

The Ten Principles of Karaite Faith in a Seventeenth-Century Hebrew Poem from Troki

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Abstract. The ten principles of Karaite faith were originally compiled by medieval Byzantine Karaite scholars to sum up the basics of the Karaite Jewish creed. Early modern Karaites wrote poetic interpretations on the principles. This article provides an analysis and an English translation of a seventeenth-century Hebrew poem by the Lithuanian Karaite, Yehuda ben Aharon. In this didactic poem, Yehuda ben Aharon discusses the essence of divinity and the status of the People of Israel, the heavenly origin of the Torah, and future redemption. The popularity of Karaite commentaries and poems on the principles during the early modern period shows that dogma—and how to understand it correctly—had become central for the theological considerations of Karaite scholars. The source for this attentiveness is traced to the Byzantine Karaite literature written on the principles and to the treatment of the Maimonidean principles in late medieval rabbinic literature.

Writing poems about the basics of Jewish faith was a popular pastime for pre-modern Hebrew poets. The poets were initially inspired by the thirteen principles of faith, envisioned by none other than the illustrious Moses Maimonides (1138–1204, Egypt) in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*.¹ In this article I will provide a short introduction to the history of the ten Karaite principles of faith (Heb. *‘asara ‘iqqere emuna*) as they appear in Eastern European Karaite poetry and an analysis of an early seventeenth-century Karaite poem *Adon ‘olam she‘e shav‘i*² (“Lord of the Universe, behold my cry”) written by a Karaite³ scholar Yehuda ben Aharon of Troki.

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¹ For a list of medieval Hebrew poems written on the thirteen principles of faith, see Davidson 1970, 4: 493.

² Listed in Davidson 1970, 1: 30 (no. 607). A brief philological analysis of this poem has been provided in Tuori 2013, 274–8. According to the heading of the Karaite *Siddur*, the poem is dedicated to the ten principles although it is not systematic in its presentation of the principles. Nevertheless, I will deal with the poem as an elaboration of Karaite doctrine.

³ Karaite Jews reject the rabbinic interpretation of Judaism and emphasize the independent interpretation of biblical texts. ‘Rabbanites’ (or, rabbinic Jews) hold to the authority of the Talmud as the divinely ordained Oral Torah. On the origins, history, exegetics, philosophy, and geographical variety of Karaite Judaism, see the articles in Polliack 2003. On the early modern history of Eastern European Karaites (or, as they are now often known, Karaims), see Akhiezer, Shapira 2001, Kizilov

This poem is published in the fourth volume of the Karaite prayer book,⁴ which contains paraliturgical poetry for the celebration of the Sabbath, festivals, weddings, and circumcisions.⁵

Introduction: Karaites and the Ten Principles of Faith

Scholars of Jewish studies often note that the concept of dogma in Judaism was never precisely defined (see, e.g., Altmann 2007, 529). Judaism does not require correct opinions on doctrine but, rather, correct practice. Nevertheless, following the models of Christian and Muslim theologians, medieval Jewish intellectuals began to write down more explicit accounts of creed (Kellner 1986, 6–7). Karaite theologians were among the forerunners: the twelfth-century Byzantine Karaite Yehuda Hadassi provided ten principles on the essence of faith in his encyclopaedic treatise on Karaism, *Eshkol ha-kofer* (“The Cluster of Henna”, Gozlow 1836). His principles were organized according to the views of *kalām*,⁶ and the number ten was probably chosen to parallel the Ten Commandments (Lasker 2008, 42–3; Akhiezer 2011, 729).⁷

The most influential version of Jewish doctrine was drawn by Maimonides in his *Commentary on the Mishna*,⁸ a few decades after Hadassi. Thirteen in number,⁹ his principles (Ar. *usul* or *qa’ida*; Heb. *‘iqqarim*) discuss God’s existence, the revelation of

2009, and Shapira, Lasker 2011. On previous discussions on the ten principles of faith in Karaite Judaism in general, see Lasker 2008, and in Eastern European Karaism in particular, see Nemoy 1989, Harviainen 2008, and Tuori 2014.

⁴ *Siddur hat-tefillot ke-minhaq haq-qara’im*, Vol. 4, Vilna: 1892, 182–3.

⁵ *Adon ‘olam she’e shav’i* appears in two nineteenth-century manuscripts with minor textual differences: Ms. A065 in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy in St. Petersburg (*Zemirov le-shabbatot hash-shana ke-minhaq qara’im*, copied in 1861, fols. 76a–77b, viewed from the microfilm F 52313 at the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem), and Ms. Schocken 12823 in the Schocken Library in Jerusalem (*Karaitische Gebete und Piyutim in Hebräisch und Tartarisch mit hebr. Buchstaben. Handschrift aus dem 18. Jahrh.*, fol. 62b–64a).

⁶ *Kalām* as a form of rational philosophy, developed by Muslim rationalists (*Mu’tazila*) in the eighth and ninth centuries, carried significant influence on the medieval Karaite and Rabbanite philosophy and exegesis. More on Hadassi, see Lasker 2008, 41–59. For Hadassi’s principles, see Appendix below.

⁷ Sa’adya ha-Ga’on (882–940), the head of the Babylonian academy and a vocal opponent of Karaite Judaism, also summed up ten principles of faith (see more in Ben-Shammai 1985 and 1996). The Hebrew term for the principles (*ishshurim*) was probably coined by Hadassi himself (Akhiezer 2011, 733).

⁸ The Mishnaic passage (Sanhedrin 10:1) deals with those who have no share of the World-to-come: the ones who deny the resurrection of the dead or the divine origin of the Torah, and *apikoros*. *Apikoros*, once related to the Greek philosophical movement (the Epicurean), had become identical with the one who denies rabbinic tradition, and in the Middle Ages with the one who denies God and providence, i.e. atheist or heretic.

⁹ The number thirteen is often connected with the thirteen attributes of God enumerated in Ex. 34:6–7. For Maimonides’s principles, see Appendix below.

the Torah, and retribution. Familiar with Muslim theology, Maimonides emphasized that one's share of the World-to-come was dependent on the unreserved acceptance of all the principles (Kellner 1986, 17).

The Maimonidean principles began to occupy a more central position in Jewish thought especially from the fourteenth century onwards, perhaps partly as a response to Christian polemical literature (Shapiro 2004, 3–4). The principles were taught to children and converts as the basis of Jewish faith, included in the morning liturgy, and merited poetic interpretations. The most famous poem, *Yigdal elohim hay* ('May the living God be exalted') was also included in the Karaite rite.¹⁰ True to the dialogic spirit of Judaism, Maimonidean principles and their implications were subjected to continuous discussion and criticism, and their prescriptive, 'orthodox' status has been challenged.¹¹

While Karaite Judaism rejects the divine origin of the rabbinic Oral Torah (Talmud), individual Karaites studied and occasionally embraced works written by Rabbanites.¹² Despite the fact that Maimonides condemns Karaites as heretics (*minim*) in his *Epistle to Yemen* (1172), Byzantine Karaites heralded him as a great scholar and studied his monumental work on philosophy, *More nevuḳim* ('A Guide for the Perplexed').¹³ In the spirit of the famous Karaite dictum 'Search the scripture well and do not rely on my opinion', rabbinic works, as well, could and should be studied for one's intellectual benefit.¹⁴

Perhaps inspired by the rabbinic enthusiasm on the Maimonidean principles, the fifteenth-century Karaite Eliyya Bashyachi (c. 1420–90) issued his version of the principles in his legal codex *Adderet eliyahu* ('The Mantle of Elijah') (*Bashyachi 1532*, 55a–60a).¹⁵ Loyal to his Karaite predecessor Hadassi, Bashyachi counts not thirteen but ten principles. A conventional number used when memorizing lists, the number ten is a symbolically powerful number in Jewish tradition with

¹⁰ The poem, written perhaps in the 14th-century in Italy, is published in the Vilna edition of the Karaite *Siddur*, 2: 252 (1890). See Davidson 1970, 2: 266–7; Shapiro 2004, 18–20; Lasker 2007, 325.

¹¹ On the Maimonidean principles in later Judaism and their status as *the* Jewish dogma, see Kellner 1986, Shapiro 2004.

¹² Tirosh-Becker (2012, 17–29) lists motivations why medieval Karaites had to be thoroughly acquainted with rabbinic literature: for example, to be able to discuss and conduct polemics with the Rabbanites one had to know the 'enemy'.

¹³ On the multifaceted Karaite attitudes towards Maimonides, see Lasker 2007. *More nevuḳim* was included in Karaite lists of study books (Elior 2013, 9–10), and the seventeenth-century Karaite from Troki, Zerah ben Natan—a contemporary of our poet, Yehuda ben Aharon—even wrote a commentary on it (Komlosh, Akhiezer 2007, 513).

¹⁴ The famous dictum appears for the first time in Yefet ben 'Eli's (10th c.) commentary on the Book of Zechariah as the original words of the putative founder of Karaite Judaism, 'Anan ben David (8th c.) (Frank 2004, 22–32).

¹⁵ For the English translation of Bashyachi's principles, see Lasker 2003, 521.

many prominent examples: the Ten Commandments, the ten plagues God inflicted on Egypt, the ten trials of the Patriarch Abraham described in rabbinic literature (Mishna, *Abot* 5:3),¹⁶ and later even the ten divine attributes (*sefirot*) vital for Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah).¹⁷ Figures aside, Bashyachi's discussion on the principles draws much from Maimonides (Lasker 2008, 97; idem 99–100, n. 16). Bashyachi also notes (1532: 55a) at the beginning of his discussion that these principles are compulsory for the believer.¹⁸ He distinguishes between the sinners who will not be excluded from the People of Israel or from the Garden of Eden, and between those who deny even one of the principles. The latter (*kofer be-'iqqar, apikoros*) are excluded from the community and eventually from the Garden of Eden, even though ostensibly observing *halakha* (Jewish law). Bashyachi, like Maimonides, adds that it is forbidden to eat meat slaughtered by such a person (Bashyachi 1532, 60a; Lasker 2008, 99–100, n. 16).¹⁹

The principles of faith—the description drawn by Bashyachi in particular—became something of a hot topic for early modern Karaites.²⁰ This enthusiasm was funnelled into a wide range of commentaries Karaite scholars devoted to the principles.²¹ Karaites carefully studied not only Hadassi's *Eshkol ha-kofer* and Bashyachi's *Adderet eliyahu* but also rabbinic works discussing the principles of faith.²² For example, an early nineteenth-century list selling textbooks for Crimean Karaite schools includes *Sefer 'aqedat yiṣḥaq* by the Rabbanite scholar Yiṣḥaq ben Moshe Arama (c. 1420–94, Spain), who comments on the Maimonidean principles.²³

¹⁶ The anonymous seventeenth-century Volhynian Karaite author of *Sefer elon more* refers to these trials in his exposition of the ten principles; cf. Gen. 15:18–21 (Akhiezer, Lasker 2006, 22–3).

¹⁷ Early modern Karaite scholars showed keen interest on the Kabbalah in many of its various forms (see, e.g., Lasker 2004).

¹⁸ This became standard for Karaites, as well; the same is required by Jakob Duvan in his nineteenth-century *Katichizis* (Harviainen 2007, 303).

¹⁹ More on Maimonides's standpoint, see Kellner 1986, 20, 227, n. 57.

²⁰ It should be noted that not all the philosophical leanings of Bashyachi were accepted without protests (Lasker 2008, 96, n. 1); on East European Karaite criticism against the Byzantine sage, see *Sefer pinnat yiqrat* by the Crimean Karaite Yiṣḥaq ben Shelomo (1834: 1).

²¹ The list of commentators include Yosef ben Mordokay Malinowski (d. c. 1625, Troki), Yosef ben Shemu'el (d. c. 1700, Halicz), Mordokay ben Nisan (d. c. 1709, Kukizów), and Shelomo ben Aharon (1675–1745, Troki), as mentioned by Simḥa Lucki (d. 1760) in his *Ner ṣaddiqim* (“The Candle of the Righteous Ones”) (see Mann 1931, 1409–45); for Shelomo ben Aharon's version in his *Appiryon 'asa lo* (“A Palanquin He Made for Himself”), see Neubauer 1866, 16–8. A bit later, the Crimean Karaite Yiṣḥaq ben Shelomo (1755–1826, Chufut-Kale) published a bilingual (Karaim and Hebrew) treatise on the ten principles, *Sefer pinnat yiqrat* (“A Costly Corner-Stone”, Gozlow 1834).

²² Both *Eshkol ha-kofer* and *Adderet eliyahu* appear in early modern Karaite lists of recommended study (Neubauer 1866, 79–80; Akhiezer, Lasker 2006, 12; idem note 16). More on East European Karaite indebtedness to Byzantine Karaite thought, see Lasker (2008, 264–71).

²³ Firkowicz Collections, Personal archives at the National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg, F946, no. 12, copied in 1830. More on Maimonides's later commentators, Yosef Albo (15th c., Spain), and Yiṣḥaq Abrabanel (1437–1508, Portugal), see Kellner 1986.

The Crimean list originates from a later period; nevertheless, it reveals the Karaite attentiveness to the philosophical and theological implications of the principles in the wider Jewish context.

Following the popularity of the rabbinic *Yigdal elohim hay*, early modern Karaites began to write Hebrew poems elaborating the ten principles of faith. The *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew poetry* provides these Karaite poems in a category of their own.²⁴ As was shown above, the Karaites actively studied and acquired the works of earlier (both Rabbanite and Karaite) commentators of the principles, including Maimonides, Albo, Hadassi, and Bashyachi, and found it necessary to teach them to the members of the community. The prime motivation for the Karaite poets was apparently didactic: poems about the essentials of the Karaite faith were suitable for the religious instruction of the members of the congregation.²⁵ Such Hebrew songs were most likely sung in the *kenesa* (the Karaite synagogue), at schools, and also at homes during festive mealtimes.

The poet: Yehuda ben Aharon

The name of Yehuda ben Aharon is hidden in the first letter of stanzas 2–12 of *Adon 'olam she'e shav'i*. In the Lithuanian Karaite community of the time, this particular name was not uncommon.²⁶ Fortunately, the heading of the poem in the *Siddur* provides a few further details on the poet's identity: Yehuda ben Aharon is the author of a work known as *Qibbuṣ yehuda* ("The Assortment of Yehuda"), a commentary on *Minḥat yehuda* by the Turkish Karaite scholar Yehuda ben Eliyyahu Gibbor (15th–16th c.). *Minḥat yehuda* covers in rhyme all the sections of the Pentateuch with philosophical and Kabbalistic ideas.²⁷ This Turkish Karaite poetic work became

²⁴ Davidson (1970, 4: 493) lists five Karaite poems on the ten principles of faith, and eighty-nine Rabbanite ones on the thirteen principles of faith. During my visits to East European archives, I have discovered the following poems in manuscripts, unknown to Davidson: *Adonay yom ahallilka* by Yoshiyahu ben Yehuda (17th c., Troki), and *Essa' de'i* by Shalom ben Zeḳarya (18th c., Halicz). See Ms. 8° B601, *Me'assef sheni: yalqut derashot, piyyuṭim, tefillot ve-toḳaḥot musar shel qara'e troki* (copied in 1902/03 by Yehuda Bizikovich, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, Israel), fols. 23ab and fols. 43aff. Yoshiyahu ben Yehuda is the son of Yehuda ben Aharon, the author of the poem under inspection in this article. It is likely that more such poems remain hidden in libraries and archives around the world.

²⁵ On the Hebrew learning of boys in Lithuanian Karaite communities, see Kowalski (1929, xiii–xiv).

²⁶ Yehuda had at least two Karaite namesakes in Poland–Lithuania of the time, both known scholars (Mann 1931, 728, n. 169).

²⁷ *Minḥat yehuda* is published in the Vilna *Siddur*, 1: 342–93. Weinberger (1991, 668–81) publishes the first part of the poem (the Book of the Genesis). Gibbor also wrote a work drawing from Kabbalah under the title *Sefer mo'ed qatan* (Danon 1925, 313); on the appearance of Kabbalistic ideas in medieval Karaism, see Fenton 1983. Research in progress at the Goethe University Frankfurt on "The Introduction of Liturgical Poetry in the Karaite Prayer Book" by Professor Elisabeth

the object of commentaries by many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Karaite scholars (Frank 2003, 553; Lasker 2007, 321–2), including also Yehuda ben Aharon of Troki. At least one copy of *Qibbuṣ yehuda* has been preserved.²⁸

Yehuda's father Aharon and his brother Mordokay were both employed as *gabbayim* (managers of the Karaite *kenesa*) in Troki; the brother also appears among the community's signatories in 1640 (Mann 1931, 797, 1446). A man of scholarly aspirations, Yehuda became the *hazzan* (cantor and religious scholar) of the Troki Karaite congregation (Mann 1931, 732). Yehuda's family left an imprint on the community: the son Yoshiyahu ben Yehuda of Troki corresponded with the famous Jewish scholar Yosef Shelomo Delmedigo (Candia, 1591–1655),²⁹ and the grandson Abraham ben Yoshiyahu of Troki became a physician and an enthusiast of Kabbalah.³⁰ A handful of Hebrew poems by Yehuda and his offspring have been preserved in various manuscripts and printed collections.³¹

The poem *Adon 'olam she'e shav'i*: a formal analysis

Adon 'olam she'e shav'i is a metric poem embellished with a refrain.³² It contains fifteen four-line rhymed stanzas. The rhyme scheme is the following: *aaab bbbb cccb* etc. The main rhyme (*-ra*), perhaps, evokes the image of the Torah in the minds of the reciters. The first stanza is repeated after each stanza as a refrain (*Adon 'olam she'e shav'i...*). The biblical verse cited after the poem is taken from Ps. 22:25.³³

The poem follows the conventional East European Karaite poetic style, thoroughly indebted to the medieval Andalusian tradition of Hebrew poetry and poetics.³⁴ The

Hollender and Dr Joachim Yeshaya will lead to a much better understanding of Yehuda Gibbor and his enigmatic *Minḥat yehuda*. For now, see Philip Miller's unpublished dissertation *At the Twilight of Byzantine Karaism. The Anachronism of Judah Gibbor*, New York University, 1984.

²⁸ Ms. Evr. 225, copied in 1870, in the Russian State Library, Moscow (Sklare 2003, 901). I hope to be able to consult the manuscript in the future.

²⁹ The letter *Ner elohim* ("The Candle of the Lord"), written by Delmedigo in 1624 to Yoshiyahu, answers his questions on the existence of God and the immortality of the soul (Mann 1931, 620, 678). On Delmedigo, see Barzilay 1974 and Schreiner 2003.

³⁰ On the grandson, see Tuori 2008.

³¹ For a preliminary list of the poems and other literary works by Yehuda ben Aharon, his son, and grandson, see Tuori 2013, 419–20.

³² This indicates that the poem was most likely sung. On Lithuanian Karaite music, see Firkavičiūtė (2001). By the early twentieth century the Karaites stopped using Hebrew as the main language of rite and culture, and the melodies of the Karaite Hebrew hymns disappeared.

³³ "For He has not despised nor abhorred the lowliness of the poor; neither has He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard." Following the spirit of the citation, in the first stanza the poet cries unto God, and in the last stanza he pleads God not to hide His face from him.

³⁴ More on the formal aspects of Polish–Lithuanian Karaite paraliturgical poetry, see Tuori 2013, 115–75; on Andalusian Hebrew poetry and poetics, see Pagis 1974 and Fleischer 1975.

metre of *Adon 'olam she'e shav'i* is known in the modern study of Hebrew poetry as *ham-marnin* (coined from the classical Arabic metre, *hazaj*). *Ham-marnin* was one of the most popular classical metres in Hispano-Hebrew poetry (Pagis 1976, 118–9): metres, where the first syllable is “short”, they are fairly easy to apply, and it was commonly employed even by the less-experienced Ashkenazi poets trying their hand at Andalusian metres (Fleischer 1975, 436).

It is noteworthy that Yehuda's poem begins with the same words as the famous Jewish poem *Adon olam asher malaḳ* (“The Lord of the Universe who reigned”) (see Davidson 1970, 1: 29). This early anonymous poem was included in most Jewish rites, including the Karaite one, and was often imitated.³⁵ While Yehuda ben Aharon was inspired by the ten principles of Karaite faith, in terms of form and style he draws much from this eminent predecessor, including linguistic elements, the rhythmic terseness of its lines, and complete phrases.³⁶

The poem:

Adon 'olam she'e shav'i by Yehuda ben Aharon

Notes on the Hebrew text and translation

The annotations of the Hebrew text contain comments on the linguistic aspects of the poem (e.g., variants between the printed edition and the manuscripts). The annotations of the English translation discuss the contents of the poem in more detail, including the poetic allusions to the principles.³⁷ Because most of Yehuda's contemporaries had studied Bashyachi's *Adderet eliyahu*,³⁸ the footnotes added to the translation refer to his version of the principles.

³⁵ It is published in the *Siddur ke-minhag haq-qara'im*, 1892, 4: 74, among the morning blessings. For other Karaite imitations of *Adon olam asher malaḳ*, see, e.g., Yehuda Maruli's (d. 1593, Constantinople) *Yeḥo'uni ḥasadeka*, (no. 148 in the fourth volume of the Vilna *Siddur*, directly after no. 147), and a poetic plea for the ten days of mercy (*Adon 'olam le-daḳ niḳlam*) by the thirteenth-century Byzantine Karaite Aharon ben Yosef, the compiler of the first successful Karaite prayer book (for this poem, see Weinberger 1991, 528).

³⁶ See, e.g., the fourth line of the fourth stanza below.

³⁷ Due to the demands of the metre, the conjunction -ו , (“and”) is very common at the beginning of lines. I have omitted some of these conjunctions from the translation in order to make the language less repetitive.

³⁸ See above note 27. Shelomo ben Aharon (1670–1745), the Troki-based Karaite scholar and the author of *Appiryon*, includes *Adderet* in his recommendations of essential works for a devout Karaite (Neubauer 1866, 79–80).

Siddur hat-tefillot ke-minhaq haq-qarai'm, pp. 182–3.

Title: זמר על יו"ד עקרי האמונה להר"ר יהודה נ"ע בע"ס קבוץ יהודה בכמוהר"ר אהרן ז"ל

Acrostic: ³⁹יהודה בן אהרן חזק

Metre: *ham-marnin*

.1

1. אָדוֹן עוֹלָם שְׁעָה שְׁוֹעֵי

2. וּמְהַלֵּל פִּי בְּמוֹ רַעֲי

3. וַיֹּזֶם לַיַּל הַזֶּה רַעֲי

4. וְכִי חֲנֹן שְׁמַךְ נִקְרָא

Refrain

אָדוֹן עוֹלָם...

.2

1. יִתְנֶנּוּ צְדָקָה נִוְרָא

2. בְּנֵי הַבְּרִית בְּנֵי בְרָה

3. אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵר לְכָל נִבְרָא

4. בְּאַמְרָה הַבְּרוּרָה

.3

1. הֲלֹא אַתָּה מְלֵא עוֹלָם

2. וּמַעֲיֵן מְאֹד נֶעְלָם

3. וְאַב חֶלֶם עָלֵי סֵלָם

4. מְצִיאֹתֶךָ וּבִתְדִירָה

.4

1. וְאַחֲדוּתֶךָ גְּמוּרָה הִיא

2. וְנִשְׁגָּבָה וּמִתְמִיחֵי

3. וְחֻקְמַת הָאֲבוֹשׁ מָה הִיא

4. לְהִתְחַכֵּם לְהִסְבִּירָה⁴⁰

³⁹ Always the first letter of stanzas 2–15.

⁴⁰ A long poetic infinitive (“to explain”), following the style of the rabbinic medieval poem *Adon ‘olam asher malak*: לְהַמְשִׁילוֹ וּלְהַסְבִּירָה.

.5

1. דְרָכֵיךָ לַהוֹדִיעֵי
2. בְּתוֹרָתְךָ לְהַבִּיעֵי
3. וּבִגְמוּלָךָ לְהוֹשִׁיעֵי
4. וְלִרְשָׁעִים תִּהְיֶה אֲנִי

.6

1. הִכִּי מֹשֶׁה נָבִיא הָאֵל
2. וְנָתַתְּ הוֹרִישׁ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
3. וְאֲדוֹן הוּא נְאֻרִיאֵל
4. וּלְנַבִּיאִים כְּמוֹ אֹרֶה

.7

1. בְּכֹל עַת אִישׁ יֵאָוֶה הַלֵּל
2. לְיוֹצֵר כָּל הַלְמוֹחֵלֵל
3. וְשֵׁם קֹדֶשׁוֹ לְבַל חַלֵּל
4. בְּדַבְרֵי חוֹל וְלִיֹּהֲרָא

.8

1. נְצַפְּהָ כִּי יִסְיָנוּ
2. וּמַעֲפָר יִקְיָצְנוּ
3. וּמֵאֲשָׁפוֹת יִרְיָמוּ
4. וְתַעֲזוּ יַד אֲשֶׁר קָצְרָה

.9

1. אֶל־הֵינוּ תִּמְהַר נָא
2. מְשִׁיחַ צְדָקָה אֲנִי
3. וּפְשַׁע עִמָּךְ שָׂא נָא
4. לְמַעַנְךָ וְנִשְׁיֶרָה⁴¹

⁴¹ In Ms. A065 (fol. 77a): וְאֵוֹ שִׁירָה, 'And then a song.'

.10

1. הַדוֹרָה כֹּל יְשׁוּרְרוּ לָךְ
2. בְּעִיר עִז לִי בְּמַהֲלָלְךָ
3. וְטוֹב סֵלַח לְהַגְדִּילְךָ
4. בְּמַעְצוֹמוֹת לְהַאֲדִירָה⁴²

.11

1. רְצוֹנְךָ לִי לְהִיטִיבָה
2. לְהַר צִיּוֹן וְהִשִּׁיבָה
3. לְבִנְיָה וְהִקְשִׁיבָה
4. לְזַעֲקָתָם בְּעֵת צָרָה

.12

1. נַחֲנִי צוֹר בְּצַדִּיקְתָּךְ
2. וּבִישׁוּעָה וּבִפְדוּתָךְ
3. וְזַכְרוֹן טוֹב בְּהִלּוּתָךְ⁴³
4. זְכוֹר שְׁפֵל מְאֹד תָּרָה

.13

1. תֵּשׁוּב שְׂמֵךְ וְתוֹרְתָךְ
2. וְעִיר קִדְשֶׁךָ וְלִנְוֹתָךְ
3. וְעַל חִלּוֹל גְּדֻלָּתָךְ
4. וְהִפֵּר לְתַרְוֹן עֲבָרָה

.14

1. זָרָה זָרִים וְאַזְנָרִים
2. וְאֵל יֵאמְרוּ בְּגִי כּוֹפְרִים
3. בְּלִי מְלֹךְ בְּגִי עֲבָרִים
4. מְאוֹרְתָם כְּבָר קָרְרָה⁴⁴

⁴² A long poetic infinitive ("to make glorious"), following the style of the rabbinic medieval poem *Adon 'olam asher malak*: לְהַמְשִׁילוֹ וּלְהַחֲבִירָה.

⁴³ In Ms. A065 (fol. 77b): בְּהַעֲלוֹתָךְ, 'by raising you'.

⁴⁴ In Ms. A065 (fol. 77b), קָרְרָה, 'to become dark'.

.15

.1 קרב לי האנון קולי

.2 ואל תבונה במלולי

.3 ואל תסתר ביום צר לי

.4 פני רחמים ובמקרה

ככתוב כי לא בזה ולא שקץ ענות עני וכ'45

Translation

A hymn on the Ten Principles of Faith by the great rabbi Yehuda—may his soul rest in the Garden of Eden,—the author of the *Assortment of Yehuda*, the son of our honourable teacher, the great rabbi Aharon, may his memory be blessed.

Lord of the Universe, behold my cry,
the praise of my mouth in my shout.
Be my shepherd (Ps. 23:1) day and night,
for Your name is called gracious (Ex. 34:6).
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

2.
May they repeat your righteousness (Judg. 5:11), Awesome one,
the children of the covenant with clear speech⁴⁶—
[the one] who created all the creatures,
with [His] pure word.⁴⁷
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

3.
Do you not fill the world,⁴⁸
[are you not] much hidden from the eye (Job 28:21)?
Father dreamt of the ladder:⁴⁹
your existence in perpetuity.⁵⁰
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

⁴⁵ Ps. 22:25.

⁴⁶ Bashyachi's sixth principle holds that the believer must know the language of the Torah (Hebrew) (Lasker 2003, 521).

⁴⁷ Bashyachi's first principle holds that everything physical has been created (Lasker 2003, 521). The "pureness" of the divine word in creating the world may refer to *creatio ex nihilo*.

⁴⁸ Referring to the all-encompassing nature of God; cf. Is. 6:3: 'the whole earth is full of his glory'.

⁴⁹ An allusion to the dream of the Patriarch Jacob in Gen. 28:12–7.

⁵⁰ Bashyachi's second principle holds that everything was created by the Creator, who did not create himself but is eternal (Lasker 2003, 521).

4.

Your oneness is absolute,
exalted and astonishing.

What is human wisdom [compared to it],
to become wise [enough] to explain [it]?⁵¹

Refrain: Lord of the universe...

5.

Show me Your ways (Ps. 25:4),
pouring forth for me in Your Torah.⁵²
Redeeming me with your recompense,
scatter the evil ones.⁵³

Refrain: Lord of the universe...

6.

Indeed, Moses is the Prophet of God,
[who] bequeathed the Law to Israel,
and he is the lord and Ariel,⁵⁴
and for the prophets like a light.⁵⁵

Refrain: Lord of the universe...

7.

Ceaselessly one yearns to praise
the Creator of everything (Jer. 10:16) and Maker,
and not to profane His holy name (Lev. 22:32)
with irreverent words and conceit.⁵⁶

Refrain: Lord of the universe...

⁵¹ Bashyachi's third principle holds that the Creator has no likeness and is unique (Lasker 2003, 521).

⁵² Bashyachi's fifth principle holds that God has sent his perfect Torah with Moses (Lasker 2003, 521).

⁵³ Bashyachi's ninth principle holds that God requites each person according to his ways and deeds (Lasker 2003, 521).

⁵⁴ A poetic epithet for Moses as the Lion of God.

⁵⁵ Bashyachi's fourth and fifth principles hold that God has sent the Prophet Moses, and his perfect Torah with him; likewise, Bashyachi's seventh principle explicates that God has inspired prophets after Moses, likened here to light (Lasker 2003, 521).

⁵⁶ Referring also to the importance of Bashyachi's sixth principle (knowing the language of the Torah, Hebrew)?

8.

We hope that He will revive us
and awaken us from the dust (Dan. 12:2),
and raise us from dunghills (Ps. 113:7).⁵⁷
The hand that was weakened will be strong (Ps. 89:14).
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

9.

Our Lord, please hasten
the Messiah of your righteousness,
and please forgive the sin of your nation (Gen. 50:17),
for Your sake, and we will sing.⁵⁸
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

10.

The splendid one,⁵⁹ everyone will sing for you,
in my strong city (Is. 26:1) in your praise,
the Good and Forgiving (Ps. 86:5) magnifying you,
mightily making [you] glorious (Is. 42:21).
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

11.

Your favour for me [is] to do good:
Restore to the Mount of Zion (Ps. 51:20)
Your children, and hear
their shout in the time of trouble.⁶⁰
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

12.

Lead me, o Rock, in your righteousness (Ps. 5:9),
and in Your redemption and salvation,
and while you are raising the good memory,
remember the low one,⁶¹ o very furious one.⁶²
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

⁵⁷ Bashyachi's eighth principle holds that God will resurrect all mankind on the Day of Judgment (Lasker 2003, 521).

⁵⁸ Bashyachi's tenth principle holds that God has not forsaken his people in Exile; they are suffering God's righteous punishment and must wait for salvation and the Messiah (Lasker 2003, 521).

⁵⁹ 'The glorious one', a poetic epithet referring here probably to Jerusalem.

⁶⁰ Cf. Is. 33:2, Jer. 14:8, 15:11, 30:7, Ps. 37:39.

⁶¹ 'The low one', a poetic epithet for Israel.

⁶² A poetic epithet for God, a plea for him to remember his nation despite his anger.

13.

Think of Your Name⁶³ and Your Torah,
and the city of Your holiness and Your meadow,⁶⁴
and on the profanation of Your greatness,⁶⁵
cease [Your] anger and wrath.⁶⁶
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

14.

Cast the strangers and the cruel ones,
[so that] the heretics⁶⁷ will not proclaim:
“The Hebrews are without a King,⁶⁸
their light has already darkened.”
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

15.

Come nearer to me, listen to my voice,⁶⁹
and do not despise my speech,
and do not hide on the day of my trouble
Your merciful face (Ps. 22:25),⁷⁰ and [may the salvation arrive] soon.
Refrain: Lord of the universe...

As it was written (Ps. 22:25): “For He has not despised nor abhorred the lowliness of the poor; neither has He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard.”

⁶³ Cf. Mal. 3:16.

⁶⁴ The Temple, or the Land of Israel.

⁶⁵ That is, Jerusalem and the Temple being under the dominion of non-Jews.

⁶⁶ Cf. Ps. 78:49, Ps. 85:5.

⁶⁷ Cf. *kofer be-‘iqqar* (the one who denies any of the principles and will not have any part in the World-to-come) in Bashyachi 1532, 60a. Here the reference is most likely to Christians (see the discussion below).

⁶⁸ Christian critics, among them the sixteenth-century Christian-Orthodox polemicists, “claimed that God ceased to consider the Jews as the chosen nation, seeing they rejected the faith of Jesus, and consequently the Jews no longer had their own king” (Akhiezer 2006, 445). Yehuda ben Aharon was obviously familiar with this criticism.

⁶⁹ Cf. Ps. 140:7, 141:1, Job 9:16, 34:16, Is. 28:23.

⁷⁰ The same biblical verse is also mentioned under the poem as a source of poetic inspiration (“as it is written”).

Final Remarks:
The ten principles of faith
in a seventeenth-century Karaite poem

The main gist of *Adon 'olam she'e shav'i* may be summarized in a few lines: the Lord of the Universe, whose eternal existence was perceived by the Patriarch Jacob in a dream, is praised as gracious and righteous. His unity is absolute, and his essence is incomprehensible to the human mind. His prophet Moses is compared to a luminous light. At the end of time, the dead will be revived from dust, and the faithful ones will return to the Mount Zion.

Bashyachi's principles appear in the following stanzas of the poem (Bashyachi 1532, 55a–60a):⁷¹

1. Everything physical has been created: second stanza
2. Everything was created by the Creator, who did not create himself but is eternal: third stanza
3. The Creator has no likeness; he is unique: fourth stanza
4. God has sent the Prophet Moses: sixth stanza
5. God has sent with Moses the perfect Torah: fifth and sixth stanza
6. The believer must know the language of the Torah (Hebrew): second and seventh stanza
7. God has inspired prophets after Moses: sixth stanza
8. God will resurrect all mankind on the Day of Judgment: eighth stanza
9. God requites each person according to his deeds (reward and punishment): fifth stanza
10. God has not forsaken his people in Exile. They are suffering God's just punishment, and they must hope for salvation and the arrival of the Messiah: ninth stanza

Although Yehuda ben Aharon does not deal with the principles in the very order they appear in Bashyachi,⁷² Yehuda's choice of presentation follows the same logic. Like Bashyachi, he begins with the concept of God and creation,⁷³ then discusses the Torah and the prophecy of Moses, and finally enters the zone of resurrection and redemption. The rest of the poem (from the tenth stanza onwards) continues to elaborate the themes of redemption and retribution. One noteworthy element is the

⁷¹ The English translation follows Lasker (2003, 521), with a few modifications.

⁷² For example, the sixth principle (on knowing the holy tongue, Hebrew) already appears in the second stanza.

⁷³ In contrast to Bashyachi (see principle no. 1), Maimonides included the creation into his fourth principle (on the eternity of God) only later (Kellner 1986, 53–4, 61); more on Bashyachi's view on the creation of the world, see Lasker 2008, 101–4.

strong presence of Jerusalem and the Temple (stanzas 10, 11, and 13). Yehuda ben Aharon's emphasis on Jerusalem has a parallel in the twelfth-century Karaite Yehuda Hadassi, whose seventh principle in his *Eshkol ha-kofer* entails that "the Temple is the place of residence of God's glory and presence" (Lasker 2003, 506).⁷⁴

One line suggests that Yehuda ben Aharon took a stance to a contemporary issue. In the fourteenth stanza, the poet attacks the "heretics" (*bene koferim*) who declare that the "Hebrews no longer have a King". This is a common Christian figure of speech raised against the Jews, who are blamed for rejecting the kingship of Jesus. According to Akhiezer (2006, 445), the Lithuanian Karaite scholar Yiṣḥaq ben Abraham (1533–94) addressed this particular piece of Christian critique in his treatise against Christianity, *Ḥizzuq emuna* ("The Strengthening of the faith").⁷⁵ One may assume that Yehuda ben Aharon was familiar with this criticism, living as he was in the multi-ethnic society of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth with an abundance of various Christian denominations (Catholics, Protestants, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and Antitrinitarians).⁷⁶

The Karaite (ten) and the Rabbanite (thirteen) principles of faith do not contradict one another.⁷⁷ In the case of *Adon 'olam she'e shav'i*, the Karaite identity of the poet emerges in his choice to write about the *ten* principles of faith instead of the Maimonidean thirteen. This is as far as it goes: the poet does not bring forth any explicitly "Karaite" ideas, and probably did not feel any need to do so. For example, the status of the Written Torah as opposed to the Oral Torah (Talmud) is not raised in the poem.⁷⁸ The only criticism Yehuda ben Aharon supplies targets the Christians, not the Rabbanites. Abraham Geiger (1810–74), a prominent scholar of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, once mused: "It was always the differences in practice, not in dogma, that caused and sustained divisions in Israel" (as quoted by Revel 1913, 3). This poem by the Lithuanian Karaite Yehuda ben Aharon, dedicated to the principles of faith, does not offer any ideas that would be objectionable to rabbinic Judaism.

⁷⁴ For Hadassi's principles, see Appendix below. *Qibla* (the direction of prayer, facing Jerusalem) also occupies an important place in the six principles of the thirteenth-century Egyptian Karaite Yisra'el ben Shemu'el ha-Maghrebi, written in Arabic (Halkin 1982, 146, 152; Lasker 2008, 42, n. 8).

⁷⁵ *Ḥizzuq emuna* became by far the most famous and widespread East European Karaite work ever written (see Waysblum 1952, Dan 1988, Akhiezer 2006, 437, n. 1).

⁷⁶ On the slightly later polemical treatise against Christianity, *Migdal 'oz* by Shelomo ben Aharon, the author of *Appiryon*, see Akhiezer, Lasker 2011.

⁷⁷ The anonymous seventeenth-century Volhynian Karaite author, for example, notes that the rabbinic and Karaite versions contain more or less the same ideas (Akhiezer, Lasker 2006, 22).

⁷⁸ Unless one takes into account the fact that the poem begins with the first letter of the alphabet (*alef*), which according to Shelomo ben Aharon, the author of *Appiryon*, is explained as reflecting the oneness of the Written Torah, a prominent element of Karaite religious tenets (Mann 1931, 741, n. 188).

Judging from the number of Hebrew poems extant from the seventeenth century,⁷⁹ the literary culture of the Karaites was in its bloom during this period. While theoretical debates on theological, philosophical, and mystical issues were common, Karaite scholars also strove to teach the congregants about the basics of creed with the help of poetry and music. The knowledge of dogma was viewed as essential in the schooling of a Karaite believer. Teaching easily memorized rhymed lines—such as the poem by Yehuda ben Aharon of Troki, emulating the famous poetic blessing *Adon 'olam* and bringing forth the core of Jewish creed—was undoubtedly one of the most successful ways of religious education in the early modern Karaite communities in Poland and Lithuania.

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⁷⁹ For a list of more than two-hundred Polish–Lithuanian Karaite poems in Hebrew, see Tuori 2014, 417–27.

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Appendix:

Ten principles of faith by the Karaite Yehuda Hadassi (12th c., Byzantine Empire)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. The existence of a Creator. | 6. The obligation to know Hebrew. |
| 2. The pre-existence and unity of the Creator. | 7. The Temple in Jerusalem was chosen by God as the eternal dwelling place of his glory. |
| 3. The creation of the world. | 8. The resurrection of the dead. |
| 4. Moses and the rest of the prophets were sent by God. | 9. Divine judgment. |
| 5. The Torah is true. | 10. Reward and punishment. |

(Lasker 2003, 506; Altmann 2007, 529.)

**Thirteen principles of faith by Maimonides
(1138–1204, Egypt)**

1. The existence of God which is perfect and sufficient unto itself and which is the cause of the existence of all other beings.
2. God's unity which is unlike all other kinds of unity.
3. God must not be conceived in bodily terms, and the anthropomorphic expressions applied to God in Scripture have to be understood in a metaphorical sense.
4. God is eternal.
5. God alone is to be worshipped and obeyed. There are no mediating powers able freely to grant man's petitions, and intermediaries must not be invoked.
6. Belief in prophecy.
7. Moses is unsurpassed by any other prophet.
8. The entire Torah was given to Moses from the heavens; as well as the divine origin of the correct interpretation, i.e., the Oral Torah.
9. Moses' Torah will not be abrogated or superseded by another divine law nor will anything be added to, or taken away from it.
10. God knows the actions of men.
11. God rewards those who fulfil the commandments of the Torah, and punishes those who transgress them.
12. The coming of the Messiah.
13. The resurrection of the dead.

(For a full English translation by D.R. Blumenthal, see Kellner 1986, 11–7.)

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