

BAHYA BEN JOSEPH IBN PAḲUDA [\(back to article\)](#)

By : [Kaufmann Kohler](#) [Isaac Broydé](#)

System of Ethics.

Dayyan and philosopher; flourished at Saragossa, Spain, in the first half of the eleventh century. He was the author of the first Jewish system of ethics, written in Arabic in 1040 under the title "Al Hidayah ila Faraid al-Ḳulub" (Guide to the Duties of the Heart), and translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon in the years 1161-80 under the title "Ḥobot ha-Lebabot" (Instruction in the Duties of the Heart). Of his life nothing is known except that he bore the title of dayyan or judge at the rabbinical court. In composing the work toward the close of his life, Baḥya desired, as he says in the introduction, to supply a great need in Jewish literature, neither the Talmudists nor the philosophical writers having theretofore made any attempt to bring the ethical teachings of Judaism into a system. Baḥya found, on the one hand, the majority of the rabbis paying attention only to the outward observance of the Law, "the duties to be performed by the parts of the body" ("ḥobot ha-ebanim"), without regard to the ideas and sentiments embodied in the 613 laws of Moses, "the duties of the heart" ("ḥobot ha-leb"); and, on the other hand, the people at large disregarding all duties incumbent upon them, whether outward observances or moral obligations. Even the student of the Law was often prompted only by selfish and worldly motives. Baḥya therefore felt impelled to make an attempt to present the Jewish faith as being essentially a great spiritual truth founded on Reason, Revelation (the written Law), and Tradition, all stress being at the same time laid on the willingness and the joyful readiness of the God-loving heart to perform life's duties. An original thinker of high rank, thoroughly familiar with the entire philosophical and scientific Arabic literature, as well as with the rabbinical and philosophical writings of the Jews (of which he gives a valuable synopsis in the introduction), Baḥya combined in a rare degree great depth of emotion, a vivid poetic imagination, the power of eloquence, and beauty of diction with a penetrating intellect; and he was therefore well fitted to write a work the main object of which was not to argue about and defend the doctrines of Judaism, but to appeal to the sentiments and to stir and elevate the hearts of the people. He was also broad-minded enough to quote frequently the works of non-Jewish moral philosophers, which he used as a pattern. The "Ḥobot ha-Lebabot" was intended to be, and it deservedly became, a popular book among the Jews throughout the world, and parts of it were recited for devotional purposes during the Penitential Days, as is the penitential hymn "Bareki Nafshi," composed by Baḥya, which, embodied in the Roman ritual, has found a place also in Einhorn's and Jastrow's liturgies for the Day of Atonement.

Baḥya's Neoplatonism.

From the style of his writings and the frequent and apt illustrations he uses, it appears more than probable that Baḥya was a preacher of rich experience; while his great personality—a soul full of the utmost piety coupled with touching humility and a spirit of tolerance—shines through every line. Though he quotes Saadia's works frequently, he belongs not to the rationalistic school of the Motazilites whom Saadia follows, but, like his somewhat younger contemporary, Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021-1070), is an adherent of Neoplatonic mysticism, often closely imitating the method of the Arabian encyclopedists known as "the Brothers of Purity," as has been shown by Kaufmann, "Die Theologie des Bachya ibn Pakuda," pp. 202-204. Strangely inclined to contemplative mysticism and asceticism, Baḥya had nevertheless the common sense to eliminate from his system every element that might obscure the pure doctrine of Jewish monotheism, or might interfere with the sound, practical teachings of the Mosaic and rabbinical law. He wanted to present a religious system at once lofty and pure and in full accord with reason. The many points of contact that Baḥya has with Ibn Gabirol and Gazzali (1059-1111) have led Rosin and Brüll to assume that Baḥya borrowed largely from both, and that consequently he lived at a later time than is assumed by Kaufmann, who holds that both Ibn Gabirol and Gazzali were indebted to Baḥya (see Kaufmann, *l.c.* pp. 194, 198, 207; Rosin, "Die Ethik des Maimonides," p. 13; Brüll, "Jahrb." v. 71 *et seq.*).

His Religious Philosophy.

The "Hobot ha-Lebabot" is divided into ten sections termed "gates," corresponding to the ten fundamental principles which, according to his view, constitute man's spiritual life. The essence of all spirituality being the recognition of God as the one maker and designer of all things, Bahya makes the "Sha'ar ha-Yihud" (Gate of the Divine Unity, or of the monotheistic faith) the first and foremost section. Taking the Jewish Confession, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God the Lord is One," as a starting-point, the author emphasizes the fact that for religious life it is not so much a matter of the intellect to know God as it is a matter of the heart to own and to love Him. Yet it is not sufficient to accept this belief in God without thinking, as the child does, or because the fathers have taught so, as do the blind believers in tradition, who have no opinion of their own and are led by others. Nor should the belief in God be such as might in any way be liable to be understood in a corporeal or anthropomorphic sense, but it should rest on conviction which is the result of the most comprehensive knowledge and research. Far from demanding blind belief—which is anything but meritorious—the Torah, on the contrary, appeals to reason and knowledge as proofs of God's existence, as is shown, for instance, in Deut. iv. 6. It is therefore a duty incumbent upon every one to make God an object of speculative reason and knowledge, in order to arrive at true faith. Without intending to give a compendium of metaphysics, Bahya furnishes in this first gate a system of religious philosophy that is not without merit. Unfamiliar with Avicenna's works, which replaced Neoplatonic mysticism by clear Aristotelian thought, Bahya, like all the Arabian philosophers and theologians before him, bases his arguments upon Creation. He starts from the following three premises: (1) Nothing creates itself, since the act of creating necessitates its existence (so also Saadia, "Emunot," i. 2); (2) the causes of things are necessarily limited in number, and lead to the presumption of a first cause which is necessarily self-existent, having neither beginning nor end, because everything that has an end must needs have a beginning; (3) all composite beings have a beginning; and a cause must necessarily be created. The world is beautifully arranged and furnished like a great house, of which the sky forms the ceiling, the earth the floor, the stars the lamps, and man is the proprietor, to whom the three kingdoms—the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral—are submitted for use, each of these being composed of the four elements. Nor does the celestial sphere, composed of a fifth element—"Quinta Essentia," according to Aristotle, and of fire, according to others—make an exception. These four elements themselves are composed of matter and form, of substance and accidental qualities, such as warmth and cold, state of motion and of rest, and so forth. Consequently the universe, being a combination of many forces, must have a creative power as its cause. Nor can the existence of the world be due to mere chance. Where there is purpose manifested, there must have been wisdom at work. Ink spilled accidentally upon a sheet of paper can not produce legible writing.

Unity of God.

Bahya then proceeds, following chiefly Saadia and the Motekallamin (teachers of the Kalam), to prove the unity of God by showing: (1) All classes, causes, and principles of things lead back to one principal cause. (2) The harmony of all things in nature, the interdependence of all creatures, the wondrous plan and wisdom displayed in the structure of the greatest and smallest of animal beings, from the elephant to the ant, all point to one great designer—the physico-theological argument of Aristotle. (3) There is no reason for the assumption of more than one creator, since the world manifests but one plan and order everywhere. No one would without sufficient cause ascribe a letter written altogether in the same style and handwriting to more than one writer. (4) The assumption of many creators would necessitate either a plurality of identical beings which, having nothing to distinguish them, could not but be one and the same—that is, God—or of different beings which, having different qualities and lacking some qualities which others possess, can no longer be infinite and perfect, and therefore must themselves be created, not self-existent. (5) Every plurality, being a combination of units, presupposes an original unity; hence, even those that assume a plurality of gods must logically admit the prior existence of a Divine Unity—a Neoplatonic argument borrowed by Bahya from the Brothers of Purity. (6) The Creator can not share with the creatures accidents and substance. The assumption of a plurality, which is an accident and not a substance, would lower God, the Creator, to the level of creatures. (7) The assumption of two creators would necessitate insufficiency of either of them or interference of one with the power of the other; and as the limitation deprives the Creator of His power, unity alone establishes Divine omnipotence. After having

thus proved God's unity, Bahya endeavors to define God as the absolute unity by distinguishing His unity from all other possible unities. There is, he says, a unity that is obviously only accidental, as, for example, that of an army consisting of many soldiers; and there is another unity, the accidental character of which is less visible, as, for instance, that of the body, which consists of matter and form. Contrasting with this, there is the substantial unity presented by the unit which forms the unit and the basis of all numbers. Still this unity exists only as an idea. But there is a substantial unity which exists as the reality of all truth. Not subject to any change or accident, it is the root of all things, and has no similarity to any other thing. This real unity, necessitated by the plurality of all things as their root and eternal cause, is God. Every other unity of things is accidental, since composite; God alone is the true unity; nothing exists beside Him that is absolutely and eternally one.

Attributes of God All Negative.

V02p449001.jpgPage from Editio Princeps of "Hobot ha-Lebabot," Naples, 1489.

(In the Library of Columbia University, New York.) Adopting this Neoplatonic idea of God as the one who can only be felt by the longing soul, but not grasped by the reason, Bahya finds it superfluous to prove the incorporeality of God. The question with him is rather, How can we know a being who is so far beyond our mental comprehension that we can not even define Him? In answering this, Bahya distinguishes between two different kinds of attributes; namely, essential attributes and such as are derived from activity. Three attributes of God are essential, though we derive them from creation: (1) His existence; since a non-existent being can not create things; (2) His unity; (3) His eternity; since the last cause of all things is necessarily one and everlasting. But these three attributes are one and inseparable from the nature of God; in fact, they are only negative attributes: God can not be non-existent, or a non-eternal or a non-unit, or else He is not God. The second class of attributes, such as are derived from activity, are most frequently applied to God in the Bible, and are as well applied to the creatures as to the Creator. These anthropomorphisms, however, whether they speak of God as having manlike form or as displaying a manlike activity, are used in the Bible only for the purpose of imparting in homely language a knowledge of God to men who would otherwise not comprehend Him; while the intelligent thinker will gradually divest the Creator of every quality that renders Him manlike or similar to any creature. The true essence of God being inaccessible to our understanding, the Bible offers the name of God as substitute; making it the object of human reverence, and the center of ancestral tradition. And just because the wisest of men learn in the end to know only their inability to name God adequately, the appellation "God of the Fathers" will strike with peculiar force all people alike. All attempts to express in terms of praise all the qualities of God will necessarily fail (Ber. 33*b*). Man's inability to know God finds its parallel in his inability to know his own soul, whose existence is manifested in every one of his acts. Just as each of the five senses has its natural limitations—the sound that is heard by the ear, for instance, not being perceptible to the eye—so human reason has its limits in regard to the comprehension of God. Insistence on knowing the sun beyond what is possible to the human eye causes blindness in man; so does the insistence on knowing Him who is unknowable, not only through the study of His work, but through attempts to ascertain His own essence, bewilder and confound the mind, so as to impair man's reason. To reflect on the greatness and goodness of God, as manifested throughout creation, is consequently the highest duty of man; and to this is devoted the second section of the book, entitled "Sha'ar ha-Beḥinah" (Gate of Reflection). Men, as a rule, fail to appreciate the mercies of God, either because their insatiable longing for pleasure deprives them of the sense of gratitude, or because they are spoiled by fortune, or dissatisfied and disappointed in their expectation of life. All the more necessary is it to contemplate the active working of God in order to penetrate as far as possible into the Divine wisdom, which, while ever the same, is infinitely manifold in its effects, just as the rays of the sun differ in color according to their mode of refraction.

His Natural Philosophy.

Bahya here presents a beautiful and interesting system of natural philosophy, the teleological character of which indicates its provenience from the Brothers of Purity, as well as from Galen, whom he mentions in particular. Following the idea expressed in Prov. ix. 1, "Wisdom hath builded her house, hewn out her seven pillars," he points out a sevenfold manifestation for the creative wisdom in (1) the combination of the elements of which the earth forms the center, with water and air surrounding it and fire placed above; (2) the perfection of

man as the microcosm; (3) the physiology and intellectual faculties of man; (4) the order of the animal kingdom; (5) that of the vegetable kingdom; (6) the sciences, arts, and industries of man; and (7) the divine revelation as well as the moral and social welfare of all the nations. But, as has been said by one of the sages, "True philosophy is to know oneself." It behooves man to ponder on his own wondrous formation in order to recognize the wisdom of his Maker in observing the process of transformation of the elements into vegetation, which as food turns into marrow and blood, and builds up the animal body, which again, when joined to the soul—a spiritual, ethereal body akin to the celestial spirits—becomes a thinking, striving, and struggling man. How diverse the qualities of soul and of body! and yet they are united by the breath of life, the blood, and the nervous system! And how wisely are all the tender organs shielded by flesh, skin, hair, or nail against the perils surrounding them! And what marvelous foresight is exhibited in the way the infant is sheltered in the womb against the harmful influences of the atmosphere and nourished like a plant until it enters life, when the blood in the mother's breast is transformed for it into nurturing milk. The long dependence of the child upon the mother, the gradual awakening of the senses, and the slow development of the intellect lest its state of helplessness become unbearable, the frequent shedding of tears, even the mode of teething and the frequent sicknesses that befall children, betoken an especial training of man for the higher objects and obligations of life. Bahya then surveys the entire physiology and psychology of man; showing the wisdom displayed in the construction of each organ and of each faculty and disposition of the soul; also in such contrasts as memory and forgetfulness—the latter being as necessary for the peace and enjoyment of man as is the former for his intellectual progress. In nature likewise, the consideration of the sublimity of the heavens and of the motion of all things, the interchange of light and darkness, the variety of color in the realm of creation, the awe with which the sight of living man inspires the brute, the wonderful fertility of each grain of corn in the soil, the large supply of those elements that are essential to organic life, such as air and water, and the lesser frequency of those things that form the objects of industry and commerce in the shape of nourishment and raiment—all these and similar observations tend to fill man's soul with gratitude and praise for the providential love and wisdom of the Creator.

Worship of God.

This necessarily leads man to the worship of God, to which the third section, "Sha'ar 'Abodat Elohim" (Gate of Divine Worship), is devoted. Every benefit received by man, says Bahya, will evoke his thankfulness in the same measure as it is prompted by intentions of doing good, though a portion of self-love be mingled with it, as is the case with what the parent does for his child, which is but part of himself, and upon which his hope for the future is built; still more so with what the master does for his slave, who is his property. Also charity bestowed by the rich upon the poor is more or less prompted by commiseration, the sight of misfortune causing pain of which the act of charity relieves the giver; likewise does all helpfulness originate in that feeling of fellowship which is the consciousness of mutual need. God's benefits, however, rest upon love without any consideration of self. On the other hand, no creature is so dependent upon helpful love and mercy as man from the cradle to the grave.

Pedagogical Value of the Law.

Worship of God, however, in obedience to the commandments of the Law is in itself certainly of unmistakable value, inasmuch as it asserts the higher claims of human life against the lower desires awakened and fostered by the animal man. Yet it is not the highest mode of worship, as it may be prompted by fear of divine punishment or by a desire for reward; or it may be altogether formal, external, and void of that spirit which steels the soul against every temptation and trial. Still the Law is necessary as a guide for man, says Bahya, since there exists in man the tendency to lead only a sensual life and to indulge, like the brute, in passion and lust. There is another tendency to despise the world of the senses altogether, and to devote oneself only to the life of the spirit. Both are abnormal and injurious: the one is destructive of society; the other, of human life in both directions. The Law therefore shows the correct mode of serving God by following "a middle way," alike remote from sensuality and contempt of the world. The mode of worship prescribed by the Law has therefore mainly a pedagogical value, asserts Bahya. It educates the whole people, the immature as well as the mature intellects, for the true service of God, which must be that of the heart. Here an exposition of the teachings of the

Law and the Rabbis is given, with the view of emphasizing the need of spirituality without which all the observances of the ceremonies and the painstaking study of the dry volumes of rabbinical law fail of their purpose. A lengthy dialogue follows, between the Soul and the Intellect, on Worship, and on the relation of Free Will to Divine Predestination; Bahya insisting on human reason as the supreme ruler of action and inclination, and therefore constituting the power of self-determination as man's privilege. Another subject of the dialogue is the physiology and psychology of man with especial regard to the contrasts of joy and grief, fear and hope, fortitude and cowardice, shamefulness and insolence, anger and mildness, compassion and cruelty, pride and modesty, love and hatred, generosity and miserliness, idleness and industry—ten pairs of faculties of the soul which occur also in Ibn Gabirol's "Tikkun Middot ha-Nefesh" (see Kaufmann, "Theologie des Bahya ibn Pakuda," pp. 194 *et seq.*; Rosin and Brüll, *l.c.*), and may have been borrowed from an older Arabic source.

Divine Providence.

Trust in God forms the title and the subject of the fourth gate, "Sha'ar ha-Bittaḥon." Greater than the magical power of the alchemist who creates treasures of gold by his art is the power of trust in God, says Bahya; for he alone who confides in God is independent and satisfied with what he has, and enjoys rest and peace without envying any one. Yet only God, whose wisdom and goodness comprise all times and all circumstances, can be implicitly confided in; for He provides for all His creatures out of true love, and with the full knowledge of what is good for each. Particularly does He provide for man in a manner that unfolds his faculties more and more by new wants and cares, by trials and hardships that test and strengthen his powers of body and soul. Confidence in God, however, should not prevent man from seeking the means of livelihood by the pursuit of a trade; nor must it lead him to expose his life to perils. Particularly is suicide a crime often resulting from lack of confidence in an all-wise Providence. Likewise is it folly to put too much trust in wealth and in those who own great fortunes. In fact, all that the world offers will disappoint man in the end; and for this reason the Saints and the Prophets of old often fled their family circles and comfortable homes to lead a life of seclusion devoted to God only.

Immortality of the Soul.

Bahya here dwells at length on the hope of immortality, which, in contradistinction to the popular belief in bodily resurrection, he finds intentionally alluded to only here and there in the Scriptures, in view of the immature and childlike understanding of the multitudes, who need a training to morality by threats and bribes, by rewards and punishments, that appeal to the sense. To Bahya the belief in immortality is purely spiritual, as expressed in Zech. iii. 7, "I give thee places among these that stand by." His frequent recurrence, however, to the Saints, whom he lauds for their ascetic life, as showing their perfect confidence in God and their hope in the soul's future, betrays the singular dualism pervading his system—on the one hand, a mysticism derived from Arabic thinkers; and, on the other, the practical common-sense religion of the Jewish Law.

Hypocrisy and Skepticism.

Sincerity of purpose is the theme treated in the fifth "gate", called "Yiḥud ha-Ma'aseh" (Consecration of Action to God); literally, "Unification of Action." Nothing is more repulsive to the pious soul than the hypocrite, who is far worse than the heathen that worships idols, but does not deceive men and insult God's majesty as does the hypocrite. But it is characteristic of the age in which Bahya lived that he regarded skepticism as the chief means of seducing men to hypocrisy and all other sins. At first, says Bahya, the seducer will cast into man's heart doubt concerning immortality, to offer a welcome excuse for sensualism; and, should he fail, he will awaken doubt concerning God and divine worship or revelation. Not succeeding therein, he will endeavor to show the lack of justice in this world, and will deny the existence of another world which is to readjust the wrongs of the one that now is; and, finally, he will deny the value of every thought that does not redound to bodily welfare. Wherefore, man must exercise continual vigilance regarding the purity of his actions.

Humility.

The sixth gate, "Sha'ar ha-Keni'ah," deals with humility ("keni'ah"). This has its seat within, and is manifested in gentle conduct toward one's fellowman, whether he be of equal standing or superior, but especially in one's attitude toward God. It springs from a consideration of the low origin of man, the vicissitudes of life, and one's

own failings and shortcomings compared with the duties of man and the greatness of God; so that all pride even in regard to one's merits is banished. The high priest himself, in order to learn humbleness in his high station, had to remove the ashes from the altar every morning (Lev. vi. 3). The conditions of humility are meditation on God's greatness and goodness, observance of the Law, magnanimity toward the shortcomings of others, patience to endure without complaint every hardship that God imposes, kindness to others and charitable judgment of their doings, and forgiveness of injuries received. Especially is humility shown in refraining from finding fault in others, and in patiently bearing insults from them. Pride in outward possessions is incompatible with humility, and must be suppressed; still more so is pride derived from the humiliation of others. There is, however, a pride which stimulates the nobler ambitions, such as the pride on being able to acquire knowledge or to achieve good: this is compatible with humility, and may enhance it.

Repentance.

The practical tendency of the book is particularly shown in the seventh section, "Sha'ar ha-Teshubah" (the Gate of Repentance). The majority even of the pious, the author says, belong not to the class of those who have kept free from sins, but to such as feel regret at having committed them; wherefore, the prayer for divine forgiveness is one of the first of the eighteen benedictions. As there are sins both of omission and of commission, man's repentance should be directed so as to stimulate good action where such had been neglected, or to train him to abstain from evil desires where such had led to evil actions, just as the cure of a patient is of a stimulating or prophylactic character, according to the cause of his sickness. Repentance consists in: (1) the full consciousness of the shameful act and a profound regret for having committed it; (2) a determination of change of conduct; (3) a candid confession of the sin, and an earnest supplication to God asking His pardon; (4) in a perfect change of heart. True repentance shows itself in fear of the deserved divine punishment, in contrition of soul, in tears and sighs, in outward signs of grief—such as moderation of sensual enjoyment and display, and foregoing pleasures otherwise legitimate—and in a humble, prayerful spirit and an earnest contemplation of the soul's future. Most essential is the discontinuance of sinful habits, however excusable in themselves; because the longer they are adhered to, the more they grow from thin threads into thick ropes which can no longer be torn asunder. An especial hindrance to repentance is procrastination, which waits for a tomorrow that may never come. After having quoted sayings of the rabbis, to the effect that the sinner who repents may rank higher than he who has never sinned, Baḥya quotes the beautiful words of one of the masters to his disciples: "Were you altogether free from sin, I should be afraid of what is far greater than sin—that is, pride and hypocrisy." After having dwelt upon the mode of making amendments for wrongs done to one's fellow-man, and of preparing the soul to meet its Maker in perfect purity, the author closes the section with the story—taken, as he says, "from the ancients"—of a traveler, who, laden with heaps of silver coins, cast them, in his folly, into the stream which he wanted to pass, expecting to pave a way across, but found that all his coins had disappeared save one with which he paid the ferryman to carry him across. Repentance is the one coin that will carry man across the stream of life to the shore of eternal salvation, when all life's treasures have been foolishly spent.

Seeing God.

The next gate, entitled "Sha'ar Heshbon ha-Nefesh" (Self-Examination), is of the same admonitory character as the preceding one. It contains a solemn exhortation to take as serious and lofty a view as possible of life, its obligations and opportunities for the soul's perfection, in order to attain to a state of purity in which is unfolded the higher faculty of the soul, which beholds the deeper mysteries of God, the sublime wisdom and beauty of a higher world inaccessible to other men—a state reached only by the truly righteous ones, the chosen ones of God, where one is capable of "seeing without eyes, of hearing without ears, of speaking without tongue, of perceiving without the sense of perception, and of arriving at conclusions without the methods of reason." Baḥya, following the example of the Arabian encyclopedists, advocates a mysticism which might have led him far away from the path of the Law and of philosophy, had he not continually insisted on the observance of the prescribed forms of prayer, of worship, and of study of the Law, with the view of using them as means of elevating the soul to those heights of contemplation of the Divine accessible only to the pure in heart. Accordingly, he devotes the following section, entitled "Sha'ar ha-Perishut" (Gate of Seclusion from the World),

to the problem that is uppermost in his mind, the relation of true religiousness to asceticism. Abstinence, or seclusion from the world, is, according to Bahya, a necessary discipline to curb man's passion and to turn the soul toward its higher destiny, which is to rise, amid all earthly temptations and trials, to the station of angelic beings. Still, as the normal law of human life requires the cultivation of a world which God has formed to be inhabited, and the perpetuation of the race, asceticism can only be the virtue of a few chosen ones who stand forth as teachers of a higher art of life; but, in the same measure as the masses inclined at all times toward sensualism, in the same measure there arose Nazarites, prophets, and saints in the midst of them to point to the higher needs of the soul.

An Ascetic Life.

But there are different modes of seclusion from the world. Some, in order to lead a life devoted to the higher world, flee this world altogether, and live as hermits far away from all civilization, quite contrary to the design of the Creator; others retire from the world's turmoil and strife and live a secluded life in their own homes; a third class, which comes nearest to the precepts of the Law, participates in the world's struggles and pursuits, but leads a life of abstinence and moderation, regarding this world as a preparation for a higher one. The object of all religious practise is the exercise of self-control, the curbing of passion, and the placing at the service of the Most High of all personal possessions and of all the organs of life. Accordingly, the generation of the Patriarchs, being less passionate, required fewer legal restrictions than the people of Israel in Canaan surrounded by idolatrous nations, where the Nazarites and Prophets, who led a life of abstinence, became a necessity for them. Some such discipline of abstinence Bahya recommends, as an offset against worldliness, for an age like his own, when the people display unbridled passions and low desires; and he quotes from some Arabian moralist a lengthy admonition in this spirit.

Love of God.

The aim and goal of all ethical self-discipline he declares to be the love of God, which forms the contents of the tenth and last section of the work, "Sha'ar Ahabat Elohim" (The Gate of the Love of God). This is explained as the longing of the soul, amid all the attractions and enjoyments that bind it to the earth, for the fountain of its life, in which it alone finds joy and peace, even though the greatest pains and suffering be imposed on it. Those that are imbued with this love find easy every sacrifice they are asked to make for their God; and no selfish motive mars the purity of their love. Thus was the love of Abraham and Job, of Daniel and all the saintly martyrs, filled with the joy of self-sacrifice. For those that truly love their God the 613 commandments of the Torah are rather few in number, their whole life being consecrated to the God with whom they are one. As characteristic of this perfect unity of the loving soul with its God, Bahya tells of a saint found sleeping in the desert, who, when asked whether he had no fear of the lions in the vicinity, answered, "I should feel ashamed of my God, did I entertain fear of any being besides Him." And yet Bahya is not so one-sided as to recommend the practise of the recluse, who has at heart only the welfare of his own soul. A man may be as holy as an angel, yet he will not equal in merit the one that leads his fellow-men to righteousness and to love of God. The "Ḥobot ha-Lebabot" contains many gems of thought and beautiful sayings collected from the Arabic literature; and on account of its deep religious sentiment it became a treasury of devotion for the Jews during the Middle Ages. A number of compendiums of the work were composed and published for this purpose. According to Steinschneider, one was written as early as the thirteenth century by a grandson of Meshullam b. Jacob of Lunel, and reedited (not composed, as was formerly assumed) by Jacob Pan in 1614. Another compendium for the Penitential Days was composed by Menahem ibn Zerah and embodied in his "Zedah la-Derek" (1374). Two Arabic manuscripts of the "Ḥobot ha-Lebabot" exist, one in Paris and another in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; but they show essential variations, and seem therefore to present two different redactions. They are, according to Steinschneider, in "Jew. Quart. Rev." xiii. 452, "being prepared for the press." Judah ibn Tibbon translated the first section of the book for Meshullam ben Jacob of Lunel in 1161, and the rest between 1170 and 1198. Meantime Joseph Kimḥi of Narbonne made another translation, of which only the section on Repentance, "Sha'ar ha-Teshubah," has been preserved. It was published by Jellinek, together with Ibn Tibbon's translation, at Leipsic in 1846. Jacob Roman of Constantinople intended to publish the Arabic text with a Latin translation in 1643. A comparison of the translations with the Arabic original (Cairo MS.) was begun by Jehiel Judah b.

Joseph Moses Lewensohn in a pamphlet entitled "Ḥayye Lebabot," Vienna, 1872, and New York, 1885. According to Steinschneider, the Paris manuscript differs considerably from the text that Ibn Tibbon translated. The first edition of Ibn Tibbon's translation appeared in Naples in 1489; a less correct one in Venice in 1548; and a more critical one, with register and index, in Mantua in 1559. The best critical edition, based on eight manuscripts, is the one published by Isaac Benjacob, together with a brief commentary and a valuable preface and fragment of Kimḥi's translation by Jellinek, Leipsic, 1846. Hebrew commentaries, together with the text, appeared as follows: (1) "Manoah ha-Lebabot," by Manoah Händel b. Shemariah of Poland, Sulzbach, 1691, together with a German translation by Isaac b. Moses, Amsterdam, 1716; another with a German translation by Samuel Posen, Fürth, 1765; (2) "Marpe la-Nefesh," by Raphael b. Zachariah Mendel of Frankfort-on-the-Oder, Oleknitz, 1774; (3) "Toledot Aharon," by Ḥayyim and Isaacs, sons of Israel Somesz; (4) "Ne'edar ba-Ḳodesh," by Moses b. Reuben of Yurburg, Grodno, 1790; (5) "Pat Lehem," by Ḥayyim b. Abraham ben Aryeh Loeb Cohen, darshan of Mohilev, published with text under the title of "Simḥat Lebab," Sokolow, 1803; (6) "Or la-Yesharim," by Raphael J. Fürstenthal, together with a German translation and the text, Breslau, 1836. The following translations have been published: In Portuguese by Samuel b. Isaac Abbas, Amsterdam, 1670; in Italian in 1847; modern German translations were attempted in 1765; Spanish by Joseph Pardo, Amsterdam, 1610; Ladino by Zaddik b. Joseph Firmon, Venice, 1703, and Isaac Bellagrade, Vienna, 1822; German, besides those mentioned, by Mendel E. Stern, Vienna, 1856, and by Mendel Baumgarten, with preface by Abraham Geiger, Vienna, 1854. Baḥya's teachings were influenced by the Sufi theories which were in vogue at that epoch. Without going so far as to pronounce a deprecatory judgment on the ritual ceremonies, as the Sufis did, Baḥya seems to have attached no great importance to them. "The precepts prescribed by the Law," says he, "are only 613; those dictated by the intellect are innumerable." This is precisely the argument used by the Sufis against their adversaries, the Ulemas (compare Von Kreme, "Notice sur Sha'rany," in "Journal Asiatique," 1868, p. 253).

The Sufis.

The title of the eighth gate, "Muḥasabat al-Nafs" (Self-Examination), is reminiscent of the celebrated Sufi chief Abu Abd Allah Ḥarith b. Asad (tenth century), who has been surnamed El Muḥasib ("the self-examiner"), because—say his biographers—"he was always immersed in introspection" (compare Haji Khalifah, *s. v.* "Radyah"; Abu-al-Fida, "Annal Mosl." ii. 201, 698).

His "Reflections on the Soul."

Jami, in describing the life of the Sufis, says: "The aim that the Sufis pursued was a perfect union with God, or rather a kind of absorption of their individuality in the Deity. This absorption can be attained only gradually by cultivating self-renunciation, perfect indifference to all externals, and the effacement of all affection and will" ("Notices et Extraits," xii. 291). Such theories are often repeated by Baḥya in the last three gates. In the short introduction to the ninth gate, Baḥya says: "As in speaking in the preceding gate of self-examination, as withdrawal of the world was considered one of its conditions, I thought it fit to annex to it an exposition of the different forms of withdrawal and the form that is obligatory to the men of the Law." In adding the words "to the men of the Law," which are repeated several times in this gate, Baḥya had in view the asceticism of the Sufis. However this may be, Baḥya knew how to find the pearls in the heap of dust accumulated in the mystical literature of the Sufis; and his work exercised the most salutary influence upon Jewish religious life during many centuries. His proofs of the existence and unity of God, although all drawn from Arabic sources, and chiefly from the Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity, became classic, and were copied by many Christian scholastics (compare Thomas Aquinas; see also Fénelon, "Œuvres Complètes," pp. 701 *et seq.*).

Baḥya's Style.

Baḥya's style, although diffuse, like all Arabic philosophical writings, is clear and very often eloquent. Unfortunately, the same can not be said of the Hebrew translation of his work, and consequently of all the modern translations made from the Hebrew. Judah ibn Tibbon made it his duty to translate verbatim, frequently without having penetrated into the author's thought: he thus became a source of misinterpretation. Many passages in the Hebrew translation are veritable enigmas; and the commentaries that have been grafted on the translation of this simple work—a work designed by its author for the multitude—are unable to solve these

enigmas correctly, on account of the mistakes of the translator. Another philosophical work of Bahya, entitled "Ma'ani al-Nafs" (Reflections on the Soul), was discovered six years ago in a manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris. This manuscript, which is quite old, bears on the title-page the name of Bahya ben Joseph ibn Pakuda as author. The authenticity of the authorship of this work, questioned by J. Guttmann, in "Monatsschrift," 1897, pp. 241-256, has been recognized by all Orientalists who were enabled to compare this manuscript with the original of the "Duties of the Heart" (compare Schreiner, in "Zeit. für Hebräische Bibliographie," i. 121-128; Kaufmann, in "Revue Etudes Juives," xxvii. 271; J. Derenbourg, *ib.* xix. 306). At any rate, the philosophical theories expounded in the "Reflections on the Soul" are in perfect accord with those expressed here and there in the "Duties of the Heart." The influence of Neoplatonism and the Kalam is apparent in both works, a fact that proves beyond any doubt that the "Reflections on the Soul" were written no later than the eleventh century—that is to say, in Bahya's era. The "Reflections on the Soul," translated from Arabic into Hebrew under the title "Torot ha-Nefesh" (Teachings on the Soul), with a French résumé by I. Broydé (Paris, 1896), is divided into twenty-one chapters, in which the author endeavors to reconcile the Neoplatonic psychological system. Bahya refers in this work to two other writings of his, which are no longer extant: (1) "Bareki Nafshi," a psychological Hebrew poem to which the "Reflections on the Soul" serves as a commentary; and (2) "Alnask wal-Nazam fi al-Khaliqah" (Order and Gradation in Creation). [Bahya also composed a number of liturgical poems, full of great religious fervor, part of which have found a place in the Roman Maḥzor, while some are still in manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The best-known poem is the one beginning with "Bareki Nafshi," which was translated by Deborah Ascarelli into Italian in 1601, and was paraphrased in Italian by Johanan Alatrino, 1628; in German, by Michael Sachs in his "Die Religiöse Poesie der Juden in Spanien," and in English by M. Jastrow in his prayer-book. A description of these liturgical poems by Bahya is given by Landshuth in "Ammude ha-'Abodah," i. 49, Berlin, 1857. A seliḥah by Bahya is published in Koback's "Jeschurun," iv., Hebrew part, 1864, pp. 183, 184]. Bibliography:

Dukes, *Zur Kenntniss der Neuhebräischen Religiösen Poesie*, pp. 85 *et seq.*, 1842; Geiger, *Die Ethische Grundlage des Buches über die Herzenspflichten*, in ed. Baumgarten, xiii.-xxii., 1854; Brüll, *Jahrbücher*, v., vi. 71 *et seq.*; Munk, *Mélanges*, p. 482, note 3; Karpeles, *Gesch. der Jüdischen Literatur*, i. 483-486; Michael, *Or ha-Hayyim*, No. 563; Steinschneider, *Cat. Bodl.* pp. 780 *et seq.*; idem, *Hebr. Uebers.* §§ 214-217, and *Jew. Quart. Rev.* xiii. 452; Kaufmann, *Die Theologie des Bahya ibn Pakuda*, Vienna, 1874, in *Sitzungsberichte der Philosophisch-Historischen Classe der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, lxxvii.; Rosin, *Die Ethik des Maimonides*, 1876, p. 13; Eisler, *Vorlesungen über die Jüdische Philosophie des Mittelalters*, i. 43-57, Vienna, 1876; J. Reifmann, in *Graeber's אוצר החכמה*, 1888, ii.; J. Guttmann, *Monatsschrift*, xli. 241-256. K. I. Br. K.

Conceived, created, and funded by
The Kopelman Foundation

search powered by
THUNDERSTONE
Document Retrieval & Management

Copyright 2002 JewishEncyclopedia.com. All rights reserved.

• [Privacy](#) • [Terms of Use](#) • [Contact](#)