

# FROM THE PAGES OF TRADITION

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## JOSEPH IBN TZADDIK'S DEFINITION OF PHILOSOPHY

### INTRODUCTION

The classical definition of philosophy derived from the Greek term as "love of wisdom" has given rise to a variety of conceptions on the role of philosophy. It ranges all the way from regarding the philosophic enterprise as concerned with a comprehensive world-view to a new way of "talking about talking" (clarification of language). Somewhere between these two views is the common notion that the philosophic discipline is an attempt to formulate a rational basis for doctrinal beliefs, behavior patterns, and scientific hypotheses. Appealing to human reason as the distinctive standard of evidence in philosophy, the method is one of translating beliefs and knowledge into conceptual terms.

Now such an attitude has turned the philosophic pursuit into a critical discipline, a sort of an intellectual busy-body with no home of its own but operating in every area of human endeavor wherever discordance and obscurity abound. It is strikingly enlightening that in the twelfth century we had a Jewish philosopher in Spain who made it his supreme task to interpret philosophy as a distinct discipline. He was anxious to find a home for it and propounded a definition of philosophy that gave it a distinct content as well as method. He defined philosophy as a study of man's knowledge of himself. And he hastened to add that this definition does not circumscribe or limit the enterprise. On the contrary, philosophy thus contrived, is the science of sciences and the end thereof, because it is the path to a knowledge of the Creator and the key to the knowledge of all. He named his treatise *Olam Katan* (Microcosm) — because in man we find represented all the elements of the universe.

We know very little of the early life of Joseph Ibn Tzaddik. Reliable sources indicate, however, that he was a Talmudist of high repute and in 1138 was appointed *Dayyan* (Judge) of the Jewish Community at Cordova, Spain.<sup>1</sup> Until his death in 1149 he occupied the position jointly with Maimon, the father of Maimonides. From a letter which Maimonides wrote to his

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translator Samuel Ibn Tibbon it would appear that he knew Joseph Ibn Tzaddik and thought highly of him. He compared his work to that of the "Brethren of Purity" whose world outlook was neo-platonic.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Tzaddik was also a gifted poet and some of his liturgical poems are incorporated in the Sephardic and African *Machzorim*.<sup>3</sup> He is known chiefly for his philosophic treatise *Olam Katan* written originally in Arabic and translated into Hebrew by an unknown author. The original Arabic treatise was lost and we are indebted to the unknown Hebrew translator for our knowledge of this significant work.

What follows is my translation of the introduction to this work which gives us an insight into the meaning and definition of philosophy as well as a summary of the content of the four main divisions into which *Olam Katan* is divided.

L.D.S.

### JOSEPH IBN TZADDIK'S INTRODUCTION TO *OLAM KATAN*

Praised be the Lord, Who has endowed us with speech in order to praise Him and has set fixed time for us to offer gratitude to His Unity which is unique and unqualified. It is He alone who deserves to be worshipped. He created man and endowed him with wisdom above all other creatures as we read in scriptures, "Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven" (Job 35:11).

After this preliminary praise to the Almighty, would that He be gracious to thee, my dear pupil, for inquiring of me about the real intention of the philosophers when they use the terms permanent good and perfection. They maintain that perfection and permanent good are not prevalent in this world and yet every man of intelligence should seek them. The subject matter is indeed very difficult and wearisome, made more so by the small number of persons pursuing it and engaging in its study, especially in our generation which is far inferior to the former generations in that many people are completely devoid of the merits of knowledge and the method of investigation.

Two fundamental requisites are necessary for the knowledge of our subject. They include awareness of God and per-

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formance of His will. This is, in truth, corroborated by King David's admonition "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God Thy Father and serve Him with an entire heart and with willing soul" (Chronicles II 28:9). He moreover indicated that by our neglect to seek Him and to know Him, He will remove Himself and His Will from us as we read: "If thou seek Him, He will let Himself be found by thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever" (*Ibid.*).

Do not imagine, however, that the Almighty is either near or removed, attached or aloof from any object; nor is He subject to change, perception, relation or any of the other accidents . . . The notion of God's abandonment or aloofness is found only in the hearts of fools and in slumbering, indolent minds, intoxicated with lust which is worse than being inebriated from wine. This is what the philosophers refer to when they speak of hearts of men in pursuit of lust who are far removed from the Creator.

My love for wisdom and for those who pursue it has given me therefore no way out but to fulfill your request and do your bidding, confident that the Almighty, blessed be His name, will reward me.

I discovered that the path to this profound knowledge is to understand the works of the philosophers and theologians. But I learned that there is no way to comprehend their works without an acquaintance with the four preliminary sciences. The first is the science of arithmetic; the second, the science of geometry; the third, the science of music; and the fourth, astronomy, that is, the course of the spheres. After all these courses one should study the science of logic including the exercise of premises and syllogisms. Such a course of study takes a long time and is likely to weary the student, especially the beginner who is anxious to derive prompt benefit from his studies and digest only the salient points.

I have made it, therefore, my purpose to explain how a man can know himself, for from a knowledge of self he will come to a knowledge of all. For one who knows his self may know things outside himself but to be ignorant of one's self is surely to be ignorant of everything else. Man is, therefore, called

a microcosm — a world in miniature — for he has in him represented all the elements of the universe. His body represents the corporeal world; his rational soul is like the spiritual world. This is what the philosophers meant when they attempted to limit the discipline of philosophy by defining *philosophy as a man's knowledge of himself*. For knowledge of self leads to an understanding of all, namely, the corporeal and spiritual world. This is then the science of philosophy, which is the science of sciences, and the end thereof because it is the sure path to a knowledge of the Creator and Cause of all. May He be blessed and exalted!

My purpose in this work was to be concise and to summarize the subject matter. I refrained from indulging in difficult and lengthy discussions lest they induce weariness and rejection of the subject matter. It was necessary to introduce the subject with appropriate preliminary remarks that serve as a key and exposition to the rest. To be sure, I do not pretend to cover the entire subject or to probe its essence and all its characteristics for this is not within my competence or inclination.

I pray that the Almighty may help me and guard me from sin for only he is safe whom the Creator safeguards, as it is written, "Yet they that wait upon the Lord shall acquire new strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles" (Is. 40:31).

I called this work "Microcosm" for it touches upon the crucial question we have raised and the main purpose toward which we directed our attention. I have divided the treatise into four divisions. The first part treats of premises and introductory hypotheses necessary for exposition. Also included is a classification of the transient species that have no permanence in this world.

The second division deals with man's knowledge of himself as a microcosm and the reasons that philosophers refer to him as such. The third is devoted to doctrines and principles about God. The fourth part constitutes our exposition on ethics as well as the nature of transgressions and reward and punishment thereof.

Now that I have enumerated the number of divisions in the book, following, as I am wont to do, in the footsteps of the

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philosophers and emulating their wise methods, we shall revert to the task set for ourselves and proceed to expound upon the purpose toward which we strive, with confidence and trust in our God as we find "those who know Thy name put their trust in Thee, for Thou hast not forsaken those who seek Thee, O Lord" (Psalm 9:11).

NOTES

1. See Horovitz's *Der Mikrokosmos des Josef Ibn Saddik*, Breslau 1903. He is praised as a talmudic scholar by Moses Ibn Ezra.

2. *Iggerot*, Amsterdam, 1712, p. 146.

3. A poem addressed to Judah Halevi, when he visited Cordova on his way to the Holy Land, is included in the collections of Halevi's poems. Charizi and Ibn Daud praised the poetry of Ibn Tzaddik.