the world enough for your needs/the little it will provide will suffice for you/but if you ask for more than you need/even everything will not suffice for you.”⁴⁵

Frugality is very beneficial for the soul. A wise man said: He who asks for more than he needs troubles his soul from its utility: “They said: He for whom what the Creator has given him is sufficient, he is wealthier than all men” (وقال: من طلب أكثر)⁴⁶ (من حاجته شوغل عن منفعة نفسه). Ibn Abed Rabbah said: “They said: There is no wealth other than the wealth of the soul” (لا غني الا غني النفس).⁴⁷

⁴¹ Abd Alqadar, 1966: Preface, vi and p. 217; Schirmann, 1995: p. 347 (See: Abu Taleb al-Maki, 2001: qut al-qulūb).

⁴² Tarabieh, 2007: pp. 332-346.

⁴³ Alnajjar, 2002: p. 64.

⁴⁴ Aljāhiz, 1932: p. 86, Vol. 3.

⁴⁵ Alḥarizi, 1952: p. 335.

⁴⁶ Ibn Hazm preached about the value of frugality and devoted a special chapter to the subject in his enormous book, *Hayona-tuk al-hamama*, 178.

⁴⁷ Ibn Abed Rabbah, 1928: p. 134, Vol. II. Darkazalli, 2006: pp. 1-11, Vol. 2.

The poet al-Ma'ari (973 - 1057) had a different opinion on this subject. Below are some of his views:

- The soul loves death and is not wary of it. For the soul the body is a receptacle for impurity, and the soul is purified by leaving it.
- For al-Ma'ari the mind represents “the religious leader, individual, and the prophet directed towards the truth,” and a faithful guide in the life of man; He arrived at the conclusion that man does not see the truth even after he raised the mind to the level of a prophet.
- Man creates evil naturally and good artificially. The world has only ever-spreading evil that cannot be done away with. The world induces evil on everything it contains; on man and on beasts. Society, in his opinion, is also corrupt. It is ruled by lust, ignorance, temptations, and hypocrisy. The only path left for man is isolation and maintaining good qualities.
- Religion, in his opinion, is the product of human thought. People believe in it out of habit and education, and they do not examine if it is true. For him, religion is not a divine manifestation, but the result of human development and the creation of the human spirit. Religions come and go. They have value only for people who lack a conscience, who play on the folly of mankind.

Al-Ma'ari distinguished between God's rule and Fate, and attributed to Fate the power of rule, seeing in it an unjust ruler, who directs men according to its will, and its power cannot be overcome or stopped. The questions that arise here according to al-Ma'ari's faith: Did al-Ma'ari see Fate in God's hands and He determined it first, and the evil that comes to human beings is from God? Or that Fate is God, and therefore God is an unjust ruler? Or that Fate is an evil force parallel to the power of God, who is good? But that would be blasphemy because God's power is supreme. This shows that al-Ma'ari suffered from a strong emotional disturbance that stemmed from anxiety and worry because of his eternal blindness.⁴⁸

Al-Ma'ari believed in fatalism according to which everything that happens to a man comes to him due to a hidden fate over which he has no control or the power to alter it, and man lives only temporarily. He asserts that a man is born, grows old, and lives under the compulsion of the supreme power, without any choice. Man is corrupt because corruption is inherent in him. Good is true good only if it submits to the control of the mind.⁴⁹

The ancient Greek philosophers dealt with the essence of the soul in relation to the body. Plato, and in his footsteps, Aristotle, regarded the living soul as a unique spark of the humanity of man. Like the Jewish sages they maintained that all the

⁴⁸<https://www.aljazeera.net/blogs/2019/1/30/> Al-Ma'ari fell ill with a severe case of measles. His father died when he was only 14 years old, and he lost the sight of one eye. After his mother died, when he was 16, he lost the sight of the other eye due to weeping and suffering over their deaths. Afterwards he cut himself off from his surrounding and remained in his home, childless and alone until he came to be called “*rahin almahbasin*” (رهين المحبسین), i.e., the doubly imprisoned, first by his blindness and secondly by his social isolation. Out of despair he refrained from marriage lest he bring blind children into the world.

⁴⁹Darkazalli, 2006: 1-11, Vol. 2.

limbs of the human body are double, except for the single soul in the body. Likewise, they divided man between a growing soul, a thinking-speaking living thing. By the expression “speaking living thing” the Greek philosophers expressed the spiritual superiority of man over the rest of creation. The sages of Israel followed this concept, and in particular the philosophers and poets of the “Golden Age” in Spain. In a liturgical poem (*reshut*) for *Nishmat* entitled *Sheḥi la’el* this influence may be perceived in the analogy between man and his God.

Among the characteristics of the liturgical poetry from Spain, which is imbued with philosophical idea, are these two important concepts: the mind’s eye and the heart’s eye. It is known that abstract forms like God’s eye, the angels, and the soul are invisible, but may be perceived by means of the heart’s eye.⁵⁰ That is the Platonic “Idea.” In other words, what is perceived by means of the internal eye. One of the philosophical sources that had a great influence on the sages of Spain was “The Letters of the Brethren of Purity”.

The ascetic poets believed that everything is finite, and the end of everything is death. A striking expression appears in Psalms: “Where can I escape from Your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I descend to Sheol, You are there too. If I take wing with the dawn to come to rest on the western horizon, even there Your hand will be guiding me, Your right hand will be holding me fast” (Ps. 139: 7-10).

One of the central ideas in Jahiliyyah poetry dealt with the concept of body and soul as one inseparable unit, that exists as long as a man is alive. But Platonic philosophy regarded the soul as imprisoned in the body as a negative reality. Greek literature not only separated between the body and the soul, but emphasized clearly the superiority of the spiritual soul over the material body in which it is imprisoned. This idea found its lyrical expression in the Arabic abstinence poetry and in the Letters of the Brethren of Purity, in which the soul is described as a spiritual entity similar in its qualities to God.⁵¹ The Letters had a great influence on the sages of Spain.

The Jewish poets adopted the concept of condemning the material body as opposed to the superiority of the spiritual soul. This idea originates in the abstinence poetry of Abū al’Atāhiyya and Abu Nuwas. The Jewish poets who followed in their footsteps wrote poetry in which they diminished the value and importance of the body and praised the pure spirit, similar in its qualities to its Creator. The purpose of the soul is to rule over the body, to restrain it and to guide it in the straight path. Ibn Gabirol refers in his poetry to the material body and the negative qualities of man and emphasizes the superiority of the wise soul. He addresses the soul in a language of castigation urging it not to pursue the pleasures of the world or to submit to physical delights. These motifs may also be found in the Abassid poetry of Abū al’Atāhiyya and Abu Nuwas.⁵²

⁵⁰Cf. Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Foundations of the Torah, 4: 7.

⁵¹Netton, 1982: p. 16.

⁵²Tobi, 2009: pp. 363-386.

The soul whom Abū al'Atāhiyya addresses is not immune from the inclination to sin because the body and soul can both fall into the net of the evil inclination, but the soul has a better chance to refrain from sinning and cut itself off from the vanity of this world.⁵³ Among the Jewish poets of Spain the recurrent motif "From You and to You" is widespread. Ibn Gabirol, standing before God as a sinner, says in his confession:

"And if you seek out my sin, I shall flee from you and to you."⁵⁴

The source of this motif is in *Keter Malkhut*, par. 35, but its terse phrasing is Arabic. The motif recurs in a poem of Abū al'Atāhiyya: "Woe to my soul which went far with love" (أَلَا مَنْ لِنَفْسِي فِي الْهَوَى قَدْ تَمَادَتْ).⁵⁵

"I have no choice but to be his [God's] servant/To God I return both my weariness and my joy" (verse 12)

The poet stresses his loneliness and impotence before the greatness of God. God is the shelter for those who serve Him (pray to Him), who turn to Him and ask his forgiveness.

A man's storming passions, the body and its never-ending material desires are also given many lyrical expressions. On the one hand, the poets realize the power of passion that never finds satisfaction, and on the other hand confront the man who pursues them with his fate that will deprive him of them.⁵⁶ One of the problems of the man pursuing his appetites or possessions is the lack of awareness of his end: If a man remembered at every moment that his end is to die, he would not waste his life in pursuit of vanities:

"Let a man remember throughout his life/that to death he will be taken."⁵⁷

To clarify this subject, we shall present Ibn Gabirol's poem "Bow before God."⁵⁸ This is a liturgical poem of the genre called *Reshut le-Nishmat* [i.e., a preface to the liturgical passage recited in the morning prayer on Sabbaths and festivals that declares that the soul of all living things (*Nishmat kol hai*) should praise God] meant to be incorporated in the service of Yom Kippur. In this poem the poet addresses his soul and asks it to devote its life to the worship of God, to bless Him and praise Him for giving it eternal life.

Bow before God, wise and unique/and run to serve Him with fear,
Face your world by night and by day/and why pursue vanity and for what?
You are compared in your life to the living God/who disappears as you disappear.

Just as your Creator is pure and clean - /know that you are pure and innocent.
Powerful, He holds the heavens on His arm - /like you hold a silenced corpse.
Sing songs, my soul to your Rock/who does not put your image in the earth.
My heart, bless your Rock always/whose name every soul will praise!

⁵³Schirmann, 1995: pp. 342-343; Schirmann, 1995: p. 321.

⁵⁴Schirmann, 1956a, 1956b: p. 282, Vol 1; Levin, 2007: par. 35.

⁵⁵Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 89.

⁵⁶Elizur, 2004: p. 156, Vol. 2.

⁵⁷Ibn Ezra, 1935: p. 67.

⁵⁸Schirmann, 2006: p. 237.

The poem opens with a direct and dramatic address by the poet to his soul, in which he commands it to bow down before God and to hasten to worship Him in fear and awe. The rhyme of “*haḥakhama*” (the wise) and “*be’eima*” (in fear) emphasizes the link between the soul’s understanding and its ability to choose to cleave to God and worship him in fear. Thanks to its wisdom, the soul understands the importance of worshipping God.

The speaker calls upon his soul to devote his time to the supreme spiritual world from which it comes, and not to waste it on the vanities of this world. Ibn Gabirol stresses before the soul that it is similar to God in its eternal existence and its invisibility and parallel to it in more qualities: The God who created it is pure and pristine, as it is pure and innocent; The powerful God holds the heavens (the world) in His arms, just as the soul carries the silent body. In the last verse the speaker addresses the body (its heart) and calls upon it to praise God, who is praised by every soul.

The use of one of the names of God, “your Rock” together with the mention of the “soul” indicate that this poem was a kind of preface to *Nishmat*. In this genre the poet asks permission, as it were, from God and from the congregation to recite the *Nishmat* prayer. In that *piyyut* the poet asks his soul to praise and glorify God, who gave it eternal pure life. Addressing his soul, he seeks to arouse in the listeners a feeling of spiritual transcendence that is special for worshipping God. One may conclude from the poem that the ultimate aspiration of man should be expressed in his abandoning the vanities of the world and devoting his life to complete faith in God, whereby he will grant his life the meaningfulness of sanctity.

Unlike in his secular poetry, in which Ibn Gabirol praises himself and takes pride in his skill, in his sacred poetry, we find another man altogether: submissive, aware of his own nothingness, and referring to his Creator with fear and trembling. In his poem “Know my soul”⁵⁹ Ibn Gabirol implores his soul, asking it to get closer to God, who is the only one who could reward it for its actions and answer its requests. The poem opens with an admonition to the soul to cut itself off from the vanities of this world, and its main part is an appeal to it not to be tempted and run after the vanities of this life. Finally, it calls upon the soul to prepare for the Day of Judgment, when it will have to give account for its deeds.

Know, my soul, your master/who will reward you
 And worship the one who will listen/on this day to your conversation
 Know, my soul, what you will do/before you go up to your Rock
 Why my single one and for what/have you pursued vanities in vain?
 Remember the Judgment Day/and be not foolish and debauched.

The poet turns to the soul, calling upon it to wake up and recognize the existence of God, who does not forget his creation, and urges it to worship God, who alone can listen to his prayers and petitions. He calls upon it to wake up from its slumber and be sober, to be aware of its actions before the body dies and it goes

⁵⁹Levin, 2007: p. 151.

up to heaven. The poet addresses his soul with two questions in order to warn it for its vain actions and wants to remind it to prepare for the Day of Judgment and not act foolishly and take part in the debauchery in this world.

Abū al'Atāhiyya also addresses his soul, and he also reminds it that death is approaching, and calls upon it to prepare for the Judgment Day that awaits it after death:

“Oh, my soul, forget not your book/woe unto you if you receive it in your left hand.”⁶⁰

“Fear God and abandon pride and remember/the judgment of the sinner on the Day of Judgment.”⁶¹

“Oh, my soul, until when will you distance yourself from the truth/until when will you not repent?”⁶²

“Oh, my soul, if you cannot be good/resemble those who are good.”⁶³

“(You) debauch yourself – and death comes to us – evening and morning/He whom the face of death does not reach in the morning, it will reach in the evening.”⁶⁴

“Until when do you amuse yourself and play/and death runs towards you with an open mouth.”⁶⁵

“Oh, he who builds a house and prepares it/what have you done for the sake of your world to come?”⁶⁶

In the four poems that were selected for comparison, the speaker addresses the soul and ignores the body. This fact testifies to the great value of the spiritual soul as opposed to the lowliness of the material body. The purpose of the address to the soul is to warn it to distance itself from the world before meeting God on the Judgment Day. This warning in the poem is addressed to the individual soul, but it applies to the audience in general.

Ibn Gabirol addresses his soul in the first verse of the poem “Know my soul,” saying:

Know my soul, what you will do/before you go up to your Rock (verse 1),

And he continues, asking:

Why my single one and for what/have you pursued vanities in vain? (verse 14).

Similarly, Ibn Gabirol addresses his soul in the poem “Bow before God” and implores it to cease pursuing the vanities of this world:

Bow before God, wise and unique/and run to serve Him with fear (verse 1)

Face your world by night and by day/and why pursue vanity and for what?

⁶⁰Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 314.

⁶¹Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 55.

⁶²Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 426.

⁶³Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 426.

⁶⁴Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 471.

⁶⁵Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 470.

⁶⁶Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 23.

(verse 2)

The speaker refers to his soul, using the names “unique” and “wise”, and he also cites the qualities that it has in common with God, such as “purity”, “innocence”, and “invisibility”.

In five characteristics the soul resembles God:

- It fills the entire body just as God fills the entire world.
- It sees but is not seen, like God.
- It nourishes the whole body like God nourishes the whole world.
- It is pure like its Creator.
- It resides in the depths of the body, like God resides in the innermost rooms.

A soul that has gained these qualities and shares them with the Creator of the world, must praise and glorify Him. This is an ancient Jewish concept, that describes the link between the soul of man and God.

In the first verse of the poem Ibn Gabirol asks his soul to submit itself and bow down before God (*Shehi la'el*) and to pray and worship Him out of “fear”. The term *shehi* is from the root ש.ה.י, which means bow, bend down. Addressing the soul to bow before God and submit oneself to him, stands out in Ibn Gabirol’s other poem as well, “Know, my soul” (*Nafshi de'î*):

Before God bow down/prostrate yourself, fall down (verse 9)

In this poem, in which the poet commands his soul to turn to its supreme source and cease pursuing vanity, the imperative form of face recurs:

Face your world by night and by day/and why pursue vanity and for what?

(verse 2)

The poet gives orders.

The poet Abū al'Atāhiyya also addresses his soul in his poems:

Oh, who is to my soul, which sailed away with its inclinations/and when I say so it returns from folly (verse 1).

Oh, the soul of this world is not a beloved relative/leave it to people who argued over it (verse 7).

When Abū al'Atāhiyya addresses his soul, he entreats it not to lust like others after the vanities of this world and its appetites. The difference between Ibn Gabirol and Abū al'Atāhiyya is that Ibn Gabirol perceives the soul as resembling God and attributes to it divine qualities. Descriptions like these do not occur in Abū al'Atāhiyya’s poetry specifically and in the poetry of Arabic poets in general because they would violate Muslim law.⁶⁷

3. The Attitude of Ibn Gabirol and Abū al'Atāhiyya towards This World and the World to Come

“The World” and “Time” are among the prominent subjects in the poetry of

⁶⁷Kutob, 2014: p. 18.

Spain. These subjects display a dark, pessimistic aspect opposed to the colorful and joyful experience of wine songs and songs of desire. The World (Heb. *tevel*) and Time (Heb. *zeman*) were linked together in the world of poetry, and they remained in it for centuries. Alduniya; (الدنيا) in Arabic; in Hebrew (*tevel*) “is the continent that is populated”. It is synonymous with earth, land, universe.⁶⁸

Here is verse by R. Samuel Hanagid from *Ben Qohelet*:

My comrade, will you earn the world to come? —and your legs rush to the joys of this world?

You are like a man with two wives, when you do/the will of one—you anger the other (Hanagid, 1993: p. 194, *Ben Qohelet*).

In Arabic Ibn Abed Rabba in his book *Al'aqed alfarid waqalo*: “They said:

The parable of this world and the world to come is like the parable of a man who has two wives, if he pleases the one, he angers the other.”⁶⁹ Samuel Hanagid addresses people, anyone who desires a long life—lovers of this world, your lives are worth nothing, and reminds them that they were born to die, everyone returns to whence he came:

Lovers of days on the earth, do you know that your lives are worthless?

You, every branch is from the root of death, it will return to its roots (Hanagid, 1993: p. 14, *Ben Qohelet*).

Abū al'Atāhiyya, who lived at a time long before the poets of Spain, would mention in his poems one of the principles of abstinence: preference for the world to come over the earthly life. He implored people not to be enslaved to this world, but to withdraw from a life of hedonism, and abandon material life. He points out that death is approaching, and reminds people that life in this world is in vain, but true happiness is to be found in the true life after death.⁷⁰

The motif of abstinence is expressed in Abū al'Atāhiyya's poem: “The tragedy of man is love of the world” (الْمَرْءُ أَفْتَهُ هَوَى الدُّنْيَا).⁷¹

In the following verses we shall see how the poet prefers life after death to the present life:

The love of this world is the tragedy [illness] of man/and the wealthier a man becomes the more he becomes despotic (verse 1).

I came to know the results of this world/so I left what I desired for that which I feared (verse 2).

Oh, you who build a home and furnish it/what have you done for your home in the world to come? (verse 18).

In the following verses the poet mentions the day of death, from which a man cannot escape:

⁶⁸Levin, 1962: pp. 68-79; Ibn Abed Rabbah, 1404 AH: part 3, p. 119; Almuwaz; See also: Ibn Abed Rabbah (<https://shamela.ws/book/23789/852>).

⁶⁹Levin, 1962 (<https://shamela.ws/book/23789/852>).

⁷⁰Jamal Aldin, 2018: pp. 34-36.

⁷¹Abū al'Atāhiyya, 1986: pp. 22-24.

Did you count those whom you have seen/when they were alive and afterwards you saw that they are dead? (verse 21).

You will reach the court of death/and will reside in the dwelling places of the dead (verse 22).

In the other poem, “Oh, my soul, which went too far in love” *أَلَا مَنْ لِنَفْسِي فِي الْهَوَىٰ* (تَمَانَّتْ) (Abū al’Atāhiyya emphasizes the advantage of abstinence and abandoning material life:⁷²

Oh, my soul, this world is not a beloved relative/leave it to the people who fight over it (verse 7).

And regarding the fate of the debauched soul, Abū al’Atāhiyya writes:

[The poet wonders] where do they go who wasted their lives in entertainment/and where are the generations that passed and were wiped out? (verse 10)

Abū al’Atāhiyya reminds his soul of the generations that existed before it and are extinct in order to persuade it to stop desiring this world, which ends in oblivion and death.

Solomon Ibn Gabirol also addresses his soul in two poems and impores it to devote its life to worshipping God and cease its pursuit after vanity.⁷³ Both poems mention the approach of death and warn about the Day of Judgment, on which all the living receive recompense for their actions in this world.

Abstinence poetry is basically pessimistic. With death lingering on the horizon, preaching that one should remove himself from the vanity of the world is the main subject of this poetry. Its purpose is to awaken man and bring him to take account and repent before leaving the material world.⁷⁴

These motifs appear in the following verses from Ibn Gabirol’s poem “Bow before God:”

Bow before God, wise and unique/and run to worship Him with fear (verse 1)

Face your world by night and by day/and why pursue vanity and for what? (verse 2)

In his poem “Know my soul” Ibn Gabirol also calls upon his soul to refrain from the vanities of the physical world, and to prefer the spiritual world:

Why, my unique one, and for what/do you go vainly after vanity (verse 14)

Gird yourself, help yourself/refrain, be noble (verse 15)

Abandon the vanity of the world, and do not/mourn over its arrogance (verse 16)

In the next stanza the poet warns about death approaching and the Judgment

⁷²Abū al’Atāhiyya, 1986: p. 89.

⁷³Levin, 2007: p. 163.

⁷⁴Beeri, 2009-2010: pp. 363-366.

Day in its wake:

Remember the Day of Judgment and do not look and debauch yourself (verse 22).

4. The Poetry of Ibn Gabirol and that of Abu Alatahayya: Artistic Techniques

Ibn Gabirol was familiar with the poetics and ornamental language of Arabic poetry and made marvelous use of its idioms and rhetorical techniques. Despite the profound influence of Arabic poetry on Ibn Gabirol, we can distinguish a certain uniqueness, such as his use of acrostics. He would sign his name Solomon (Shelomo) at the beginning of verses. This was a customary practice among the Hebrew poets of Andalusia, who were able in this way to stake their claim of ownership on their works for generations to come.

4.1. The Contrast of Opposites

Both Ibn Gabirol and Abū al'Atāhiyya made extensive use of opposites and pairs of words that demonstrate the contrast between this world and the world to come. Here are a few examples:

In his poem "Bow before God" (verse 2) he presents the contrast between "your night" and "your day", and in the poem "Know my Soul" (verse 23) the opposition of "good" and "evil".

In Abū al'Atāhiyya's first poem "Oh, my soul, which went too far in love," he contrasts "misery" with "happiness" in verse 12 (شِفْوَتِي وَسَعَادَتِي - طباق). In his second poem, "The tragedy of man is love of the world", verse 8, he contrasts between "slave" and "master" (العَبْدُ وَالْمَوْلَى - طباق); the contrast between "faults" and "merits" (مساويها - محاسنها); in verse 12: "bearer of the tidings of death" and bearer of good tidings" (أحياء - (النعي والبشرى); verse 21: the contrast between "life" and "death" (موتى أرضى - (أغضب).

4.2. The Use of Allusions to the Bible and the Quran

Allusions refer, by means of a word or expression that appears in a work, to other literary sources, creating a connection between the work itself and another event or literary work. This connection enriches the fabric of the later work, expanding its meaning and giving it more depth.

Muslim poets from before the period of Spain would enrich their poetic compositions with materials that refer to their sources, the Quran and the Hadith. Such a usage may be called "the Quranic connotation".

A study of Abū al'Atāhiyya's Diwan reveals that he preached to his readers by including expressions and phrases from the Muslim sacred ceremonies, and made great use of allusions from the Quran and the Suna.

Ibn Gabirol and the Jewish poets of Andalusia were influenced by the Bible,

which served for them as an important source to enrich their literary work. Abu Alatahayya, who preceded Ibn Gabirol by many years, used this technique extensively. His vast knowledge of Islamic sources enabled him to use allusions to the Quran and Hadith, in addition to incorporating proverbs from the Arabic tradition.

In Abū al'Atāhiyya's poem "Oh, my soul, which went too far in love," it says:

A soul that lived a long life of temptations/will in the end die despite its experience in fleeing from death (verse 9).

In this verse the poet alludes to Sura 50 ("The Qaf"), verse 19: "And the intoxication of death will bring the truth; that is what you were trying to avoid"

(وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنْتَ مِنْهُ تَحِيدُ)⁷⁴

To where did they go who spent their lives in entertainments and in naughtiness/and where are the generations that existed and were destroyed? (verse 10).

(أَلَا أَيْنَ مَنْ وَلى بِهِ اللَّهُمُّ وَالصِّبَا وَأَيْنَ فُرُونَ قَبْلَ كَانَتْ قَبَادَتِ)

These words allude to Sura 20 ("Ta Ha"), verse 128: "Then, has it not become clear to them how many generations We destroyed before them as they walk among their dwellings? Indeed, in that are signs for those of intelligence."⁷⁵

And from the second poem, "The tragedy of man is love of the world:"

The tragedy [illness] of man is love of the world, and the more a man becomes wealthier, the more he becomes despotic (verse 1).

(المرء أفنهُ هوى الدنيا والمرء يطغى كلما استغنى)

In this verse there are allusions to two verses (6 - 8) in Sura 96 ("The Clinging Substance"): "No! [But] indeed, man transgresses because he sees himself self-sufficient. Indeed, to the Lord is the return. (كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظِرٌ أَلَمْ يَرَ أَنَّهُ رَبَّهُ فَأَلْبَسَ الْحَمَاقَةَ إِنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الْرُجُوعُ).⁷⁶

Indeed. I examined and did not find anything/more valuable than a little sustenance, and not greater than that (verse 6).

(وَلَقَدْ بَلُوثٌ فَلَمْ أَجِدْ سَبِيًّا بِأَعَزَّ مِنْ قَنَعٍ وَلَا أَعْلَىٰ)

This verse alludes to the Hadith: "He who makes do with little will be strong and the covetous person will be brought low" (عَزَّ مَنْ قَنِعَ وَذَلَّ مَنْ طَمِعَ).⁷⁷

In the following verse Abū al'Atāhiyya incorporated a proverb in order to clarify his idea:

The truth shines and is not hidden/even the blind can see its light (verse 35).

This verse alludes to the proverb "The truth shines and a lie is unstable" (الحقُّ

⁷⁵The Qur'an, 2012: 50: p. 19, p. 522.

⁷⁶The Qur'an, 2012: 20: p. 128, p. 306.

⁷⁷The Qur'an, 2012: 96: pp. 6-8, p. 642.

⁷⁸Ibn Manẓūr, 1414 AH: p. 11, p. 321. See under the root قنع.

(أَبْلُجُ وَالْبَاطِلُ لُجُجٌ.⁷⁹)

Ibn Gabirol also made much use of allusions, as for example, in the opening of his poem “Bow before God”:

שְׁחִי לְאֵל, יְחִידָה הַחֲכָמָה, וְרוּצִי לְעִבְדוֹ אוֹתוֹ בְּאֵימָה (בית 1)

Bow before God, wise and unique/and run to serve Him with fear (verse 1).

The expression “to serve Him” alludes to the verse: “And you shall come to see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him who has served the Lord and him who has not served Him” (Malachi 3:18).

קִרְבִי, בְּרַכּוֹ תְּמִיד לְצוּרְכֶם אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁמּוֹ תִּהְלֵל כָּל נְשָׁמָה! (בית 7)

My heart, bless your Rock always/whose name every soul (*neshama*) will praise! (verse 7).

Here the speaker alludes to the verse: “Let all that breathes (*neshama*) praise the Lord” (Ps. 150:6).

In the poem “Know My Soul” the poet wrote:

וְרֵאֵי פְקַדֹת רַב עֲוֹן / בְּצַעֲדָה, וְעוֹד לֹא תִמְעָלִי (בית 6)

And see the order of sinfulness/you have committed, and not yet trespassed (verse 6).

In this verse the poet alludes to Lev. 26:40—“And they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, in that they trespassed against Me, they were hostile to me.” And in the next verse:

קוּמִי בְּעוֹד לַיְל, וְאַל / תִּתְיַשְׁנִי, תִּתְעַצְלִי (בית 7)

Rise up while it is still night/and do not slumber or be slothful (verse 7)

This verse alludes to Proverbs 6: 9—“How long will you be there, lazybones; when will you wake up from your sleep?”

And subsequently:

(אולי יִסְנַךְ צוּר וְלֹא / תִּרְדִי אֵלַי שַׁחַת בְּלִי (בית 13)

Perhaps the Rock will educate you and you will not/descend to the grave of oblivion (verse 13).

Here alluding to Isa. 38: 17—“Truly, it was for my own good that I had such great bitterness: You saved my life from the pit of destruction, for You have cast behind Your back all my offences.”

5. Summary

we recognize Another element that separates the two poets is that Solomon Ibn Gabirol incorporates in his poetry his vast knowledge of science and philosophy, such as the constellations, sea routes, stars in the heavens etc.

Analysis of these poems reveals that there is a great similarity between the poems that concern love of God and the reflection of the *Zuhd*-abstinence motif.

⁷⁹Almidani, 1988: p. 269.

The reader may notice that the poets were God-fearing, devoted believers in God, in such a way that is expressed in each and every poem. Their faith in God is expressed in different aspects that were examined in the study, whether in the contents of the poem, the use of artistic techniques, or ways of structuring the poem simply and the effort to reach out to the reader. For example, the use of contrast between the speaker and God. While the former is infinitesimal and earthly, God is omnipotent, enormous, and awe-inspiring.

In addition, Both Solomon Ibn Gabirol and Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya make abundant use of metaphors and images in order to sharpen these differences and illustrate the world of contrast in which they find themselves.⁸⁰ In every one of the poems, it was analyzed that there are different images and metaphors, even using a number of metaphors to describe the same action. However, despite the similarity, a significant difference may be observed in Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's tendency to use personification much more than Ibn Gabirol. Rābi'a frequently describes her love of God in the language of love between men and women, including longing and other expressions that Ibn Gabirol did not use.

Beyond their great use of metaphors and images of contrast, and simple language, both used the artistic trademark of flowery openings. In the case of Ibn Gabirol this may be seen as part of the characteristics of the poem from the point of view of internal rhyme and structure.

In contrast to the striking similarity in these aspects, two significant distinctions separate these poets. First of all, the period in which the two speakers lived (the 8th and 11th century). Secondly, in Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's poetry her physical difficulties are notable, as are all the terrible problems which she must struggle. In Ibn Gabirol's poems most of the problems that he must face are internal ones, mainly resultant from his complicated emotional situation, and not physical conditions as in the works of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya. In addition, Ibn Gabirol frequently incorporates his knowledge of both the religious and scientific world, for example by referring to sources or to other philosophical or scientific phenomena. Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya makes no use of these tools .

The philosophical poems deal with questions of life and death that pertain to every human being, and they generally express a pessimistic attitude towards the man's fate that of the world. In Arabic poetry in the East, philosophical poems were widespread, and they were mainly poems of morality and abstinence, calling on man to loath the pleasures of life in this world, to withdraw from society and engage in thought alone, and they undoubtedly influenced the Hebrew philosophical poetry composed in Spain. The Hebrew poets referred to these poems as *Zuhd* poems, i.e., poems of abstinence.

The contact created between two cultures in Spain enriched the cultural world of the Jewish poet, and in particular the secular poetry, which reached its height in the 10th century. Abstinence poetry is considered one of the new genres that the Jewish poets fashioned in Spain. Solomon Ibn Gabirol's abstinence poetry was

⁸⁰Badawi, 1962: pp. 61-82.

influenced by Muslim Zuhd poetry and in particular by the poetry of Abu Alatahayya. Ibn Gabirol gave his poetry a Jewish character by integrating the material that he drew from Abū al'Atāhiyya into a Hebrew framework, such as including Biblical allusions and the use of the acrostic, unique to Jewish poets. All of these features gave his work the appearance of an original Hebrew work.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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