

Hasdai Crescas  
Collected Writings



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THE LIBRARY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

# HASDAI CRESCAS

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THE LIFSHITZ EDITION  
COLLECTED WRITINGS

EDITOR, ROSLYN WEISS

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# Timeline

	Hasdai Crescas	Jewish Context	Global Context
1263		Disputation between Ramban (Nahmanides) and Pablo Christiani before King James I of Aragon. Notable among disputations in that the king gives Ramban freedom to speak against Christianity. This relative freedom is characteristic of Jewish rights in Spain.	
1337–1453			The Hundred Years' War between England and its allies against France and its allies. Spain is not directly involved.
1340	Hasdai Crescas is born in Barcelona, the capital of Aragon.		
1343		Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, known as the Baal HaTurim, dies in Toledo. His <i>Arba'ah Turim</i> , an ugely influential halakhic code, forms the basis for the even more influential <i>Shulhan Arukh</i> .  King Kazimir III (the Great) invites the persecuted Jews of Western Europe to settle in Poland.	Geoffrey Chaucer is born in London, becomes known as “the father of English literature.”
1343–1351			The Black Death (bubonic plague) kills about one third of Europe’s population.
1344		Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (Rabag, Gersonides) author of <i>Milhamot HaShem</i> , dies. His philosophical work adhered to Aristotelian thought, and his rationalism led him to explain away some biblical miracles. Crescas was among his critics.	
1349		Jews are blamed for the Black Death and suffer persecution across Europe. Hundreds of Jews are burned alive in the Strasbourg Massacre.	

1351–69		Up to 38,000 Jews die in the civil war.	Civil war in Spain between King Peter and his illegitimate brother Henry of Trastámara over the right to the crown.
1361			University of Pavia, still active today, is founded in Italy. One of a number of universities founded in this era that served as new intellectual centers.
1367	Crescas emerges as merchant, poet, and communal leader. Crescas is briefly imprisoned, along with Rabbi Isaac ben Sheshet (Rash), Rabbi Nissim ben Reuben (the Ran), and others on a trumped-up charge of host desecration.		
1370	Crescas participates in a poetry competition between Hebrew poets of Barcelona and Gerona.		
1380		Joseph Albo, philosopher and rabbi who was Crescas's most famous disciple and later wrote <i>Sefer HaIkkarim</i> , is born in Aragon.	
1383	Crescas is among the delegates of the Jewish community to the Crown of Aragon, which negotiates the renewal and extension of privileges for the Jews of Aragon.		The 1383–85 Crisis in Portugal: A period of civil war and disorder begins after King Fernando dies without a male heir to the Portuguese throne.
1387	Crescas attains the title of “member of the royal household” of Aragon.		
1389	Crescas is invited to serve as rabbi of Saragossa, replacing Rabbi Isaac ben Sheshet.		
1390	Crescas is appointed crown Rabbi of the entire state of Aragon by King Joan I and Queen Violant de Bar.	Rabbi Israel Isserlein, author of the <i>Terumat HaDeshen</i> , is born in Styrian Maribor (present-day Slovenia).	
	Crescas is appointed by Queen Violant supreme judge in matters pertaining to informers in Jewish communities; he is given the right to impose punishment.		

1391	<p>Crescas's only son dies in Barcelona's anti-Jewish riots.</p> <p>Crescas publishes <i>Epistle to the Jews of Avignon</i>, chronicling the devastation of Jewish communities by the anti-Jewish riots.</p>	<p>Antisemitic priest Ferrand Martinez travels throughout Spain inciting riots against Jews. Pogroms erupt in Seville, the violence spreads throughout Spain and Portugal, especially to Toledo, Barcelona and Mallorca.</p> <p>Perhaps as many as 50,000 Jews are massacred and more than 150,000 convert to Christianity. This event marks a turning point in the history of Spanish Jewry, with most of the survivors leaving the Iberian Peninsula.</p>	
1393	<p>King Joan I appoints Crescas to lead the effort to reconstitute shattered Jewish communities in Barcelona and Valencia.</p> <p>Crescas receives permission from the King of Aragon to take another wife, who bears him one son and three daughters.</p>		
1396	<p>Crescas frames regulations to reform communal representation and to strengthen the power of the administrators of the Jewish community.</p>		<p>Battle of Nicopolis: The Ottomans defeat a joint crusade by Hungary, France, the Holy Roman Empire, England, and Wallachia, led by King Sigismund of Hungary. This is the last large-scale crusade of the Middle Ages.</p>
1397–1398	<p>Crescas publishes <i>Refutation of the Christian Principles</i>.</p>		
	<p>Crescas publishes <i>The Passover Sermon</i>. (Date unknown but predates the publication of <i>Light of the Lord</i>.)</p>		
1401–1402	<p>Crescas travels to Pamplona, having received 40 florins from King Carlos III, perhaps to discuss the state of the Jewish community there and the possibility of resettling Aragonese Jews in Navarre.</p>		<p>1402: Conquest of the Canary Islands (off the coast of northwest Africa) begins, marking the beginning of the Spanish Empire.</p>
1410	<p>Crescas publishes <i>Light of the Lord</i>.</p>		<p>Foundation of St. Andrew's University in Scotland.</p>

1410 OR 1411 OR 1412

Crescas dies in Saragossa.

1437

Don Isaac Abrabanel, statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator, and financier, born in Lisbon.

1492

Queen Isabella of Spain issues the Alhambra Decree banishing all Jews from Spain.

Cristopher Columbus sets sail on his first voyage of discovery.

# General Introduction

*Roslyn Weiss*

This volume contains all of Ḥasdai Crescas's extant works, along with English translations of each. The translation of the *Epistle to the Jewish Communities of Avignon* is the work of F. Kobler. Both the Hebrew text and the English translation of *The Refutation of the Christian Principles* were prepared by Professor Daniel Lasker. Roslyn Weiss translated both the *Sermon on the Passover*, whose Hebrew text was produced by Professor Aviezer Ravitzky, and *Light of the Lord*, whose Hebrew text was produced by Daniel Levin.

## Crescas's Life

Ḥasdai Crescas was born in or around 1340, in Barcelona, Spain. He is descended from a long line of Torah scholars and was a student of the great Talmudist, Rabbi Nissim ben Reuben Gerondi (Ran). He counted among his friends the renowned Rabbi Isaac ben Sheshet (Ribash) and Rabbi Simeon ben Tzemaḥ Duran (Rashbatz), and among his students the esteemed Rabbi Joseph Albo. Crescas relied

upon his students as colleagues and acknowledged in *Light of the Lord* their help in composing it.

In the first period of his life, Crescas lived relatively peacefully in Barcelona. He was a student at the local yeshiva, which was headed by Rabbi Nissim, where, in addition to the standard curriculum of Bible and Talmud, Crescas also studied Kabbala, science, and philosophy. In his twenties, Crescas was a merchant and communal leader and, following the death of Rabbi Nissim, he and his friend Ribash became the most prominent authorities on matters of Jewish law and practice, not only in Aragon, but possibly in all of Spain.

In Christian Europe of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, hatred of the Jews was rampant both among the Catholic clergy and in the general populace. Riots and savage attacks on Jewish communities gradually made their way from Germany and France to Spain. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century the condition of the Jews in Spain had worsened, as the priests proclaimed: one state, one nation, one faith. The Jews were forced to choose between conversion and death. The intellectuals were the first to opt for conversion, having no firm commitment to one religion over another. It was the simpler Jews who, for the most part, remained faithful to their Judaism and whose lives were consequently imperiled. Crescas became an unfortunate and undeserving target of the anti-intellectual sentiment that ensued among traditionalists. In 1367, he was falsely accused and imprisoned (along with Ribash the Ran and others) – though he (and they) were soon released.

In 1387, Pedro IV of Aragon died, and his son became king. The new king, Joan I of Aragon, was, along with his French queen, Violant de Bar, a patron of the sciences and arts; their palace in Saragossa, the capital of the Crown of Aragon, became a cultural and scientific center. In 1389 Crescas left Barcelona for Saragossa, and a year later was appointed by the royal couple chief judge of the Jews of Aragon. In 1391, while Crescas resided in Saragossa, the Jews of Barcelona fell victim to horrific pogroms. The massacres began in Castilla, but spilled over into Aragon. The king and queen tried to save the Jews and to prevent the pogrom, but they were successful only in Sara-

ity – original sin, redemption, the Trinity, incarnation, the virgin birth, transubstantiation, baptism, the messiahship of Jesus, the New Testament, and demons – and thereby to challenge the Christian claim to superiority. Another work, *Sermon on the Passover* (*Derashat HaPesah or Maamar Or LeArbaa Asar*), considers, in its first part, how human will and miracles affect faith in God and Torah. Its second part contains a concise summary of the laws of Passover. As far as we know, Crescas, who was in his day a recognized and renowned halakhist, produced no other halakhic works. *Light of the Lord*, which amplifies and modifies some of the ideas set forth in the *Sermon*, was surely motivated by Crescas's perception of the need to shore up a decimated Jewish community. He had hoped to produce a two-volume work, to be called *Lamp of the Lord*, that would provide a creditable alternative to the two Maimonidean works he regarded as deeply problematic, the *Guide of the Perplexed* and the *Mishneh Torah*. His intention in this work was to set the record straight on matters of both Jewish belief and Jewish law. Unfortunately, the second volume (to be called *Lamp of the Commandment*) concerning Jewish law was never written. Only the single volume, *Light of the Lord*, his challenge to the *Guide* concerning Jewish belief, was completed.

Crescas's bold philosophy had fewer adherents than it should have had. Later thinkers tended either to toe the Aristotelian line or to return to a less philosophically inflected Jewish traditionalism. In addition, history was not kind to Crescas: Spanish Jewry was shattered by the 1391 pogrom and by further persecutions at the start of the next century. Nevertheless, *Light of the Lord* continues to be known and studied. Moreover, Crescas's philosophical views – particularly those on the infinite and on free will – influenced two major later thinkers, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who quotes Crescas extensively, and Spinoza, whose views on freedom, necessity, and love, as well as on extension and infinity, bear Crescas's stamp. Spinoza refers to R. Ḥasdai explicitly in his Epistle 12 to Ludwig Meyer (April 20, 1663), in which he paraphrases Crescas's version of the cosmological argument for God's existence.

It is hoped that this volume will spark renewed engagement with a profound, and profoundly Jewish, thinker who merits far more attention and study than he has hitherto received.

# איגרת לאביניון

Epistle to the Jews  
of Avignon

Translated by Fritz Kobler

כתב אשר שלח הרב מסרגוסא  
דון חסדאי קרשקש אל קהלות אויניין  
על דבר הגזרות אשר היו בספרד  
בשנת קנ"א לאלף הששי

אם אמרתי אספרה להם רובי התלאות אשר מצאונו ישתוממו רעיונכם, האמנם אערוך לפניכם שלחן הרעה מעוטרת ראש ולענה בקצרה, הדברים כהויתם להשביעכם מרורות לענותנו ולהשקותיכם מיין עצבונינו. ובעבור אחשוב כבר הוגד לכם הדבר אכתוב אותו בתכלית הקצור על הסדר וזה החלי:

יום ראש חדש תמוז קנ"א המר והנמרד דרך ה' קשתות האויב על קהלת סביליאה רבתי עם שהיו בה כמו ששה או שבעה אלפים בעלי בתים, הציתו כאש שעריה והרגו בה עם רב, אך רובם המירו, ומהם מכרו לישמעאלים מהטף ומהנשים, והיו מסילות היהודים יושבים בדם, ורבים מתו על קדושת השם, ורבים חללו ברית קודש.

# Hasdai Crescas to the Community of Avignon

“Among the many who sanctified the name of the Lord was my only son.”  
[Saragossa, 19 October 1391]

If I were to tell you here all the numerous sufferings we have endured you would be dumbfounded at the thought of them; I will therefore set before you only in brief detail the table of our disaster set with poisonous plant and wormwood, giving you a bare recital of the facts so that you may satiate yourselves on the bitterness of our wormwood and drink from the wine of our grief.<sup>1</sup> As I suppose that you have been told the story already, I will recount it as briefly as possible, commencing as follows:

On the day of the New Moon of the fateful month Tamuz in the year 5151 [July 1391] the Lord bent the bow of the enemies against the populous community of Seville where there were between six thousand and seven thousand heads of families, and they destroyed their gates by fire and killed in that very place a great number of people; the majority, however, changed their faith.

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1. Jer. 23:15.

משם יצאה אש ותאכל כל ארזי הלבנון העיר הקדושה קהלת קורטובה, גם שם המירו רבים ותהי לחורבה. וביום צרה ותוכחה יום שהוכפלו בו הצרות, שבעה עשר בתמוז, חמת ה' נתנה על עיר הקודש אשר משם תצא תורה ודבר ה', היא קהלת טוליטולה, ויהרגו במקדש ה' כהן ונביא. שמה קדשו את השם ברכים רבניה, הם זרע הכשר והנבחר, זרע הרב רבי אשר זכר צדיק לברכה, הם ובניהם ותלמידיהם. גם שם המירו רבים לא יכלו לעמוד על נפשם. על שלש אלה רגזה ארץ. מלבד קהלות אחרות סביבותיהן בא מספרן כמו שבעים עיר, ובכל זאת אנחנו פה על משבר והיה לנו הלילה והיום למשמר. ויהי בשביעי לחודש אב בלע ה' ולא חמל בקהלת ולינציאה, היו בה כמו אלף בעלי בתים, והיו המתים בקדושת השם כמו מאתים וחמשים אנשים, והנשארים הרה נסו, ונמלטו מעטים ורובם המירו.

Many of them, children as well as women, were sold to the Muslims, so that the streets occupied by Jews have become empty. Many of them, sanctifying the Holy Name, endured death, but many also broke the holy covenant.

From there the fire spread and consumed all the cedars of Lebanon [Jewish scholars, here Jews generally] in the holy community of the city of Cordova. Here, too, many changed their faith, and the community became desolate.

And on the day of misery and punishment on which the sufferings were intensified, the wrath of the Lord was discharged on the holy city, the source of learning and the word of the Lord, namely, the community of Toledo, and in the temple of the Lord the priests and the learned were murdered. In that very place the rabbis, the descendants of the virtuous and excellent Rabbi Asher of blessed memory,<sup>2</sup> together with their children and pupils, publicly sanctified the Holy Name. However, many who had not the courage to save their souls changed their faith here, too.

The country trembled even on account of these three communities, yet seventy other communities in the same vicinity were struck as well. And withal, we were in the greatest danger here, and had to be on the alert day and night. On the 7th of the month of Av the Lord destroyed mercilessly the community of Valencia, in which there were about a thousand heads of families; about 250 men died, sanctifying the name of the Lord; the others fled into the mountains; some of these saved themselves but the majority changed their faith.

From there the plague spread over the communities of glorious Majorca, which is situated on the shore of the sea. On the day of the New Moon of Elul, the bloodthirsty villains came there, profaned, plundered and robbed them and left them like a net in which there are no fish. There died, sanctifying the Holy Name, about three hundred persons, and about eight hundred took refuge in the royal castle; the others changed their faith.

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2. Viz. Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel; he died in 1328.

משם פשטה הנגע בקהלות מיורקה העדינה לחוף ימים ישכון, יום ראש חדש אלול באו בה פריצים ויחללוהו, בזוהו ושללוהו ועזבוהו כמצודה שאין בה דגים, ומתו בקדוש השם כמו שלש מאות נפשות, וכמו שמונה מאות נמלטו במגדל המלך, והנשארים המירו.

יום שבת אחריו שפך ה' כאש חמתו, נאר מקדשו וחלל נזר תורתו, היא קהלת ברצלונה אשר הובקעה ביום ההוא, ובא מספר ההרוגים כמו מאתים וחמשים נפשות, וכל יתר הקהל נסו אל המגדל, ושם נמלטו. והאויבים בזו כל מסילות היהודים והציתו אש בקצתם. ויד מנהיג המדינה לא היה במעל, אך התאוה להצילים בכל יכלתו, ויכלכלו שם היהודים בלחם ובמים, ויאזרו לעשות שפטים באנשים הפושעים. אזי קם שאון דלת העם והמון רבה על נכבדי המדינה, וילחמו עם היהודים אשר במגדל עם קשתות ובלסטראות, ויכום ויכתום שמה במגדל. רבים קדשו ה', בתוכם בני יחידי חתן שה תמים העליתיו לעולה, אצדיק עלי הדין ואתנחם לטוב חלקו ולנעימת גורלו. ומהם רבים ששחטו עצמם, ומהם הפילו עצמם מהמגדל ולא הגיעו לחצי המגדל, עד שנעשו אברים אברים, וקצתם יצאו משם וקדשו את השם ברחוב, וכל השאר המירו, רק מעטים היו שנמלטו בערי הסגנים, נער יכתבם, אך הם מהנכבדים. וברוב עוונותינו אין היום בכרצלונה איש בשם ישראל יכונה.

וכן בעיר לירידה מתו רבים, והשאר המירו, ושנמלטו היו רק מעטים.

בעיר גירונדה תורה וענוה במקום אחד, קדשו ה' ברבים הרבנים אשר שם, לא המירו בה כי אם מועטים, ורוב הקהל נמלטו בבתי העירונים, והם היום במגדל.

סוף דבר, במלכות ולינציאה לא נשאר יהודי, זולתי במקום אחד

On the following Sabbath the Lord poured out his fury like fire, destroyed His sanctuary and profaned the crown of His teaching, namely the community of Barcelona, which was destroyed on that day. The number of murdered amounted to 250 souls; the rest fled into the castle, where they were saved. The enemies plundered all streets inhabited by Jews and set fire to some of them. The authorities of the province, however, took no part in this; instead, they endeavored to protect the Jews with all their might. They offered food and drink to the Jews, and even set about punishing the wrongdoers, when a furious mob rose against the better classes in the country and fought against the Jews who were in the castle, with bows and missiles, and killed them in the castle itself. Amongst the many who sanctified the Name of the Lord was my only son, who was a bridegroom and whom I have offered as a faultless lamb for sacrifice; I submit to God's justice and take comfort in the thought of his excellent portion and his delightful lot. Amongst them were many who slaughtered themselves and others who threw themselves down from the tower and whose limbs were already broken before they had reached half-way down the tower. Many also came forth and sanctified the name of the Lord in the open street. All the others changed their faith, and only few found refuge in the towns of the princes; a child could register the names of these. However, these were precisely the most esteemed. Consequently, because of our many sins, there is none left in Barcelona today who still bears the name of Jew.

In the town of Lerida, too, many died and others changed their faith. There were only a few people who saved their lives.

In the town of Gerona, where knowledge of the Law could be found combined with humility, the Rabbis of that place sanctified the Name of the Lord publicly, and only few changed their faith. The majority of the community escaped to the houses of the citizens and are today in the castle.

In a word, in the state of Valencia not one single Jew remained, with the sole exception of the place called Murviedro. In the province

הנקרא מורבידרו. ובמחוז קטלוניאה לא נשאר יהודי, זולתי בערי  
הסגנים והפחות שלא שלחו יד בהם בכל המקומות.  
אנחנו פה היום בכל מדינות ארגון, אין פרץ ואין צוחה  
בחמלת ה' עלינו. הותיר שריד בכל מקומות אלו אחר ההשתדלות  
הנמרצה והפזור הרב מכל רכושנו לא נשאר לנו בלתי גויותינו.  
ובכל זאת לבנו יהגה אימה, ועינינו אל אבינו שבשמים נשואות,  
עד שיחננו וירפאנו ממכאובנו ואל יתן למוט רגלינו. כן יהי  
רצון! אמן!

אני הגבר ראה עני בשבט עברתו חסדאי בר אברהם בר  
חסדאי בר יהודה קרשקש הכותב פה סרקסטה יום עשרים לחודש  
מרחשון שנת חמשת אלפים וקנ"ב ליצירה.

of Catalonia, too, not one single Jew remained except in the towns of the princes and administrators, who nowhere attacked them.

For us, however, who are still in the country of Aragon, there is no more trouble and complaint, because the Lord has taken pity on us and has preserved the remnant of us in all these places after vehement supplication, although nothing but our bodies is left us after the distribution of our belongings. In spite of this, fear fills our hearts, and our eyes are directed towards the Father in heaven, that He may be merciful to us and may heal us of our wounds,<sup>3</sup> and keep our feet from wavering. May this be His will, Amen.

‘I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath,’<sup>4</sup> Ḥasdai son of Abraham son of Ḥasdai son of Judah Crescas, who writes here in Saragossa, on the 20th day of the month Marḥeshvan in the year 5152 of the creation.

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3. Jer. 30:17.

4. Lam. 3:1.

ספר ביטול עיקרי הנוצרים  
לרבינו חסדאי קרשקש

בתרגומו של יוסף בן שם טוב  
ההדיר דניאל י' לסקר

# The Refutation of the Christian Principles

Translated by Daniel J. Lasker

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## הקדמת המתרגם

'מאיבי תחכמני מצותך כי לעולם היא לי'<sup>1</sup>

אחר השבח והתהלה לאל לאין שיעור, אשר שיער מאמיתתו<sup>2</sup> אלינו באופן מהיושר וההצלחה מה שבו נהיה שלמים ושמחים. ושמרנו מהמבוכה והבלבול, ולקח אותנו 'להיות לו לעם נחלה'<sup>3</sup> מכל העמים 'ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש'<sup>4</sup> משרתי עליון משקיפי האמיתיות 'מלומדי מלחמות'<sup>5</sup> נבדלים מהשיבושים שהבדילנו מן התועים<sup>6</sup> להתענג משפע כבודו. לא שם חלקנו כהם, וגורלנו ככל המונם.<sup>7</sup> כלם כאחד יחפיר ויבאיש<sup>8</sup> בדעותיו ואמונותיו, בהמה כדמות איש, נבדל מהמוחש נפרד מהמושכל.<sup>9</sup> שקר ותרמית אב לבנים יודיע.<sup>10</sup> הם משתחווים [להבל וריק ומתפללים אל אל לא יושיע,<sup>11</sup> ואנו 'עמו וצאן מרעיתו'<sup>12</sup> משתחווים] לפני מלך<sup>13</sup> על כל הגוים [ה'] 'רב להושיע'.<sup>14</sup> תורת אמת ממכון שבתו<sup>15</sup>

# Joseph ben Shem Tov's Introduction

Your Commandments Make Me Wiser than My Enemies;  
For It Is Ever with Me<sup>1</sup>

[I shall begin] after praise and glory to the infinite God who, from His essence, has apportioned for us that equity and felicity through which we can become perfect and happy. He has guarded us from perplexity and confusion and has taken us from among the nations to be a people of His own possession,<sup>2</sup> a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,<sup>3</sup> servants of the Most High. [We are] those who reflect the truth, expert in war,<sup>4</sup> and separated from blunders, for God has separated us from those who go astray<sup>5</sup> in order to bask in the emanation of His glory. He has not designed our destiny to be like theirs, nor our lot like that of all their multitude.<sup>6</sup> All of them act shamefully and disgracefully<sup>7</sup> because of their doctrines and beliefs. They are like an animal in the shape of man, separated from the sensible, isolated from the intelligible.<sup>8</sup> The father teaches lies and deception to the children.<sup>9</sup> They bow down to vanity and emptiness and pray to a god that cannot save.<sup>10</sup> But we, His people, the sheep of His pasture,<sup>11</sup> bow before the King,<sup>12</sup> the Lord above all nations, mighty to save.<sup>13</sup> He shined upon them the Torah of truth from the place He

עליהם הופיע. ברום עולם מושבו 'מושב אלהים'<sup>16</sup> ומשפט צדקתו עד אפסי ארץ הגיע. 'לך ה' הגדולה והגבורה'<sup>17</sup> תתברך ותתרומם על כל ברכה ותהלה.<sup>18</sup>

בראותי תוקף הגלות 'גלות ירושלים אשר בספרד',<sup>19</sup> כל היום אכלונו הממונו אויבים,<sup>20</sup> אויבינו העומדים עלינו לכלותינו<sup>21</sup> בלשון מדברת גדולות<sup>22</sup> באמור אלי כל היום כי 'שקר נחלו אבותינו'<sup>23</sup> מלאני לבי<sup>24</sup> רוח נדיבה,<sup>25</sup> ופירשתי איגרת חשובה בעיקרי אמונתם על פי השכל והמופת יסודה עוקרת עיקריהם אומרת, 'ערו ערו עד היסוד בה',<sup>26</sup> היא איגרת ידועה לאנפרופיט.<sup>27</sup>

וזכרתי בתחלת פירושי בה ששה דרכים הלכו בה קדמונינו הצדיקים בויכוח עם מדברי זו האומה.<sup>28</sup> ובחמישי מהם זכרתי מה שעשה הר' חסדאי ז"ל, במאמר קטן הכמות ורב האיכות והמעלה,<sup>29</sup> אשר חבר בלשון ארצו.<sup>30</sup> ולקיצורו ועומקו נעלם מבני עמנו תועלתו. מצורף אל זה זרות לשונו לאשר לא הרגילו לימוד החכמה בזולת לשונו הקדוש, כי נשאר ענינו כדברי הספר החתום.<sup>31</sup> ואני בהיותי שאנן ושקט על שמרי בבית מדרשי 'בהלו נרו עלי ראשי'<sup>32</sup> סביבותי תלמידי, העתקתיו להם אל לשוננו להגיד כח מעשיו לעם ה' ונחלתו.<sup>33</sup> וכאשר [אפסו] בעלי אמונה ואבדו אנשי החכמה,<sup>34</sup> נשאר אשר 'לא ידעו' [את] משפט אלהי הארץ<sup>35</sup> ולא השגיחו בידיעת סודות המציאות וסתרי האלהות לקוצר לשונו והפלגת רמיתו לענינים, באופן מההערה וההשמטה אשר לא יעמדו על כוונותיו ז"ל רוב המעיינים בדורנו זה. וכבר נפקדו מהם היותר נחשבים מתועלותיו כי אין נכון וחכם בארץ<sup>36</sup> הזאת יבינהו בלי

made His abode.<sup>14</sup> His throne is in the heights of the world – a divine throne<sup>15</sup> – and the justice of His righteousness reaches to the ends of the earth. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power.<sup>16</sup> You are blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise!<sup>17</sup>

I beheld the rigor of exile, the exile of Jerusalem in Sepharad,<sup>18</sup> with enemies devouring us and crushing us every day,<sup>19</sup> enemies who intend to destroy us,<sup>20</sup> boasting,<sup>21</sup> saying to me the whole day: “Our fathers inherited naught but lies;”<sup>22</sup> my heart was filled<sup>23</sup> with a willing spirit,<sup>24</sup> and I commented upon an important epistle dealing with the principles of their belief according to rational demonstration. Its foundation uproots their principles, saying: “Raze it, raze it! Down to its foundations.”<sup>25</sup> This is the well-known *Epistle* of En Profiat.<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of my commentary, I mentioned six ways in which our righteous predecessors polemicized against the spokesmen of this nation.<sup>27</sup> In the fifth one, I mentioned what was done by Rabbi Ḥasdai, of blessed memory, in a treatise, small in quantity but great in quality and eminence,<sup>28</sup> which he composed in the vernacular.<sup>29</sup> Because of its brevity and depth, its benefit has escaped the members of our nation. In addition, its language is strange for those who have not been accustomed to study science except in our holy language, and, therefore, its contents have remained like the words of a book that is sealed.<sup>30</sup>

As I have been tranquil and peaceful, guarding my house of study, His lamp shining upon my head,<sup>31</sup> my students surrounding me, I translated it for them into our language in order to show the power of His works to the nation of God, His heritage.<sup>32</sup> Since, however, believers have been removed and men of science have been lost,<sup>33</sup> only those who do not know the law of the God of the land have been left.<sup>34</sup> They were not able to derive from it the secrets of existence and the divine mysteries, because of the brevity of his language and his excessive use of indirect allusion, both in what he noted and in what he omitted. Most of those in our generation who engage in speculation<sup>35</sup> cannot understand his intentions, may his memory be for a blessing. The most worthy of its benefits have been lost to them,

מורה צדק.<sup>37</sup> ולא הבתי האמת - ה' אלהים אמת<sup>38</sup> - ותשוקתי להעמיד בניו 'בני אל חי'<sup>39</sup> על האמת, ולתת בידם 'חרב פיפיות'<sup>40</sup> לקום במלחמה מלחמת מצווה להשיב אמרים<sup>41</sup> אל הרודף, הוראת יסודותיו לילדים אשר אין בהם כל מום, יודעי ספר ומביני מדע, ואשר כח בהם לעמוד<sup>42</sup> בפרץ [המערכה]. ויבקשו ממני לשוב אל מלאכת ההעתיקה, לשנותו מהמרת הלשון אל העתקת ענינו.<sup>43</sup> מצורף לזה הביאור וההשלמה באופן מהשלמות יתפרסמו תועלותיו ופרי חמודותיו ולא תשכח מפייהם<sup>44</sup> תורותיו, נעתרתי לבקשתם לתקות גמול מהשם יתברך יזכני בהיותי 'נע ונד בארץ'<sup>45</sup> עניי, לראות מהרה בתפארת עזו בהעביר גילולים<sup>46</sup> מלב האנשים יבוא כל בשר להשתחוות לפניו,<sup>47</sup> לקבל עליהם עול מלכות שמים אשר נתן בסיני 'כי מלאה הארץ דעה את ה'.'<sup>48</sup> וזה החילי לעשות בעזרת ית' אעתיק עניני המאמר הזה לא העתקת לשונו, אבל בכל מאודי אשמור כוונתו בביאור סודותיו ורמיזותיו והרחבת הדיבור בכל עיקריו, באופן יתפשט תועלתו אל כל סביבותיו.<sup>49</sup> אמר:

for there is no one who is understanding and wise in this land<sup>36</sup> who can understand him without a true guide.<sup>37</sup> And so, because of my love of truth – the Lord is the true God!<sup>38</sup> – and my desire to cause sons – sons of the living God<sup>39</sup> – to ascertain the truth, and to put in their hand a double-edged sword<sup>40</sup> in order to arise in war – an obligatory war – to give a true answer<sup>41</sup> to the pursuer; to give instruction in the foundations [of the truth] to youths without blemish, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand<sup>42</sup> in the breach, who have requested that I return to the labor of translation, [this time] not merely to transpose the language but to translate its contents,<sup>43</sup> and to add a complementary commentary in such a perfect manner so that its benefit and desirable fruit be publicized, so that his teachings live unforgotten in their mouths;<sup>44</sup> I have acceded to their request.<sup>45</sup>

I hope that God, may He be blessed, will reward me, a fugitive and a wanderer in the land<sup>46</sup> of my affliction, by allowing me to behold His majestic glory soon, as He removes abominations from the heart of men,<sup>47</sup> as all flesh shall come to worship before Him,<sup>48</sup> accepting the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, which He gave at Sinai, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.<sup>49</sup> I begin to do this with the help of God, translating the *content* of this treatise, not merely translating its *language*. I will try with all my might to preserve its intention, clearly explaining its secrets and hints, expanding the discussion of each principle so that [the treatise's] benefits spread to all its environs.<sup>50</sup> He<sup>51</sup> said: