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M. Raffaella de Sion

IN COLLABORATION WITH EDWARD A. SYNAN

BAḤYA IBN PAḤUDA, TUTOR OF HEARTS

"AT THE crossroads of Judaism, Christianity and Islam," as Jacques Maritain has put it, stands the attractive silhouette of the Jewish sage, Baḥya ben Joseph Ibn Paḥuda.¹ This figure is but a silhouette, for the picture history provides of him hardly exceeds two dimensions: Baḥya lived in eleventh-century Spain and was a *dayyan*, a rabbinical judge, perhaps at Saragossa or Cordova.² What cannot be doubted—his great work, *An Introduction to the Duties of Hearts*, abundantly proves it—is that he was a pious Jew, familiar with three theologies: Jewish, Christian, and Mohammedan.³ To know any one of these in eleventh-century Spain meant to know Greek philosophy as well, and the obscurity that veils Baḥya's immediate sources in no way blurs the evidence that his knowledge of both Jewish and non-Jewish wisdom was extensive.⁴ Is it necessary to add that for him, as for nearly every master of the Middle Ages, philosophy wore a profoundly Plotinian guise and that to modify certain of its theses was the inevitable response of his biblical faith?

Still, Baḥya is far from devaluing rational knowledge for the sake of exalting faith:

After we have gained an acquaintance, by the traditional ways, with all the divine commandments, with their foundations and their consequences,

1. Baḥya Ibn Paḥuda, *Introduction aux devoirs des cœurs*, trans. André Chouraqui (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, n.d.), p. x. Although M. Maritain attributes this formula to M. Chouraqui, it does not appear in his "Liminaires"; see, however, *ibid.*, p. xlix.

2. See *ibid.*, pp. xxi–xxiv.

3. See *ibid.*, pp. xlix–lxi.

4. See *ibid.*, pp. xxix–xlix; see also the works of Georges Vajda: *La théologie ascétique de Bahya Ibn Paquda* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1947), p. 7; *Introduction à la pensée juive du moyen âge* (Paris: Vrin, 1947), pp. 85–94; *L'amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du moyen âge* (Paris: Vrin, 1957), pp. 92–98.

Torah makes it a duty to re-think and, in its spirit, to re-live questions of this sort. We ought to scan them with reason's help until the truth so shines forth that all error is excluded. The Bible ordains that we meditate on the unity of God; according to rabbinical method, as well as by induction, this command applies not only to the unity of God, but to every spiritual reality that reason can grasp.⁵

After the boon of existence, knowledge is God's best gift; the Bible assures us that the source of wisdom, knowledge, and intelligence is none other than the Lord.⁶ Only the necessities of education justify a priority of Jewish tradition over reason; Torah will not profit if faith remains in darkness where reason could bring light!⁷ Bahya cites a text of unknown provenance, current in his day, that makes the role of a philosopher parallel to that of the man of faith:

No one can adore the supreme Cause and the first Principle save a prophet, thanks to an act that is natural to him, or a philosopher, thanks to the knowledge he has acquired. All the rest—for they can conceive of composite being only—adore not Him, but something else.⁸

Reason has contrived many a science, and Bahya is at one with the Aristotelians in grouping these disciplines under physics, mathematics, and theology.⁹ No doubt it is possible for one ignorant of the sciences to be a believer, but only the Jew who masters them can fulfill his responsibility to those who do not share his beliefs:

It is impossible for people to recognize the superiority of our wisdom and understanding if we are incompetent to offer them a lucid exposition

5. The original of Bahya Ibn Paḳuda's *An Introduction to the Duties of Hearts* is in Arabic. There is an English rendering by Moses Hyamson from the Hebrew translation of Jehuda Ibn Tibbon; the best modern translation from the original Arabic, though not entirely unopposed (see Vajda, *L'amour de Dieu*, p. 92, n. 1; p. 96, n. 1), is Chouraqui's into French. We have relied greatly on it, and every reference to Bahya's work, hereafter abbreviated as *Duties*—the Roman numeral indicating a main section, a portal, the Arabic number one of the portal's subdivisions—is followed by a page number referring to the Chouraqui edition. The above quotation is from *Duties*, Preamble; pp. 25–26.

6. See *ibid.*; p. 9.

7. See *ibid.*; p. 26.

8. *Duties*, 1, 3; p. 56.

9. See *Duties*, Preamble; pp. 9–10; also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 10, 7; 1064b, 1–3; although Bahya certainly knew some version of the *Metaphysics*, this division of speculative philosophy he adopts had reached the Latin West centuries before the *Metaphysics* was known there. (See Boethius, *In Porphyrium Dialogus I*, PL 64:11; *De Trinitate* 2, PL 64:1250.)

of these matters—one founded on rational demonstrations, on proofs, and on arguments that establish the truth of our Torah and the certitude of our faith.¹⁰

To neglect the philosophical examination of the fundamental truths of religion is thus as much a failure against the faith as against reason itself: No more blameworthy would it be to neglect healing drugs when one is ill.¹¹

TEN PORTALS TO WISDOM

THE framework Bahya has chosen for his exposition is the figure of ten portals through which a seeker of interior wisdom advances, but this image cannot be pressed too closely. Although there is progress from one portal to the next, their themes are such that not one of them is ever superseded. More than a list, almost a litany, the ten portals define a program. The unity of God, contemplation of creatures, submission to God, abandonment to Him—these first four express the thoroughly biblical primacy of the Creator; the next five, purity of action, humility, penitence, the examination of conscience, and asceticism are man's way to conquer himself and thus make possible the portal that is the tenth because it is the goal of all the rest: the pure love of God. In his fascination with systematic divisions and subdivisions,¹² Bahya is a scholastic before our scholasticism, indeed, as his excellent historian has remarked, he is "somewhat the victim of his own procedures."¹³

Among his divisions, the organization of the work into ten portals is the most conspicuous, but by no means the most important. Far

10. *Duties*, I, 3; p. 56.

11. See *ibid.*; p. 55.

12. Thus there are ten portals, ten commands to be deduced from the *Shema'* (see *Duties*, I, Introd.; p. 49), ten propositions to direct our study of the existence and unity of God (see *ibid.*), three principles on which the demonstration of God as Creator hangs (see *Duties*, I, 5; p. 59), three divine attributes of essence and two of action (see *Duties*, I, 10; p. 85), three modes of knowledge (see *ibid.*; p. 97), six points to direct our contemplation of creatures (see *Duties*, II, Introd.; p. 118), seven signs of divine wisdom in creatures (see *Duties*, II, 4; pp. 129-133), seven degrees of contemplation (see *ibid.*), four human corporeal powers (see *Duties*, II, 5; p. 141), ten classes of Torah experts (see *Duties*, III, 4; pp. 192-196). None but another scholastic would wish to prolong this list and he would not find it difficult to do.

13. Vajda, *La théologie ascétique*, p. 47.

more significant is the division of religious duties into those of the body and those of the heart. The first of these categories, received in the Islamic world,¹⁴ is that of external worship, the exterior word and gesture; the second is that of the soul's interior dispositions. No misgivings forbid this *daiyyan* to rank the duties of the body below those of the heart, and this is the case even when the duties of the body at stake are the liturgical rites commanded by the Bible.¹⁵ In some instances, exterior duties are founded on reason, but many are such that they would carry no obligations, had Torah not imposed them. The dietary laws and the regulations that determine details of clothing are examples of these last.

All duties of the heart, on the contrary, are founded on reason. External acts approach perfection only to the point that they spring from sound inner dispositions. A mendacious obedience it would be that engaged us to words and external acts at odds with the heart!¹⁶ A right intention can render a single good act as precious as many works and, if the interior source be deeply corrupt, one transgression will weigh as heavily as a multitude. The whole Law, fulfilled without love, counts for less than the sincere desire to accomplish even one commandment.¹⁷

Bahya wrote his book to make up for what struck him as a strange omission in Jewish writing: No one, so his fruitless searching convinced him, had devoted a whole volume to interior knowledge.¹⁸ Despite hesitations, inspired by the fears and passions he calls the "enemy within," Bahya resolved to undertake the task. One obstacle he had to overcome was the fear that he might fail to express his thought in the pure Arabic that alone could make his work acceptable

14. See *ibid.*, p. 16; see also Chouraqui's "Liminaires," in his translation of *Duties*, p. xxxi.

15. See Vajda, *L'amour de Dieu*, p. 93.

16. See *Duties*, Preamble; p. 29.

17. See *ibid.*; pp. 29-30. This insistence on the importance of intention does not mean that the act is morally irrelevant (see *Duties*, X, 3; p. 589); Bahya gives a more balanced analysis of the part played by intention and external act in sin than will Peter Abelard a generation later (see *Ethica seu Scito Te Ipsum*, *passim*, but especially chaps. 2 and 5, PL 178:635, 647). One of Abelard's translators has reached the curious conclusion that this Cluniac monk, who died on his way to file an appeal at the Papal Curia, was a "Protestant" in the first half of the twelfth century; if this reasoning is right, then perhaps we should count Bahya as an unwitting "Catholic"; it is after all, classical reformation doctrine that Catholics are Judaizers in their concern with how men act.

18. See *Duties*, Preamble; p. 30.

to the men of that time.¹⁹ A mark of what a modern historian has termed the "Jewish-Arab symbiosis," the Hebrew edition of this Jewish treatise is a translation.²⁰

Conquering all his fears and demanding of himself that he live the directions he was about to set down, Bahya put his trust in God and chose for his method the rhetorical one, "usual in theology."²¹ Only where his material required it would he make use of strict demonstration; apart from such questions as the divine existence and unity, abstract and technical language has no place in such a project. Most of his proofs, he thinks, are rational enough, but he does not fail to supplement them with parables and with citations from prophets and rabbis. Nor will he renounce the use of wise sayings current in communities other than his own: Jewish teachers have ever held that Gentiles have their share of understanding and the word of wisdom loses nothing because an idolater pronounces it.²² But of all those who have gone before him, it is a Jewish authority who especially enjoys Bahya's confidence. "To read the works of our master, Saadia Ha-Gaon, of blessed memory, will help you no little," he exhorts his reader. "Those works enlighten the reason, sharpen the understanding and instruct the simple; they are a goad to the lazy."²³

Once his desire for union with God is kindled, the wayfarer needs, above all, the help of God, but he cannot dispense with the knowledge Bahya hopes to convey. Without revealing the secret of his own life of prayer, he nevertheless attests to the joy that is the fruit of the pure love of God, the love of which he thirsts to be the herald:

My desire was to produce a work both lasting and complete, to lay up a secret treasure, to enkindle a fire that might give men light and show them the way to follow. My hope was that my joy might be the joy of every man, the fulfillment of my plan guidance for each one . . . I have desired to aid in the salvation of souls, to sound among men a call to action, to drag from their torpor those who hang back, to give direction

19. See *ibid.*; pp. 31-32.

20. Like his older contemporary Solomon Ibn Gabirol, who had written his major philosophical work, *Fountain of Life*, in Arabic but his poetic meditations in Hebrew, so Bahya added metrical compositions in Hebrew to his Arabic *Duties of Hearts*. The term "Jewish-Arab symbiosis" was coined by Solomon D. Gotein, *Jews and Arabs* (New York: Schocken, 1955), p. 146.

21. See *Duties*, Preamble; p. 34.

22. See *ibid.*; p. 35.

23. See *ibid.*; p. 42; also *Duties*, I, 10; p. 90, n. 4 and *Duties*, III, 4; p. 198, n. 2.

to those who enlist, to spur on the slow and encourage the beginners, to point out the path to those who have gone astray. . . . The one true God I do invoke: may He come to my aid! To Him I confide myself, Him do I beg for light, beg that He show me the straight way that leads to knowledge and to all those works, interior and exterior, which, in His kindness, He accepts.²⁴

THE LORD IS, AND THE LORD IS ONE

NOTHING is more instructive than the terms in which Bahya speaks of Him who is blessed, the God of Israel. "Real Unity," "primordial Being," "eternal Source of good" are titles he gives to the God who has created a world of beings that are signs of His unity, witnesses to His wisdom and grandeur and goodness. This rabbinical judge, so much at home with philosophies of the One and of its emanations, is confident that the Bible is right, even on rational grounds, in refusing to separate Being from the One, and he is equally persuaded that only a doctrine of free creation does justice to the One who is Being and Lord.²⁵

God exists and He is one: Quite apart from philosophy, Bahya knows that no other truth is more fundamental. The first commandment, proclaimed long since from Mount Sinai (see Ex 20:2; Deut 6:4), has this for its burden; the least philosophical hearers—women, children, those, too, whose intelligence will ever remain unawakened—possess in these words the seed of authentic religion.²⁶ Still, the *Shema'*, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!" must resound in the heart as well as in the ear. For those with the capacity to penetrate its meaning, the *Shema'* is an invitation to theology. How could we worship what we do not know? How could the Lord command us to the lesser duties of the body and remain indifferent to our exercise of the reason that is man's chief glory?²⁷ We believers know that God exists and that He is our God; we know that He is unique: hence the command to love Him without reservation.²⁸ This love springs from the heart, but it must not remain in secret dedication:

24. *Duties*, Preamble; pp. 31, 33.

25. See *Duties*, I, Introd.; p. 45 also *Duties*, II, 1; p. 120.

26. See *Duties*, I, Introd.; p. 45 also *Duties*, Preamble; pp. 23, 24.

27. See *Duties*, II, 2; p. 121.

28. See *Duties*, I, Introd.; p. 46 also *Duties*, X, Introd.; pp. 579–580.

Cost what it may—wealth, perhaps even life itself—the love of the faithful Jew for God must be professed before the world.²⁹

For many, the confession of divine unity is no more than a formula, parroted without understanding. For others, although the heart may be engaged and traditional religious duties fulfilled, no clear grasp of the meaning of this unity is achieved or, perhaps, the distinction between the divine and the created remains vague and God is likened to material things.³⁰ Some few reach the goal; these cherish the divine unity in their hearts, proclaim it by their words and know how to distinguish His “real” unity from the “metaphorical” unity of creatures.³¹

It is here that Bahya permits himself some technical philosophical discussion in a work otherwise dominated by a pragmatic and ascetical concern. Three principles, he thinks, underlie any rational demonstration of God’s existence. One is that nothing is its own Creator. A second is that succeeding causes must be limited in number—to ascend their series is to arrive without fail at a first. Finally, every composite being is necessarily a created one.³² The truth of these principles must be established, but they are truly “principles,” starting points rather than conclusions and, for this reason, not susceptible of direct demonstration. Bahya’s technique is the Aristotelian one of indirect or “dialectical” demonstration;³³ we may be forgiven for restricting our account to a rapid glance at only one.

Of every being that comes into existence it is true to say either: This being was created by itself, or: This being was created by some other. If the first statement is true, then it must be that this being created itself either before or after it had come into existence. Both suppositions are impossible: To say that a being created itself before it had come to exist is to say that a nonexistent, a nothing, has nonetheless acted; to say it created itself after it had begun to exist is to make nonsense of the notion of creation. Since both avenues open to self-creation thus end in absurdity, the first alternative must be rejected and by that the second, that of creation, is established: Whatever

29. See *Duties*, X, 2; pp. 585, 586; also *Duties*, X, 4; p. 596.

30. See *Duties*, I, 1; p. 50; also *Duties*, I, 2; p. 53.

31. See *Duties*, I, 1; p. 51; also *Duties*, I, 2; p. 54; *Duties*, III, 3; p. 184.

32. See *Duties*, I, 5; p. 59.

33. See *Duties*, Preamble; p. 34, where Bahya cites a passage in which the Philosopher argues that not everything can be demonstrated in the same way and that there are concepts that cannot be directly demonstrated at all. (See *Posterior Analytics* I, 3, 72b 19–24.)

comes to be is the creature of some other being, nothing is its own creator.³⁴

Like the existence of God, the mystery of the divine unity is the object of Bahya's dialectic. The world in its very plurality proclaims to human understanding that it has a single cause: Above every "two" there is necessarily a "one," and here this one is the divine will.³⁵ Compacted of opposed principles, the cosmos could not subsist without a single, all-pervading wisdom, manifested in the most diverse ways, as evident in the ant as in the elephant.³⁶ Aristotle well knew that there is nothing more extraordinary in one part of creation than in another.³⁷ Besides the *a posteriori* evidence of the cosmos, there is an *a priori* ground for insisting upon the oneness of God. The notion of two "creators" is as little acceptable to reason as it is to faith: Here Euclid reinforces the precedence of pure unity over the imperfect unity of creatures.³⁸ Although one in itself, a creature remains, when all is said, one item in a plurality. Each such individual is one in itself only because with other singulars, it shares in a more perfect unity that is prior to all derivative unities. Thus understood, a plurality is a collection of what are at best "metaphorical" unities. The "real" unity they bespeak is the very ground of their possibility.³⁹

Philosophers will recognize this truth of theirs in the sayings of the Hebrew prophets. Isaiah, for one, recounts these words of Yahweh:

*Before me there was no God formed,
Neither shall any be after me.*

(43:10)

Anna, the mother of Samuel, is even more explicit:

*There is none holy as the Lord;
For there is none beside thee;
Neither is there any rock like our God.*

(1 Kg 2:2)

Aristotle and Solomon, the one a royal tutor and the other a king, naturally put this insight in political terms, but it is the same truth.

34. See *Duties*, I, 5; pp. 59–60.

35. See *Duties*, I, 7; pp. 68–69.

36. See *ibid.*; p. 70. Boethius, too, had argued for one ruler, see *Consolation of Philosophy*, 3, p. 12 (PL 63:778).

37. See *Duties*, I, 7; p. 71.

38. See *ibid.*; p. 74.

39. See *ibid.*; pp. 74–75; also *Duties*, I, 8; pp. 79–80.

"A crowd of chiefs is worth nothing," said the Philosopher, "let the chief be but one."⁴⁰

*For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof;
But by a man of understanding and knowledge
established order shall long continue.*

(Prov 28:2)

Three "attributes of essence" as distinguished from those "of action" must be asserted of God. They are existence, unity, and eternity.⁴¹ Each of these three, according to Bahya, implies the other two: What is truly one, must *be* and indeed must be always. The eternal is neither multiple nor nonexistent. And absolute existence is necessarily one and eternal. Bahya's systematic insistence on these correlations defeats any attempt to read into his text a Plotinian priority of the One over Being or a contrary preference for Being as a divine name at the expense of the One or the Eternal.⁴²

Although three, these attributes must be taken in such wise that no multiplicity throws its shadow on the unity of God.⁴³ The divine attributes of essence are negative ones: They tell us that God is *not* nothing, that He is *not* multiple, that He is *not* created. Patient of no otherness, the divine essence would be traduced by the crude affirmations conveyed by human propositions. No change, no accident, no generation, no destruction, no composition, no differentiation, no association, no similitude—thus can we lisp of the Lord, able to say only what He is *not*. No language known to Bahya has a term to express what these attributes really mean, and it is to this limitation of human speech, not to some multiplicity in the essence of God, that the multiplicity of attributes discussed by the theologians and philosophers bears witness.⁴⁴ Not only does Bahya think Aristotle said

40. *Metaphysics*, II, 10; 1076a, 4; the Philosopher is citing Homer, *Iliad*, II, 204, but Bahya credits Aristotle with the saying.

41. See *Duties*, I, 10; pp. 85–87.

42. Nothing so fully reveals the primary inspiration of a metaphysics as the way it speaks of God: It was not by caprice that Plotinus located the One before all beings, that St. Augustine read Exodus 3:14 as meaning Being in the fullest sense because it is eternal and unchanging Being, whereas St. Thomas Aquinas found in the same text support for his view that God is truly Being because He is the unqualified act of existence. For all his philosophical acumen, Bahya avoids a firm decision on what the Middle Ages called the "proper" name of God.

43. See *ibid.*; p. 86.

44. See *ibid.*; p. 88.

it, he thinks the Philosopher was right to have said that "in speaking of God, there is more truth in the negative attributes than in positive ones."⁴⁵ Historically more secure than what Aristotle should have said is what a talmudic master did say: "He who does not maintain a religious reserve before the glory of the Creator, would better not have been born."⁴⁶ It is as impious as it is futile for earth-bound man to gaze on God's essence. The pitiless sun in Bahya's vacant Spanish sky serves as an image of this peril:

Every one is witness to the existence of the sun, enjoys its brilliance and all its gifts, but the man who tries to stare at the sun in all its splendor, no shade to shield him from its blaze, has his sight burned out in the attempt. His eyes no longer see—for him the sun is extinguished.⁴⁷

Convinced as he is that God exists and that this can be demonstrated, Bahya is just as certain that the divine essence lies beyond all our knowing. Indeed, intellectual humility alone can give the theologian some footing in the presence of this mystery of mysteries:

The basis of our knowledge of God is to realize that we are totally ignorant of His essence. Are you comparing some image to Him? Attributing some likeness to Him? Sound the depths of His Being and all will be clear: You will then so far reject every comparison as to find Him only by the path of the intellect.⁴⁸

THE WORLD OF CREATURES

RENOUNCING every vain attempt to express the Ineffable, venturing only to exclude and to deny, the theologian taught by Scripture has another method: "We must try to know the Creator by the trace of His presence in His works, not by the essence of His glory. Infinitely close in His creatures, He is infinitely distant in His glory."⁴⁹

Bahya thinks that to speak of "attributes of action," founded on the works of God, is permitted only because our need to know something of God and to submit ourselves to Him is so pressing.⁵⁰ In

45. *Ibid.*

46. See *ibid.*; p. 101; also Ḥag. 11b; cf. *Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935-48), *Ḥagigah*, pp. 59-60.

47. *Duties*, I, 10; p. 104.

48. *Ibid.*; p. 100; see also citation of an anonymous "philosopher," *ibid.*; p. 106.

49. *Ibid.*; p. 99.

50. See *ibid.*; p. 89.

speaking of the hand of God, His breath, His sorrow or His watchfulness, sacred Scripture has given us a pattern for just such language, and the rabbis, he assures his readers, have known how to translate these anthropomorphisms. Had the Bible spoken of spiritual things in the way that befits them, not one word would we understand; Scripture's way is to adapt the form of revelation to the capacity of the hearer.⁵¹ For the simple faithful, the rich imagery of the Bible makes accessible at least a minimum grasp of the truth.⁵² The man of understanding runs no risk since he will penetrate the rind of corporeal terms to uncover the reality they express. As the Talmud says: "The Bible uses the language of men."⁵³ Thus Bahya invites us to turn to creatures for they are traces of the divine attributes of action.

This varied world of creatures bears witness in its very variety not only to the essential unity of God, but also to the sovereign freedom of the divine will. An agent that produces monotonously uniform results—the fire that never fails to burn, the water that always moistens—is an agent enslaved.⁵⁴ Not so the God of whom the psalmist sings:

*Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that hath He done,
In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.*

(134[135]:6)

Bahya's remark here, that only the Most High knows all things, suggests that, for him, God's freedom in creating is a correlate of the divine omniscience.⁵⁵ Although man cannot truly know the essence of God, reason joins Scripture and tradition to impose on him the duty of knowing what he can of the divine wisdom as it is bodied forth in created things.⁵⁶ On the other hand, nothing is more foolish than to mistake this world for an eternal abode; the wise man builds his hopes on the world to come.⁵⁷ For Bahya, things are precious as signs, as rungs on a ladder that ascends to heaven: The seven degrees to be achieved in the contemplation of creatures are the seven biblical pillars of wisdom.⁵⁸

51. See *ibid.*; p. 93. From the time of Boethius this notion is a commonplace among Latin theologians. (See *op. cit.*, 5, p. 6, PL 63:858.)

52. See *Duties*, I, 10; p. 106.

53. See *ibid.*; p. 92; also B.M. 3b; cf. *B. Talmud, Baba Mezi'a*, p. 195.

54. See *Duties*, II, 1; pp. 119–120.

55. See *ibid.*; p. 120.

56. See *Duties*, II, 3; pp. 126–128; also Rom 1:20.

57. See *Duties*, II, 3; p. 126.

58. See *ibid.*; pp. 129–133; also Prov 11:1.

Best among all the created signs of this wisdom is man himself. Rightly called a microcosm,⁵⁹ he is at once the immediate cause for which the world has been made and a mysterious image of the macrocosm.⁶⁰ "Whoever is ignorant of the sciences, is ignorant of truth, of the traces left by the Creator's wisdom in His works. Not knowing his own body, how will he grasp what surrounds him?"⁶¹ More marvelous than man's body, the lightsome spiritual substance that is his soul makes him akin to the superior intellects.⁶² These two constituents of man are in mutual opposition. Thanks to one, man is driven to seek joys that he shares with beasts; thanks to the other, he tends to despise this world and even to fly from civilized society. In Bahya's judgment, neither of these tendencies should be allowed to overpower the other completely: To live like a beast is to destroy all order, to despise the world is to put the life of man in jeopardy, both here and hereafter. More than once he expresses the Platonic conviction that the body is the prison of the soul and that the soul is equipped with certain of its powers for the sake of the body.⁶³

As Job well knew, man lives out the story of God's gracious mercy, from his conception and birth to his last breath (see 39:1-4).⁶⁴ But no merely corporeal gift can equal the spiritual ones; thought, memory, forgetfulness, delicacy, reason, and the word, both spoken and written, count for more than any bodily wealth.⁶⁵ The Bible, for instance, is composed of written words, and this alone would show what value they have; in comparison with other traditions of Jewish piety, Bahya uses considerable freedom in his treatment of the Bible but, in his fashion, he too esteems the inspired words for their own sake.⁶⁶ What gift that comes to man through the laws of nature and his inheritance of reason can be put on the same plane as sacred Scripture? Still more awesome than the words of the Bible are those astounding biblical deeds, those miracles by which Moses overturned the very laws of nature! When he

59. An analogy to be found in Aristotle (*Physics* VIII, 2, 252b 17-27), the notion of man as microcosm pervades the Middle Ages. See, for instance, Godfrey of St. Victor in the West (Philippe Delhaye, *Le Microcosmos de Godefroy de Saint-Victor*, Lille: Facultés catholiques, 1951). For Islamic sources see Vajda, *La théologie ascétique*, p. 25, n. 3.

60. See *Duties*, II, 5; p. 134.

61. *Duties*, Preamble; p. 41.

62. See *Duties*, II, 5; p. 136; also *Duties*, X, 1; p. 582.

63. See *Duties*, IX, 1; p. 539; also *Duties*, IX, 3; p. 547.

64. See *Duties*, II, 5; pp. 156-157.

65. See *ibid.*; pp. 141-145.

66. See Vajda, *L'amour de Dieu*, pp. 93-94.

reflects on more recent Jewish history, Bahya strikes a chord not often heard: Taken as a whole, he says, even in exile and surrounded by Gentiles, Israel's lot has been a favorable one. This is especially evident in time of war, when the Jewish lower and middle classes are often better off than their Gentile counterparts; the promise of Leviticus has, in fact, come true: "Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them . . ." (26:44).⁶⁷

ABANDONMENT

IN URGING total submission to the benign Creator of every gift, Bahya is close to his non-Jewish contemporaries, both Mohammedan and Christian, but he is confident that the Jew, above all, has reason to cast himself upon the Lord. Among Jews, those in the priestly line have received the best of all blessings, and it is on priest and Levite that gratitude makes the most profound demands.⁶⁸ Submission to God has two degrees, but neither one is to be despised; the submission of praise is surely better than that of fear, but the first is "better" precisely because the second is good.⁶⁹ This teacher of the heart's duties never tires of appealing to the divine omnipotence as the reason for abandonment.⁷⁰ What could be more futile than for man to measure himself with the omnipotent God? But this pious pragmatism does not blind him to the divine generosity; the tribute of love is not less sincere because the Torah commands a tribute of awe.⁷¹

The divine omnipotence is a field where many a theologian has come to grief: Quietism can masquerade as devout submission. A caricature of confidence in God, the quietism of misguided theologians, in strict logic, devalues even their own theologizing. To trust in human effort where the divine is at stake, on the contrary, is an impiety as blasphemous as it is vain. Confronted by the claims of God's power and man's freedom,⁷² Bahya is content to formulate a practical norm:

67. See *Duties*, II, 5; p. 153.

68. See *Duties*, III, 3; p. 185; also *Duties*, III, 8; p. 226, *Duties*, III, 6; pp. 212-213, 215.

69. See *Duties*, III, 3; p. 175; also *Duties*, X, Introd.; p. 581.

70. See *Duties*, IV, 4; pp. 278-279.

71. See *Duties*, IV, 1; p. 255.

72. See *Duties*, IV, 4; p. 295.

The thing to do is to act as if our actions depended on man alone . . . but we should also abandon ourselves to the Most High with faith and with the clear understanding that He governs all, that good and ill hang on His decrees alone, His unique will, His highest word.⁷³

Bahya knows there are areas where even theological reasoning is at a loss,⁷⁴ and we are safe in our confidence that God will surpass every claim of justice.⁷⁵ By no means blind to the role of punishments and rewards in God's governance of men, he has plain words to describe those who think our actions unimportant: Like Zimri demanding the wages of Pinhas,⁷⁶ only the fool and the simpleton presume to do nothing and still hope for the reward reserved to faithful workers.⁷⁷

All wanton tempting of God must be excluded from authentic abandonment. The ways of nature are ordained by God and so deserve our respect.⁷⁸ Miracles there may be, when and where it pleases Him, but all ways are in His power. In sickness, to choose a commonplace instance, we ought to use natural remedies and at the same time abandon ourselves to God who gives them their healing powers.⁷⁹ It is one thing to use intermediate causes, such as medicines, with gratitude and piety, but quite another to rely upon them to the exclusion of the divine will. Apart from that will, they would be nothing.⁸⁰ The story of Samuel and Saul shows that prudence is not rendered superfluous by abandonment, and no distortion of abandonment is worse than that of the suicide, unwilling to confide himself to the divine care.⁸¹

Bahya is not the last moralist to observe that his own times are the worst of all, and he has his own views why this should be so. In the golden age of the patriarchs, he says, life was simple and, in consequence, passions were feeble and faith was strong. A few commandments sufficed, and the Law in its pre-Mosaic simplicity set an adequate standard of asceticism. But those happy times were followed by the sojourn of God's people in Egypt, infamous for its fleshpots; there, a more onerous asceticism was required to repress their upsurging pas-

73. *Duties*, III, 8; pp. 226-227.

74. See *Duties*, IV, 3; p. 270.

75. See *Duties*, IV, Introd. and 1; pp. 253-255.

76. See Num 25:6-14; also Sanh. 82a-b; cf. *B. Talmud, Sanhedrin*, pp. 545-548.

77. See *Duties*, IV, 4; p. 308; also *Duties*, IX, 2; pp. 542-543.

78. See *Duties*, IV, 4; p. 279; also *Duties*, IV, 5; p. 311.

79. See *Duties*, IV, 4; pp. 283-284.

80. See *Duties*, IV, 3; p. 268.

81. See *Duties*, IV, 4; p. 280.

sions. Worse yet was Israel's plight after the conquest and settlement of Canaan: Not for nothing had Scripture styled the land of promise a land flowing with milk and honey! The more prosperity grew, the more passion extended its empire over reason; only the asceticism of the Nazarites and of the prophetic guilds could raise effective dikes to contain flooding sense.⁸² This progressive decline in morals, with its corresponding need for abnegation in the use of what is licit, has continued through the ages.

The ancients were safe in cultivating at once the goods of this world and those of the world to come; for us this ambivalence is full of peril. Judaism is best defended by asceticism, "a renouncement of the repose and of the carnal pleasures not strictly necessary for life."⁸³ Bahya thinks he has the weight of Torah on his side when he argues the claim of the ascetic and, as always, here reason can be invoked to defend what Torah prescribes:

Believers ought to submit themselves to asceticism because the intention of Torah is to make reason victorious over the passions of the soul. The principle of all sin, the cause of all vice, is surely a primacy over reason accorded to passion. No people ever falls to the standard of this world without first turning from its primordial tradition, without first losing innocence to passion, without putting itself far from the path of its fathers. This path is one of moderation in this world and of satisfying only what is strictly necessary for living there.⁸⁴

I cannot help thinking that Bahya would be as bewildered as repelled by complacent announcements, so common in our day, that self-denial is pointless because man is good.

This asceticism must be evaluated rationally. Not to speak of the hypocrite, who is externally severe for the sake of his reputation, or of the pauper who tries to make a virtue of the poverty he inwardly resents, those who fly the cities to live in the desert and those, too, who may stay in the city but keep to themselves, are open to criticism. The ascetics Torah praises are more moderate:⁸⁵

They banish the world from their hearts, but they do their work, they sow, they take part in the worship the community offers God, but they

82. See *Duties*, IX, 7; pp. 571-572.

83. *Duties*, IX, 2; p. 540.

84. *Ibid.*; pp. 540-541.

85. See *Duties*, IX, *passim*, but especially 1, 2, 3, 5, 6; Bahya is persuaded that authentic Judaism necessarily demands asceticism.

know that man, whose origin is in the spiritual world, is exiled in this earthly prison, that he is here to be tested. Thirsting for the hereafter, they make light of this world and its riches; on their guard, they await death, and their provisions for the journey are ready for the moment of departure.⁸⁶

Still, the Scriptures have rightly honored that elite, the prophets and the saints, who, by their desert wrestlings to free themselves from the bonds of sense, have merited the title "physicians of the faith."⁸⁷ The man without possessions, without wife or child, is free to fly to God and, if Bahya is impressed by the obviously Islamic tale of a semi-monastic city,⁸⁸ he has not forgotten the ascetic tradition of the Hebrew prophets: Elisha and Elijah, he knows, were no strangers to desert and silence.

The straight way of abandonment to God is to cleave to what makes a man attain the height of the saints, to conform to the virtues of the ascetics who scorned this world, to cast off all the self-love, all the self-will of one's heart by transforming them into love and yearning for the Blessed Lord. It is to hand oneself over to Him, to rejoice in His bosom and, like prophet and saint, to retire from this world, far from men, with heart full of confidence that God will put in play His grace, as He did for them in the hereafter.⁸⁹

What, in the end, is a martyr, but a man who will sacrifice all the world in abandoning himself to the will of God? So, too, did Abraham show himself ready to submit to the dreadful command that he slay Isaac.⁹⁰ Though not everyone can or should imitate these giants of abnegation, we all profit, in some fashion, from their example, and it is for their sake that God is willing to pardon the whole community. Not even celibacy in the interest of abandonment seems excessive to this devotee of Bible and Talmud:

Man has at once the care of his wife, of his children, of all under his roof, of his neighbors, his friends, his enemies, of relations and of acquaintances, of inferiors and superiors. . . . Each man confronts this choice: to be a solitary stranger or to be enmeshed in a family, surrounded by those near

86. *Duties*, IX, 3; p. 547.

87. See *Duties*, IX, 2; p. 544.

88. See *Duties*, IV, 4; pp. 291-292.

89. *Ibid.*; pp. 307-308.

90. See *ibid.*; p. 308; also Gen 22:1.

him. Such a stranger must find God his consolation in his solitude. . . . At death, no relative, no child, no companion will be of any help!⁹¹

Bahya accepts at its face value the Bible's realistic estimate of man and his morals. Beguiled by the thought of evil from his youth,⁹² man has the understanding of a fool and although he is just until he sins (Bahya obviously does not acknowledge the doctrine of original sin), at birth man resembles nothing so much as the young of the wild ass.⁹³ His composite nature is a fount of disorder that only Torah and a rule of conduct can restrain; few there are, even among the just, who have no former transgressions to bewail.⁹⁴ This means that penitence, the return of the rebel to the way of submission, and the repair of his ravages against divine worship, deserve the first place that the rabbis give them in the ritual.⁹⁵ Ignorance and passion, blindness and error play their mischievous role in sin, but the essential is a rebellious intention and penitence is always an effort to reverse this.⁹⁶ Four moments characterize true repentance: first, to be contrite, second to abandon sin, third to confess and to seek pardon; last, to engage soul and conscience against every future relapse.⁹⁷

Although it is hard to do penance for some faults and harder still to understand how irreparable crimes—murder, for one—can be expiated, Bahya has full confidence that God will always grant pardon where the sinner's heart is not fixed in perversity.⁹⁸ Fear and tears, the thought of judgment, gratitude for divine benefits,⁹⁹ and some one of the many good methods of examining the conscience (Bahya explains no fewer than thirty of these),¹⁰⁰ will help a sinner conquer his faults.

THE PURE LOVE OF GOD

PASSAGE through nine portals prepares the victory, and the tenth sings the pure love of God. For it is the love of God alone that justifies

91. *Duties*, IV, 4; pp. 290–291.

92. See *Duties*, VII, Introd.; p. 415; also Gen 8:21; 6:5.

93. See *Duties*, VII, Introd.; p. 416.

94. See *ibid.*; p. 417.

95. See *ibid.*

96. See the definition of penitence in the first lines of *Duties*, VII, 1; p. 418.

97. See *Duties*, VII, 4; p. 425.

98. See *Duties*, VII, 9; pp. 442–445.

99. See *Duties*, VII, 5; p. 428; also *Duties*, VII, 3; pp. 422–423.

100. See *Duties*, VIII, 3; pp. 461–525.

abandonment and asceticism, the Law and resistance to persecution or temptation:

Asceticism has for its purpose the integration of the heart, to direct it toward the love of God and to make it yearn for the divine delights; this is why we shall explain now the ways of the love of the Lord, blessed be He! Love is the highest state, the supreme level that men of God reach.¹⁰¹

The Law is notoriously complex: 613 commandments, 365 of them negative and 248 positive, some for stated times and places, some for individuals and some for the community, some for men and some for women. To the master of the interior life who has arrived at the summit of unmixed love, they seem all too few.¹⁰² In the dazzling light that reveals his obligation to the Most High, he searches sage and prophet for occasions to answer with passionate obedience the cascade of divine blessings.¹⁰³ Adepts are not hard to identify. Marked by qualities beyond our telling,¹⁰⁴ they throw themselves into the way eternally predestined by the Lord and despise the allurements of this world: "In the plenitude of their prostrations, of their veneration, of their love, they have emptied their souls, purified their hearts, of all that is not submission to God and penetration of Torah."¹⁰⁵

At one with the worshipping angels, men who have reached the goal find that the light of submission has done away with passion's fire. They live out their lives in patience and wisdom and modesty, in knowledge and fear and love. Passion and contrition alike disappear in the abyss of pure love; such a heart, could we see it unveiled, has burst open in the divine Presence. For it, created joys have lost their savor.¹⁰⁶ Even in this all but ecstatic portal, Bahya's realism will not let him forget on what foundations man must build:

The most powerful motive to help a man in this supreme stage is a great fear of God, a terror, but one that is sacred, in the presence of Him and of His commands. Always must we realize that He sees the secret of our souls, the nakedness of our lives, what we hide and what we reveal; that

101. *Duties*, X, Introd.; p. 579.

102. See *Duties*, X, 7; pp. 611-612.

103. See *ibid.*; p. 613.

104. See *ibid.*; pp. 608-609.

105. *Ibid.*; p. 609.

106. See *ibid.*; p. 610.

He leads us and loves us; that He knows our thoughts, our actions, past and yet to come; that He shows His trust in us when He approaches us. . . . God will never be absent from our thoughts, never outside our range of vision: In solitude, He will be near; in the deserts, He will abide in us. The crowded places of this world will seem solitudes to us and no solitude will seem empty.¹⁰⁷

In the hallowed dialogue of prayer, the master of interior knowledge, dead to this world, finds his life in God.¹⁰⁸ Excellent at all times, prayer in the night hours has a special value. The darkened world is less burdensome, then is appetite at peace, business suspended, the life of sense sinks into abeyance. Secure against the pitfalls of vainglory, for no observer then tempts him to hypocrisy, the victor in these battles encounters God in his solitary meditations.¹⁰⁹

[Such a soul] distinguishes truth from error, discerns the true face of her Creator and Maker, and when she grasps His power, His grandeur, she sinks to her knees and prostrates herself, fearful, trembling, abashed before the Most High. Nor does she abandon this posture until God calms her and stills her fear and dread. Then it is she drinks from the chalice of holy love; alone with God in a union of the heart, she makes Him the offering of her love. To Him she abandons herself, Him she desires. She has no other care than that of submitting to Him.¹¹⁰

Slaves of God that we are, we have a slave's three ways of loving his master. The master who is generous to a slave is the object of his love and hope; no master is so good as God, no slave so dependent as our soul. A second way that a slave might cherish a master is in gratitude for his readiness to forgive faults, and it goes without saying that God stands ready to cover, to blot out, to pardon numberless revolts and transgressions. No doubt these first two ways of loving God have a servile air that fully justifies the analogy Bahya has chosen. Not every slave, however, is content with a love that bears so clearly the stamp of self-interest: Even a slave might love his master for the master's own sake and thus it is possible for us to love God for His glory, for His grandeur, for His towering eminence.¹¹¹ Need we say that this is the

107. *Duties*, X, 3; pp. 591-592.

108. See *Duties*, X, 7; pp. 608-615.

109. See *Duties*, X, 6; p. 603.

110. *Duties*, X, 1; p. 583.

111. See *Duties*, X, 2; p. 585.

love that Bahya calls the "pure" love of God, love unmixed, love that transcends all egoism? This love alone Moses the prophet intended when he exhorted us to love God with all our strength:

"With all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength" (Deut 6:5)—this is to adhere in secret to the love of the Lord, yet to manifest it outwardly so that the total sincerity of that love might blaze forth, might be like a joyous song for the lovers of the Lord. It ought to blossom in the interior life as well as in that which unfolds before the eyes of all, in thought, but in action, too, balanced and solidly established according to a constant weight, a constant measure. Thus the psalmist sings: "My heart and my flesh sing for joy unto the living God" (83[84]: 3).¹¹²

Such was the storied bond that held the souls of David and of Jonathan in thrall.

The long preparation to enter the tenth portal—nine portals dedicated to a knowledge that owes so much to the Greeks and to an asceticism shared with other faiths—must not displace the center of gravity that Bahya has located only in love. Indeed, he had no choice: Man loves only what he knows, man's forces need training and direction. To this Bahya adds an unquestioning faith that God will not be outdone in generosity and that merely human effort can never suffice to bring a man to the goal of divine union:

He who perseveres in the love which is a path of hope and fear, a love, the exigency of which is within the power of most men to meet if they rally their strength and will; such a one will receive the strengthening and the help of the Lord—beyond human possibilities—to arrive at the absolute love that exalts the glory of the Most High, according to the saying of the sage:

*I love them that love me,
And those that seek me earnestly shall find me.*
(Prov 8:17)¹¹³

When the principles are established and we are firmly grounded in an asceticism that excludes the pleasures and desires of this world, then we grasp the grandeur, the majesty of God and His exalted splendor. When each one perceives the trifling worth of his own person, sees

112. *Ibid.*; pp. 587–588.

113. *Duties*, X, 4; p. 596; see also *Duties*, X, 7; p. 609.

God's immense goodness and all the magnitude of His grace, then divine love, in all its fullness, springs up in the truth and purity of a soul that desires the Lord and strains all its strength to be at one with Him.¹¹⁴ "The love of God is the soaring of a soul which, essentially, is freeing herself to fly towards God in order to unite herself to His supreme light."¹¹⁵

BALANCING THE BOOK

DESPITE its "scholastic" panoply, *An Introduction to the Duties of Hearts* is first and last a guide for daily living; hence an insistence upon categories too clear-cut would betray Bahya's thought. Nothing would be easier than to collect texts in which he assigns to private prayer a value deeper than that of the Jewish liturgy, but this in no way authorizes us to conclude that he defends the cultivation of a dogmatically neutral "art of prayer." His confidence in reason as the defense of faith and the best of God's gifts, as the power that sets man above beast, makes him a faithful disciple of Saadia ben Joseph, but he is no more a "rationalist" in the mode of the Enlightenment than were the Christian masters of the twelfth and thirteenth century.

Bahya's remarks on asceticism, too, when taken to the letter, suffer a certain ambiguity; perhaps it is not possible to reduce everything he has said on this subject to a mechanical consistency. But does this mean any more than that he is reluctant to give unqualified approval to rigors that would require us to leave the world of men in which God has placed us and yet is unable to withhold his admiration from those heroes of abnegation who are the pride of Israel? He is neither the first nor the most famous Jewish teacher to make a place for the less dismaying virtues in a world where total renunciation remains the ideal. St. Paul is still Saul of Tarsus and a Hebrew of the Hebrews when he protests that he would not have his disciples go out of this world (see 1 Cor 5:10), that the father who marries off a daughter does well, even though he who offers a child untouched to the Lord does better (see 1 Cor 7:38), and that the fathers of old, clad in skins and driven from cave to desert by the wicked, are the glory of his people (see Heb 11:32-40). Harmony is not a single note, sung in

114. See *Duties*, X, 3; p. 590.

115. *Duties*, X, 1; p. 582.

unison, but a more subtle unity, pervading and reconciling distinct currents of sound; the God who has known how to make a cosmos from elements disposed to chaos has known how to mirror the divine holiness in virtues as varied as His uncounted children. Ascetics will not be missing from their number but moderation will rule them all. Ineffably one, the divine sanctity was yet three times hailed by the Seraphim of His presence: Not all the myriad worshippings of His children can express the full divine fecundity.

Although he does not scruple to hail Jesus as a "saint,"¹¹⁶ Baḥya counts Christianity a heresy; more than once he has named dualism in the same breath as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, as if the second, like the first, could not stand with the divine unity.¹¹⁷ When he speaks of the structure of man, Baḥya is not one of those who eschew even the vocabulary of Platonic dualism, but his profoundly biblical inspiration makes it clear that, despite the terms he uses, his man is the man of Genesis, one single being, truly of this world, but as truly destined for another. The body is not to be despised: It is a marvel of God's love and power.

Was Baḥya himself a mystic who attained the higher reaches of the prayer of union? The Spirit breathes where He will, and those to whom we owe our knowledge of this master think the question cannot be answered. No doubt they are right, and this means that, if we cannot assert with confidence that Baḥya enjoyed the blessing he so esteemed, his silence, on the other hand, is no reason to deny it. His silence may well be but an instance of the delicacy he counts among the virtues. Prayer, to be sure, can flower in profound self-disclosure; St. John of the Cross and the two canonized Therasas, to name but three from among so many, are there to prove it. For other masters of prayer, reticence is a necessity. Despite his vocation to teach, Baḥya is in good company if his notion of the teacher's role has led him to tell us all he could about God, but as little as possible about Baḥya ben Joseph Ibn Paḳuda.

116. See *Duties*, VI, 6; p. 392; also *Duties*, VIII, 3; p. 495.

117. See *Duties*, I, 7; p. 78, n. 1; also *Duties*, V, 5; p. 107.