

## Giants Of #17: Shemuel haNagid

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### Four verses

1. Shemuel HaNagid, *Wine*, Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse (1981) (Ben Tehillim #203)

וּזְכְּרוּ אֵלַי יִרְדּוּ	וּמְזוּג בְּאֶסְפִּיּא	וְעָרַב לְשׁוּתָהּוּ	מֵאֲדָם בְּמֵרָאָהּוּ
בְּרֵאשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יִרְדּוּ	רֵאשִׁים אֲזֵי יִרְדָּהּ	אֲבֵל בְּעֵלּוּתוֹ אֵל	וְחֵלֶשׁ בְּאֲגָנָיו
יִנּוֹסוֹן וִירְדּוּ	יִגּוֹנִיו בְּדָם אֲשַׁכֵּל	מִכּוֹסִים בְּדַמְעוֹתָיו	וְשִׁכּוֹל אֲשֶׁר דָּמְיוֹ
עַלֵּי יֵהְלֹם יָדוֹ.	מִיד לֵיד גּוֹרֵל	עֵת יִסּוּבּוֹם אֲשִׁישׁוֹתָיו	כִּאלֹו יִידִידִים

Red to the eye, sweet to the drinker, it is poured out in Spain – but its bouquet reaches India.

When it is in the bowls, it is feeble; but once it goes to the head, it holds sway over swaying heads.

The wretch whose heart's blood is mixed with his tears banishes his sorrows with the grape's blood.

As the goblets make their rounds, passing from hand to hand, it seems as if the friends are casting lots for a diamond.

2. Shemuel HaNagid, Ben Mishlei #132 (<http://www.hebrewbooks.org/37121>)

אֵל נָא תְהִי חֵבֵר לְרִשְׁעִי, גַּם אֵל יִהְיֶה רִשְׁעִי בְּחֻלְקִי  
כִּי הוּא אֵלַי רִשְׁעוֹ יִשִּׁיבְךָ, טָרַם תְּשִׁיבֵהוּ לְצַדִּיק.

Be not a friend to the wicked / Also let not a wicked person be in your portion

For he to his evil will draw you / Before you draw him to your righteousness.

3. Shemuel HaNagid, *War*, Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse (1981) (Ben Mishlei #963)

אֲשֶׁר כָּל אִישׁ לִשְׁחַק בָּהּ יֵאָוֶה  
אֲשֶׁר כָּל שׁוֹחֲרָהּ יִבְכֶּה וַיִּדְוֶה.

קָרַב דּוּמָה בְּרֵאשׁוֹ אֵל יִפְהַפֶּה  
וְסוּפוֹ כִּזְקָנָהּ הַמְּאוּסָה

War is at first like a beautiful girl / with whom all men long to play,  
but in the end like a repulsive hag / whose suitors all weep and ache.

4. Shemuel HaNagid, Ben Mishlei #245 (<http://www.hebrewbooks.org/37121>)

חֲלֵי לִבְךָ וְעֵינֶיךָ  
אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר לְשׁוֹנֵךְ.

בְּסֵם יִרְאָה תִרְפָּא אֶת  
וּבְלִשׁוֹן מַעֲשֵׂה תִצְדִּיק

With the medicine of awe [of Gd] you shall heal / the sickness of your heart and your eyes

And with the tongue of deeds you shall make just / that which your tongue has spoken.

### 5. Must-reads

Hebrew David Solomon Sassoon, *The Diwan of Shemuel HaNagid*, <https://hebrewbooks.org/9415>

English Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, Vol. 2

### Historical background: The World of Shemuel HaNagid

6. Ta'ifas <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8b/Taifas2.gif>



(see also <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/8/8b/20090317160337%21Taifas2.gif>)

## The Rise to Political Power

7. Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, Vol. 2, pg. 52

But as he sat in his shop in Malaga he was overcome by depression and struggled powerfully with himself... There were no circles of young scholars or writers, like himself, with whom he could discourse and benefit thereby from their erudition, nor could he learn of or discuss new developments in literature and science... He suffered all the pain of one abruptly removed from his birthplace and all the misery of loneliness.

8. Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, Vol. 2, pg. 54

As was usual among Moslem theologians, Ibn Ḥazm sought to demonstrate that the Torah of Jews was fraudulent and was not the Holy Book of Gd. Among the various verses he cited as unethical, and thus proof of fraudulence, is the phrase in Genesis 12:13, "Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister"... Samuel ha-levi replied that "sister" in Hebrew can also mean a kinswoman. Whereupon Ibn Ḥazm further cited the verse in Genesis 20:12, "and moreover she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother."...

The Moslem theologian did not fail to introduce an old argument employed in all such debates – Ibn Ḥazm asked how Samuel would explain Genesis 49:10 – "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah."...

9. *Samuel Ha-Nagid*, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*

In his exalted position Samuel remained the same pious and modest scholar, and disarmed his enemies, who could not forgive him his Jewish faith, by his gentleness of manner and his liberality. The following is an illustration of his magnanimity: A fanatical Mohammedan dealer in spices, who lived near the calif's palace, once grossly offended Samuel while accompanying the calif. Incensed at the offense, the calif commanded Samuel to punish the fanatic by cutting out his tongue. Instead of executing this order Samuel made a present to the offender, and thus gained his gratitude. When the calif again noticed the seller of spices he was astonished at the change, and questioned Samuel about it. "I have torn out," answered the vizier, "his angry tongue, and given him instead a kind one."

## Scholarship

10. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (12<sup>th</sup> century Spain), *Extended Commentary to Shemot 32:31*

אמר הנגיד, כי אנא מבולע הלמ"ד, כמו "אל נא", ופי' "אל" מגזרת הואיל, וזה רחוק.

The Naggid said that *ana* has a 'swallowed' *lamed*, like *al na*, and *al* is from the root *ho'il* (an oath). This is unlikely...

11. Rabbeinu Asher (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Germany/Spain), *Commentary to Ketuvot 1:12*

כתב רב אחאי (פ' חיי סי' טז) דברכת אירוסין בי'. וה"ר שמואל הנגיד נחלק עליו ואמר שאין צריך י' אלא לברכת חתנים בלבד שלא הוזכרו י' אלא בה. ועוד הרי קידושין בפני ב' ואתה מצריך עשרה. ול"נ דברי רב אחאי

Rav Achai wrote that ten are required for the blessing of *kiddushin*. And Rabbeinu Shemuel HaNagid disagreed with him, saying only the blessings of marriage (*sheva berachot*) require ten, as the requirement of ten was only mentioned for these. Further, *kiddushin* is in front of two, and you require ten? But Rav Achai appears correct to me...

12. Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, Vol. 2, pp. 121-122

Yet his most amazing achievement surely was the writing of a treatise against the Koran... Most of the writings about Islam by Jewish scholars were comprehensive theological essays or polemics defending Judaism against the arguments of the Moslems, who sought to demonstrate from the Bible that Mohammed was a real prophet, and so on. But the Jews were careful not to denigrate the sacred book of the Moslems. And then along came Samuel to point out the Koran's contradictions and errors. He called attention to Sura 41:8-11, where it is stated that the world was created in eight days, while according to Sura 32:3 it was created in six days...