

**Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania**

---

A Jewish Addict to Sufism: In the Time of the Nagid David II Maimonides

Author(s): S. D. Goitein

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Jul., 1953), pp. 37-49

Published by: [University of Pennsylvania Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1453174>

Accessed: 04/01/2012 08:53

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Pennsylvania Press and Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Jewish Quarterly Review*.

## A JEWISH ADDICT TO SUFISM

In the time of the Nagid David II Maimonides

By S. D. GOITEIN, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

THE complicated history of the relations of Judaism to Sufism, the great mystical movement of Islam, is yet to be written.<sup>1</sup> During the later Middle Ages, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, when Sufism was also a very strong social force, many Oriental Jews, however, were attracted by it. Abraham, the son of Maimonides, who followed his father as the head of the Jewish community of Egypt (1204–1237), compiled a large Compendium, "The complete (Guide) for the Servants of God," the very name of which betrays Sufic terminology nomenclature, while throughout the book the author does not conceal the influence of the muslim mystics<sup>2</sup> upon him and his admiration for them. He even went so far as to introduce into the Jewish ritual certain religious practices, such as frequent prostrations and ablutions, which had a definite pietist bias.<sup>3</sup> Abraham Maimuni's example, although violently opposed by some of his contemporaries,<sup>4</sup> set the tone for the centuries following.

<sup>1</sup> A short survey of the question is to be found in the present writer's *Israel in its Arab Environment*, 1953, chapter 6, section 3.

<sup>2</sup> Two volumes of this important document of Jewish spiritual life have been edited under the name *Highways of Perfection* and translated into English by Samuel Rosenblatt of Baltimore with extremely valuable introductions; cf. the evaluations by D. H. Baneth and myself in *Kiryath Sefer*, vol. 8, pp. 52 f., and vol. 15, pp. 442–444.

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Maimuni's pietist reforms of the synagogue service are discussed in detail by N. Wieder, *Melilah*, Manchester University Press, 1946, pp. 37–120.

<sup>4</sup> The Taylor-Schechter Collection of the Cambridge University Library contains at least three documents relating to this opposition movement.

There were found in the Cairo Geniza fragments of Arab mystic literature, such as verses on the love of God by al-Ḥallāj, or passages from al-Gazālī's spiritual autobiography al-Munqid, copied out in Hebrew square characters for the convenience of the Jewish reader.<sup>5</sup> The library of the Vatican contains an Arabic fragment on the Soul and Love of God written in Spanish rabbinic script,<sup>6</sup> and recently Fr. Rosenthal published an analysis of a mystical treatise written by a Jew, living in the late Middle Ages, and completely permeated by Sufic terms, including the 'illumination' theory by as-Suhrawardi (died 1191).<sup>7</sup>

The contacts between Jews and Sufis were not confined to literature. Many biographies of Sufi masters state that their mystical sessions were attended by non-Muslims, often with the result that the visitors became converts to Islam. This is reported e.g. with regard to the famous al-Qushairi (d. 1074),<sup>8</sup> while as late a Sufi as Sha'rani (d. 1565) boasts that many Jews were induced by him

<sup>5</sup> H. Hirschfeld, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, O. S., 15, 1903, pp. 176-7, 180-1. I. Goldziher, *ibid.*, pp. 526-528, *idem. Islam*, vol. 4, p. 165. Cf. L. Massignon, *La passion d'al- . . . Ḥallāj*, Paris, 1922, Bibliography no. 1451 and /3. *Journal Asiatique*, 218, 1931, p. 7. F. Rosenthal, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 15, p. 438, note 16.

<sup>6</sup> Levi Della Vida, *Elenco dei manoscritti arabi islamici della Biblioteca Vaticana*, 1935, p. 281, no. 32, section 3. F. Rosenthal, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> "A Judaeo-Arabic work under Sufic influence," *HUCA*, 15, 433-484. The treatise was described by Steinschneider about a hundred years ago in his catalogue of the Bodleian, col. 2207/8 and about fifty years later in his *Arabische Literatur der Juden*, p. 179, no. 9. As Rosenthal convincingly shows (p. 437), Steinschneider's (and Neubauer's, Catalogue no. 1422) assumption that the author lived in North Africa is based on a mistake. Since the manuscript was bought by Huntington during his stay in Aleppo between 1672 and 1682, the book was at least read, if not composed, in the East.

<sup>8</sup> Subki, *Tabaqāt ash-Shāfi'īya* 4, p. 251. Goldziher, *ZDMG* 62, p. 10. In the Persian *Tezkiret al-Evlīya* of Attar various legends report conversion of Jews to Islam owing to the influences of early Muslim mystics.

to embrace Islam.<sup>9</sup> However, although there can be no doubt that the majority of the Sufi masters were devout, and even fanatical, Muslims, there were others who took a broader, interconfessional, outlook. This was in conformity with the central Sufic Idea that the visible world did not possess any reality; consequently the differences between the various denominations were irrelevant for the seeker of the eternal truth.

“What is to be done, O Muslims? for I myself do not know  
Whether I am a Christian, a Jew, a Jabr or a Muslim,”

Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī<sup>10</sup> asks, and there could be adduced, of course, countless other quotations to the same effect. An excellent example of how these relations between a Sufi master and his Jewish followers worked out in real life was given by I. Goldziher in this quarterly, vol. 6 (1894), pp. 218–220.<sup>11</sup> Hasan ibn Hūd (1235/6–1297/8), a member of the princely family of Ibn Hūd, which once had ruled in Spain, lived in Damascus where he was much sought-after as a spiritual leader, although his orthodoxy obviously was suspected: only one religious dignitary attended his funeral, and al-Kutubi concludes his biography of him with the remark: ‘Only God knows the truth about him’. Once, when requested by a Muslim to guide him in the Sufic way, Ibn Hūd asked: Upon which road? That of Moses, of Christ or of Muhammad?<sup>12</sup> At sunrise

<sup>9</sup> Zeki Mubārak, *Taşawwuf*, 2, p. 300.

<sup>10</sup> Reynold A. Nicholson, *Selected Poems from the Dīwānī Shamsi Tabrīz*, p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> Goldziher based his article on the biography of Ibn Hūd in the *Fawāt al-Wafayāt* of al-Kutubi (d. 1363), vol. 1, 123–5. Ibn Hūd’s biography is given also in a number of later Muslim compilations, which seem, however, to add nothing to the details given for the events described in al-Kutubi. Cf. E. Strauss, *The History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria under the Mamluks*, vol. 1, p. 353, note 9.

<sup>12</sup> This does not necessarily imply that Ibn Hūd was prepared to give guidance according to the Jewish or Christian *religion*. Moses and

he used to turn towards the sun and to cross himself. He was equally familiar with the customs of the Jews, for he instructed them in the understanding of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides' philosophical chef d'oeuvre, which another member of his family already had made the object of his study. However, to use the words of his biographer, he harmed the Jews, for he induced some of them, two of whose names are mentioned, to embrace Islam. The Jews retaliated in an ingenious way. They entertained Ibn Hūd, who, like many another Sufi, was a heavy eater, with a splendid meal, during which the Muslim saint, in his absent-mindedness, consumed great quantities of liquor (wine); when he was totally drunk, they carried him out of the Jewish quarter to the main street, in order to make him 'impossible' for ever. Their design, however, was thwarted by the governor of the town, who was both a friend of Ibn Hūd and a witty man; he put the drunken mystic behind him on his horse, shouting from time to time to the excited crowd: What do you want from Ibn Hūd? He has just taken some 'drugs', pronouncing the word 'drugs' as if it were 'dregs' — a pun obviously enjoyed even by the orthodox biographer.<sup>13</sup>

Thus far, the participation of Jews in the mystic sessions of Sufi masters had been attested to only by Muslim sources.

Jesus are true prophets according to Islam and each may have been supposed to teach a specific mystical doctrine. Cf. the excellent mystical Midrash on Moses' life-story in *Sha'rānī's Ṭabaqāt I*, 40–41, while *ibid.*, p. 53 it is said that the Muslims have even a better claim on Moses than the Jews, for these knew about him only through 'tradition', whereas the Muslims learned about him from the Kur'an, which was the eternal word of God and therefore 'contemporary'. However, in the context the story is intended to throw reflection on Ibn Hūd's orthodoxy.

<sup>13</sup> Goldziher, taking for granted the scholarship of the readers of the *JQR*, did not explain this humorous play with the words 'aqqār, 'drugs', and 'ukkār, 'dregs' (draining the cup to the dregs. The governor said 'akkār). It is explained here, because the passage was misunderstood by later readers of Goldziher's article.

It is now corroborated by the document published here, a letter found in the Cairo Geniza and preserved in the Taylor-Schechter Collection of the Cambridge Library, which will be shown to date from the period, when Sufic influence on the Jews was at its highest.

The Sufi master mentioned in the letter, 'al-Kūrānī',<sup>14</sup> is no doubt identical with Yūsuf al-'Ajāmī al-Kūrānī, who died in Cairo in January 1367.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the Nagid David, to whom the letter is addressed, can be only David II Maimonides who followed his father Joshu'a b. Abraham II b. David I b. Abraham I b. Moses Maimonides in 1355 as head of the Jewish community of Egypt.<sup>16</sup> The letter was therefore written during the years 1355–1367.

According to his biographers,<sup>17</sup> Jamāl ad-Dīn Yūsuf b. Ali al-Kūrānī at-Tamlīgī al-Kurdī specialized in taslik, in the education of fellow mystics. This is why Ibn Taghribirdī calls him 'Imām al-musallikīn', 'the master of the trainers'. He had a great following and supervised various zāwiyas (convents of Dervishes); his own zāwiya was on the Qarāfa aṣ-ṣugra, the Muslim cemetery east of Cairo, between the

<sup>14</sup> Al-Kūrānī is a nisba (by-name) borne by many a Muslim scholar and writer of Kurdish descent, in particular in the later, Osmanic, period, cf. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur*, supplement, vol. 3, p. 638. However, none of these fits into the situation described in our letter except Yūsuf al-'Ajāmī.

<sup>15</sup> Brockelmann, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 282, has 1366. However the Muslim year 768, in which al-Kūrānī died, began on 7th September 1266, while the exact date of his death was the 15th of the fifth Muslim month, which coincides with January 1367.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A. H. Freimann, *The Genealogy of Maimonides' Family*, Jerusalem 1935, *passim*, and E. Strauss, *History of the Jews in Egypt etc.*, vol. I, 300–302, 355, vol. 2, 26–30.

<sup>17</sup> I could use only Ibn Taghribirdī, ed. Popper, vol. 5, p. 247, and ash-Sha'rānī, *Tabaqāt*, ed. 1268, vol. 2, pp. 72–73. Other works, which may contain references to him, such as *ad-Durra al-Kāmina* of Ibn Ḥajar, or *Mir'āt al-janān* of al-Yāfi'i, or Maqrīzī's *Sulūk* were not available to me, while writing this article, owing to the well-known present situation on Mount Scopus.

town and the Muqattam mountain, the time-honored refuge of monks and mystics, constantly referred to in our letter as 'The Mountain'. Al-Kūrānī renewed the Tariqa (mystic way) of al-Djunaid, an early mystic, who was also of Persian origin (died 910) and taught his followers to adhere to the principle of strict poverty. They were therefore called, as in our letter, fuqarā, 'the poor ones,' (Ṭabaqāt 2, 72, l. 3, 10, etc.), one of the synonyms designing Muslim mystics in general. When the Sultan offered him a pension for himself and his followers, he refused to accept it as inconsistent with his teaching. Ash-Sha'rānī reports many strange stories about him, some of which may be given here in illustration of the general atmosphere in which these Sufi masters lived. When he went out of his cell, his eyes were like burning coals and everyone upon whom his gaze fell, was immediately converted into a superior creature. Once, when he went out from a seclusion of forty days, his sight met a dog, who instantly became a sort of saint dog, to whom all other dogs flocked as followers; even men visited this creature in order to have their wishes fulfilled through the blessing by its holiness. After its death it was buried by some God-inspired people and its tomb was visited by fellow dogs, just as was the case in respect to the tombs of human saints.<sup>18</sup> Al-Kūrānī never allowed the convent to be opened to visitors, except when they brought presents for the Fakirs. Asked about this, seemingly materialistic, attitude, he thus explained it: the dearest thing the Fakirs have is their time, whereas

<sup>18</sup> This, like many other stories in the *Ṭabaqāt*, reads like a parody written by some opponent of the Sufis, in order to ridicule their beliefs and practices. But it is not. Ash-Sha'rānī concludes his report with the words: "Look, when al-Kūrānī's eye was able to perform such a miracle with a dog, you can imagine what happened when his eye fell on a man." — There are many stories in genuine Ḥassidic books such as the *Siḥat Ḥullīn*, which read as if they were invented as persiflage by Mithnagdīm.

money is the dearest thing to worldly people; we can spend our time for them, only if they spend their money for us. Once some of the Sultan's attendants, who had fallen into disgrace, fled to his *zāwiya*; the Sultan came in person to the saint asking him to attend to his own affairs and not to meddle in matters of the state. In order to prove that the refugees had become converted, al-Kūrānī asked one of them to change a stone column into gold by his mere word. This was effected in the presence of the Sultan, who became convinced that the influence of such a saint could be only beneficial. Al-Kūrānī also wrote a book on the initiation of new followers, of which at least seven manuscripts exist, but which, as far as I know, has not yet been printed.

This was the sort of person under whose guidance Baṣīr, the bellmaker,<sup>19</sup> a Jew from Cairo, became infatuated by the Sufic way of life on the mountain in the desert near the town, amidst a crowd of mendicants (l. 9). He forsook his wife and three small children, and intended even to sell his house, which was, of course, in the Jewish quarter, and to take up a permanent residence in the Sufi convent (verso l. 3–5). The Sufis lived in their convents together with their families<sup>20</sup> and it obviously was also Baṣīr's intention to live there. At this juncture, Baṣīr's wife sent an urgent appeal to the Nagid David, the head of the Jewish community, 'to go after' her husband (l. 15) and to bring him

<sup>19</sup> Baṣīr, 'clear-sighted', is often used as a euphemism for a blind man; but here, no doubt, it is a proper name.

Jalājil are the small bells suspended from the necks of beasts of burden; if Jalājili denotes Baṣīr's occupation and not his family name, it would show him to belong to a low stratum of the society. The term seems not yet to be known from Jewish sources, cf. Strauss, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 172–190.

<sup>20</sup> Life in these convents is vividly described in Sha'rānī's mystical autobiography *al-Minan*, vol. 2, 112–123. To be sure, Sha'rānī was very far from adhering to the ideal of poverty as propagated by al-Kūrānī.



back to the fulfilment of his duties as a Jew and a parent. The reasons urging his return are not without interest: to devote oneself to *taṭawwu'* (margin l. 4),<sup>21</sup> supererogatory divine worship, was, of course, highly meritorious also from the Jewish point of view. But, she argued, the Muslim mendicants had only the *ẓāhir*, the outward appearance of piety, but not the *bāṭin*, the inner, the true, essence of religion, and in any case supererogatory works were useless, as long as a Jew did not fulfil his basic duties of attending the three daily services and of studying the Divine Law (l. 7–8, verso l. 1–2). The proper place for voluntary devotion was the synagogue (margin l. 5); furthermore, if the family was to move to the mountain, the children would be unable to visit the Jewish school, to study the Torah (v. l. 5–6), and, finally, there would be the danger that Baṣīr, together with his three children, would be converted to Islam (l. 11–12).

It may seem strange that Baṣīr's wife, in her petition to the Chief rabbi, dwells mainly on the religious aspect of the matter, while she puts her complaints about her solitude and her care for her hungry children in the second place (l. 13–14, margin 3, verso margin 1–2). However, in integrated Jewish society — as may be observed daily e. g. with the Yemenites — it is precisely the mother of the house, who while only indirectly partaking in the religious life, watches most eagerly over its proper functioning; it is she who sees to it that the boys study under good teachers, and it is she who sends the sometimes recalcitrant husband to synagogue early in the morning, or in the later afternoon after he comes home tired from work. Moreover, Baṣīr's wife certainly had discussed these religious questions, which

<sup>21</sup> *Taṭawwu'* in late Arabic (e. g. in the usage of the Arabian Nights) means plainly 'leading the life of a Sufi', cf. Dozy s.v., where 'lābisah lubṣ muṭṭawī'ah' in one edition corresponds to 'mutahayyi'ah bihay'at aṣṣūfiyah' in another, both meaning 'she was dressed like a Sufi'.

were the source of all her trouble, with her husband, just as many Muslim women in those days took an active part in the Sufic movement.<sup>22</sup>

It can hardly be assumed that she wrote the letter herself for she would scarcely have had an opportunity for developing such a fluent hand writing, as shown in the letter and it is problematic if she knew how to write at all.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand there are far too many mistakes in it for assuming that a learned person, such as the scribe of a rabbinical court, had written it for her. Thus we have to surmise that some clerk in a business house or some other person of moderate education wrote it for her, reproducing her own words. The letter bears indeed a very personal character. Although abounding in the usual deferential phrases,<sup>24</sup> it is rather outspoken. The petitioner no doubt had direct access to the Nagid, for she reminds him that he had promised her some medicine for her boy, who

<sup>22</sup> Many references to this fact could be adduced from the bulky works on the biographies of Sufi masters. The term *murīda*, 'woman follower', is quite common (e. g. Sha'rānī, *Tabaqāt I*, 225; *II*, 105; here the women admirers of a Sufi express their devotion to him by massaging his body). Sha'rānī remarks that he possessed sixty quires of sermons preached by a Sufi to an audience consisting exclusively of women, *ibid.*, *II*, 90. Goldziher, in his *Muhammedanische Studien* devoted a separate chapter to Muslim women saints. Cf. also M. Smith's book *Rabi'ah the mystic and her fellow saints*, 1928.

<sup>23</sup> The Cairo Geniza has preserved many letters sent by women; it is however, doubtful, how many of these were actually written by them. In some cases it can be positively shown that they were copied by professional scribes such as e. g. Taylor-Schechter 13 J 20, fol. 22, which is sent by a daughter to her father, but which is in the handwriting of Ḥalfon b. Menashe, a well-known member of the rabbinical court of Fustāt during the second quarter of the twelfth century.

<sup>24</sup> The sender calls herself 'the (and not even: your) maidservant' and 'kisses the ground' — which is an introductory formula obligatory while addressing a Jewish or a Muslim religious authority, such as a judge, cf. Taylor-Schechter collection 10 J 10 fol. 15, v. l. 39 (*Zion* 7, 138), *JQR*, O. S., 19 (1907), p. 473, l. 12 (eleventh century). She does not address the Nagid himself, but only his 'court', *mōshāv* = Arabic *majlis*, cf. Baneth, *J. N. Epstein Jubilee Volume*, 1950, p. 207, etc.

suffered from an ear-ache (verso, margin 3-7); we learn here, by the way, that R. David b. Joshua, just as most of his forefathers, was also a doctor. It is clear, she realized that the Nagid was averse to becoming involved in a dispute with the militant Sufis, and hence she reminded him that since he was in charge of a whole region (yudabbir aqlīm, verso 10),<sup>25</sup> he could not fail to succeed in this matter, if he really tried. She uses many Hebrew words and phrases, just as an illiterate Yemenite woman would do, while talking about religious matters, and she repeats herself frequently, as is natural with a woman in grief. All in all, the letter is a very human document and, at the same time, is not without historical value.

## UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CAMBRIDGE\*

T.-S. 8. J. 26/19

- (1) בשם רחם אל מושב אדונינו (1) ננידנו דוד ירום הודו ויגדל כבודו  
 (2) אלממלוכה. תקבל אלארץ ותנהי אן פי חלקהא  
 (3) זונה בציר  
 (4) אלנלאגלי (6) תלאת אטפאל וזונהא קד הוי אלנבל ענד (7) אלכוראני  
 (5) פי הבל וריק מקום אין בו תורה (8) ולא תפלה ולא זכירת השם על האמת (9)  
 כל הוא (1) יטלע אלנבל ויכאלט אלפקרא (10) ולהם אלטאהר ומא להם

<sup>25</sup> We know very little about the position of the Egyptian Nagid at that time; one should not however conclude from this passage that his jurisdiction covered many countries.

\* The present writer wishes to express his sincere thanks to the Librarian for the permission to publish this manuscript.

The above is an exact reproduction of the colloquial style and the erratic spelling and dotting of the original. E. g. where the word אלנבל appears without a stroke, as in r. margin l. 2 or verso l. 11, it is so in the manuscript.

אלבאטן ואלממלוכה (11) תכשי אן יחצֵל תם אדם רע יוצאי (1) אותו (12) מן  
 הדת ותצאי (1) אלשלשה ילדים וקר (13) הלכת אלממלוכה מן אלוודי (1)  
 וטלבה (14) אלצנאר אלקות ומקצוד אלממלוכה (15) אן יסיר סידנא כלפה  
 ויעמל מעה בצאיב (16) ראייה ואלממלוכה מא תריר מנה מא (17) לים להו (1)  
 עליה קדרה ולא דרגת אלגנא

margin

(בשולים:)

(1) ומא מקצוד אלממלוכה (2) אלי (1) אנקטאעה ען אלנבל (3) ואלראפה  
 עלי אלצֵנאר (4) וודא אראר אלחטוע (5) יכון פי אלכנים

verso

(בעמוד האחורי:)

(1) מלאום תפלת שחרית ומנחה ומעריב (2) וסמאע דבר תורה ולא יתעסאק  
 בהבלי (3) עולם ואיצא אנה ביעאיי אלממלוכה (4) עלי ביע אלדאר ואלאנפרדו (1)  
 מן ישראל (5) ואלסכני פי אלנבל ואנקטאע אלצֵנאר (6) מן תלאוה אלחורה  
 פאן כאן מולאנא (7) ישיר עלי אלממלוכה בדאלך וילזמהא (8) בה פהו מא ירא  
 אלי (1) בלצואב (1) ושלום (9) ומולאנא אללה ישיל עמרה ידבר אקלים (10) ומא  
 המטה אלעאליה קצירה ען אכפאף (11) אלמדכור מן אלטלוע אלי אלנבל  
 ומלאזמה

margin

(בשולים:)

בית הכנסת ואלתסבב (2) פי קות אלעאילה (3) וכאן סידנא קר אועד  
 אלצֵנִיר (4) בדוא אלודנה והו פי שוקא (5) מנהא ומא באס תנרב (6) אפֵלן  
 אלמיון ילעב פיה (7) בניר מכברה ירחום ה'

Immediately after these words, there appears some very faded out scribbling in Arabic writing, done by another hand and in different ink. It seems to read *ليلسا* (without dots on *ل*) with an abridged signature attached to it, meaning "This very night" — obviously an instruction given by the Nagid to send the desired medicine at once. Thus the poor woman would have obtained at least one of the objects of her letter.

## TRANSLATION

(1) In your name, You Merciful.<sup>26</sup>

(2) To the high Seat of our Lord the Nagid, may his splendor be exalted and his honor great.

(3) The maidservant (4–5) the wife of Baṣīr the bell-maker (3) kisses the ground and submits that she has on her neck (6) three children because her husband was completely infatuated<sup>27</sup> with (life on) the mountain with (7) al-Kūrānī, in vain and to no purpose, a place where there is no Torah, (8) no prayer and no mention of God's name in truth. (9) He goes up the mountain and mingles with the mendicants, (10) although these have only the semblance, but not the essence, of religion.

The maidservant (11) is afraid there may be there some bad man who may induce her husband to forsake (12) the Jewish Faith, taking with him the three children.

(13) The maidservant almost perishes because of her solitude and her search (14) after food for the little ones. It is her wish (15) that our Master go after<sup>28</sup> her husband and take the matter up with him according to his un-failing (16) wisdom, and what the maidservant entreats him to do is not (17) beyond his power nor the high degree of his influence.

(Recto Margin 1) The only thing which the maidservant wants is (2) that her husband cease to go up the mountain

<sup>26</sup> An abridgment of *בשםך רחמנא*, which is not an imitation of the Muslim Basmalah (Gottheil-Worrell, *Fragments from the Cairo Geniza*, p. 44), but to be compared with 'bismika llahumma' and possibly the model for this pre-islamic formula.

<sup>27</sup> Hawa, which could also mean 'ascend', but then the words kull hawā in l. 9 would have no connection. To read in l. 9 kull (yawm) huwa would be too great a change.

<sup>28</sup> The stroke on *כלפיה* indicates the reading kh, cf. e.g. Taylor-Schechter 18 J 2 fol. 10, l. 7, 15, 28.

(3) and that he may show mercy towards the little ones. (4) If he wishes to devote himself to God, (5) he may do so in the synagogue, (verso 1) attending regularly morning, afternoon and evening prayers, (2) and listening to the words of the Torah, but he should not occupy himself with useless (3) things.

Furthermore, he presses the maidservant (4) to sell their house, to leave the Jewish community (5) and to stay on the mountain, (which would mean that) the little ones would cease (6) to study the Torah. (It would be helpful) if our Lord (7) gave orders to the maidservant in that matter and instructed her (8) concerning it, for his wisdom is unailing. And Peace.

(9) Our Lord — may God prolong his life — is in charge of a vast region; (10) thus his high aspiration could not fail to hinder (11) the above mentioned from going up the mountain and to induce him to attend (verso margin 1) the synagogue and to occupy himself (2) with the upkeep of the family.

(3) N. B. Our Lord has promised the little one (4) a medicine for the ear,<sup>29</sup> for he suffers (5) from it. There is no harm in trying it out, (6) seeing that even the barber is playing with it (7) without experience. May God have mercy!

<sup>29</sup> Widne for uđn, a dialect form found in various present-day Arab vernaculars.