**Rav Yehuda Halevi**

**Historical Experiential Account of Belief:**

Section One:

11. The Rabbi replied: I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land, after having made them traverse the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way; who sent Moses with His law, and subsequently thousands of prophets, who confirmed His law by promises to the observant, and threats to the disobedient. Our belief is comprised in the Tōrāh--a very large domain.

12. King: I had not intended to ask any Jew, because I am aware of their reduced condition and narrow-minded views, as their misery left them nothing commendable. Now shouldst thou, O Jew, not have said that thou believest in the Creator of the world, its Governor and Guide, and in Him who created and keeps thee, and such attributes which serve as evidence for every believer, and for the sake of which He pursues justice in order to resemble the Creator in His wisdom and justice?

13. The Rabbi: That which thou dost express is religion based on speculation and system, the research of thought, but open to many doubts. Now ask the philosophers, and thou wilt find that they do not agree on one action or one principle, since some doctrines can be established by arguments, which are only partially satisfactory, and still much less capable of being proved.

14. Al Khazari: That which thou sayest now, O Jew, seems to be more to the point than the beginning, and I should like to hear more.

15. The Rabbi: Surely the beginning of my speech was just the proof, and so evident that it requires no other argument.

16. Al Khazari: How so?

17. The Rabbi: Allow me to make a few preliminary remarks, for I see thee disregarding and depreciating my words.

18. Al Khazari: Let me hear thy remarks.

19. The Rabbi: If thou wert told that the King of India was an excellent man, commanding admiration, and deserving his high reputation, one whose actions were reflected in the justice which rules his country and the virtuous ways of his subjects, would this bind thee to revere him?

20. Al Khazari: How could this bind me, whilst I am not sure if the justice of the Indian people is natural, and not dependent on their king, or due to the king or both?

21. The Rabbi: But if his messenger came to thee bringing presents which thou knowest to be only procurable in India, and in the royal palace, accompanied by a letter in which it is distinctly stated from whom it comes, and to which are added drugs to cure thy diseases, to preserve thy health, poisons for thy enemies, and other means to fight and kill them without battle, would this make thee beholden to him?

22. Al Khazari: Certainly. For this would remove my former doubt that the Indians have a king. I should also acknowledge that a proof of his power and dominion has reached me.

25. The Rabbi: In this way I answered thy first question. In the same strain spoke Moses to Pharaoh, when he told him: 'The God of the Hebrews sent me to thee,' viz. the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For Abraham was well known to the nations, who also knew that the divine spirit was in contact with the patriarchs, cared for them, and performed miracles for them. He did not say: 'The God of heaven and earth,' nor 'my Creator and thine sent me.' In the same way God commenced His speech to the assembled people of Israel: 'I am the God whom you worship, who has led you out of the land of Egypt,' but He did not say: 'I am the Creator of the world and your Creator.' Now in the same style I spoke to thee, a Prince of the Khazars, when thou didst ask me about my creed. I answered thee as was fitting, and is fitting for the whole of Israel who knew these things, first from personal experience, and afterwards through *uninterrupted* tradition, which is equal to the former.

Section 4

3. …Whenever a person was found in it who fulfilled all the necessary conditions, these sights became distinctly visible to him, 'apparently, and not in dark speeches,' just as Moses saw the Tabernacle, the sacrificial worship, and the land of Canaan in all its parts; or in the scene when, 'the Lord passed by before him.' Elijah had a vision also within this area. These things, which cannot be approached by speculation, have been rejected by Greek philosophers, because speculation negates everything the like of which it has not seen. Prophets, however, confirm it, because they cannot deny what they were privileged to behold with their mind's eye. Such a number of them, living as they did in various epochs, could not have acted upon some common understanding. These statements were borne out by contemporary sages who had witnessed their prophetic afflatus. Had the Greek philosophers seen them when they prophesied and performed miracles, they would have acknowledged them, and sought by speculative means to discover how to achieve such things. Some of them did, so especially gentile philosophers.

13.We cannot blame philosophers for missing the mark, since they only arrived at this knowledge by way of speculation, and the result could not have been different, The most sincere among them speak to the followers of a revealed religion in the words of Socrates: 'My friends, I will not contest your theology, I say, however, that I cannot grasp it; I only understand human wisdom.'

15. The Rabbi: …Let me explain the matter to thee by a simile taken from the sun. The sun is only a single body, whilst those receiving their light from it are in many ways dependent on each other. The most fitted to annex its lustre are the ruby, crystal, pure air and water, and their light is therefore called transparent. On glittering stones and polished surfaces it is called luminous; on wood, earth, etc., visible light, and on all other things it is simply designated light without any specific qualification. This general term, light, corresponds to what we call *Elōhim*, as is now clear. Transparent light corresponds to 'Eternal,' a proper name which describes especially the relation between Him and His earthly creatures, I mean, the prophets, whose souls are refined and susceptible to His light, which penetrates them, just as the sunlight penetrates the crystal and ruby. Their souls take their origin and development (as has been explained before) from Adam. Essence and heart [of Adam] reappear in every generation and age, whilst the large mass of mankind are set aside as husks, leaves, mud, etc. The God of this essence is only and solely Adōnāi, and because He established a connexion with man, the name Elohim was altered after the creation into *Adonāi Elōhim*….

The meaning of *Elōhim* can be grasped by way of speculation, because a Guide and Manager of the world is a postulate of Reason. Opinions differ on the basis of different speculations, but that of the philosophers is the best on the subject. The meaning of *Adonāi*, however, cannot be grasped by speculation, but only by that intuition and prophetic vision which separates man, so to speak, from his kind, and brings him in contact with angelic beings, imbuing him with a new spirit… Then all previous doubts concerning *Elōhim* are removed, and man deprecates those speculations by means of which he had endeavoured to derive the knowledge of God's dominion and unity. It is thus that man becomes a servant, loving the object of his worship, and ready to perish for His sake, because he finds the sweetness of this attachment as great as the distress in the absence thereof. This forms a contrast to the philosophers, who see in the worship of God nothing but extreme refinement, extolling Him in truth above all other beings, (just as the sun is placed on a higher level than the other visible things), and that the denial of God's existence is the mark of a low standard of the soul which delights in untruth.

16. Al Khazari: Now I understand the difference between *Elōhim* and *Adonāi*, and I see how far the God of Abraham is different from that of Aristotle. Man yearns for *Adonāi* as a matter of love, taste, and conviction; whilst attachment to *Elōhim* is the result of speculation. A feeling of the former kind invites its votaries to give their life for His sake, and to prefer death to His absence. Speculation, however, makes veneration only a necessity as long as it entails no harm, but bears no pain for its sake. I would, therefore, excuse Aristotle for thinking lightly about the observation of the law, since he doubts whether God has any cognizance of it.

**Relation to Philosophy**

Section One:

64. Al Khazari: Does this mean that Aristotle's philosophy is not deserving of credence?

65. The Rabbi: Certainly. He exerted his mind, because he had no tradition from any reliable source at his disposal. He meditated on the beginning and end of the world, but found as much difficulty in the theory of a beginning as in that of eternity. Finally, these abstract speculations which made for eternity, prevailed, and he found no reason to inquire into the chronology or derivation of those who lived before him. Had he lived among a people with well authenticated and generally acknowledged traditions, he would have applied his deductions and arguments to establish the theory of creation, however difficult, instead of eternity, which is even much more difficult to accept.

**Halevi’s Approach is not Irrational: The King’s Mistake**

Section one:

88. Al Khazari: Should any one hear you relate that God spoke with your assembled multitude, and wrote tables for you, etc., he would be blamed for accusing you of holding the theory of personification You, on the other hand, are free from blame, because this grand and lofty spectacle, seen by thousands, cannot be denied. You are justified in rejecting [the charge of] mere reasoning and speculation.

89. The Rabbi: Heaven forbid that I should assume what is against sense and reason.

**Powerful but Subjective:**

Section One:

26. Al Khazari: If this be so, then your belief is confined to yourselves?

27. The Rabbi: Yes; but any Gentile who joins us unconditionally shares our good fortune, without, however, being quite equal to us. If the Law were binding on us only because God created us, the white and the black man would be equal, since He created them all. But the Law was given to us because He led us out of Egypt, and remained attached to us, because we are the pick of mankind.

**Five Levels of Being; The Uniqueness of the Jew:**

31. The Rabbi: The laws of nature comprise nurture, growth, and propagation, with their powers and all conditions attached thereto. This is particularly the case with plants and animals, to the exclusion of earth, stones, metals, and elements.

32. Al Khazari: This is a maxim which requires explanation, though it be true.

33. The Rabbi: As regards the soul, it is given to all animated beings. The result is movement, will power, external as well as internal senses and such like.

34. Al Khazari: This, too, cannot be contradicted.

35. The Rabbi: Intellect is man's birthright above all living beings. This leads to the development of his faculties, his home, his country, from which arise administrative and regulative laws.

36. Al Khazari: This is also true.

37. The Rabbi: Which is the next highest degree?

38. Al Khazari: The degree of great sages.

39. The Rabbi: I only mean that degree which separates those who occupy it from the physical point of view, as the plant is separated from inorganic things, or man from animals. The differences as to quantity, however, are endless, as they are only accidental, and do not really form a degree.

40. Al Khazari: If this be so, then there is no degree above man among tangible things.

41. The Rabbi: If we find a man who walks into the fire without hurt, or abstains from food for some time without starving, on whose face a light shines which the eye cannot bear, who is never ill, nor ages, until having reached his life's natural end, who dies spontaneously just as a man retires to his couch to sleep on an appointed day and hour, equipped with the knowledge of what is hidden as to past and future: is such a degree not visibly distinguished from the ordinary human degree?

42. Al Khazari: This is, indeed, the divine and seraphic degree, if it exists at all. It belongs to the province of the divine influence, but not to that of the intellectual, human, or natural world.

43. The Rabbi: These are some of the characteristics of the undoubted prophets through whom God made Himself manifest, and who also made known that there is a God who guides them as He wishes, according to their obedience or disobedience. He revealed to those prophets that which was hidden, and taught them how the world was created, how the generations prior to the Flood followed each other, and how they reckoned their descent from Adam. He described the Flood and the origin of the 'Seventy Nations' from Shem, Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah; how the languages were split up, and where men sought their habitations; how arts arose, how they built cities, and the chronology from Adam up to this day.

Section Five:

20. …THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE expresses the conviction that existing beings are of higher or lower degree. Everything that is possessed of feeling and perception is higher than those creatures which lack the same, since the former are nearer the degree of the Prime Cause which is Reason itself. The lowest plant occupies a higher rank than the noblest mineral, the lowest animal is higher than the noblest plant, and the lowest human being is higher than the noblest animal. Thus the lowest follower of the divine law occupies a higher place than the noblest heathen. For the divine law confers something of the nature of angels on the human mind, a thing which cannot be acquired otherwise. The proof is that prolonged practice of this law leads up to the degree of prophetic inspiration, than which there is no nearer degree to God for man. A froward monotheist is, therefore, preferable to the pagan, because the divine law empowered him to lead an angelic life and to reach the degree of angels, though it has become sullied and defaced by his frowardness. Some traces will always remain, and the fire of his longing for it is not quite extinguished. If he had his own choice, he would prefer to remain untutored, just as a sick and pain-plagued person would not prefer to be a horse, or fish, or bird, which, though happy and free from pain, is far removed from reason which brings near to the divine degree.

**We Earned It:**

Section One

103. Divinity rested only upon the individual who was the heart of his siblings and the elite descendant of his parent. Only he would receive this light, and all others were like the peel of the fruit and did not receive it. This continued until the arrival of Yaakov’s sons, who were all the heart, and elite descendants. They differed from all other people in their distinguished Divinity. These distinctions seemed to place them upon a difference level of creation – a new species perhaps, that was angelic in nature. (Korobkin Translation, Feldheim).

**D’veikus:**

Section 3

17. …The saintly person also allows his heart to internalize the blessing of ‘An eternal love.’ He considers that the Divinity attaches Itself to the community which is prepared to receive It, just as light is received and reflected by a clear mirror. He considers that the Torah was given by God as an indication of Hid desire [of this world], and also so that His Kingship would be apparent in this world as it is in the heavens. It was man – not angels – that God’s wisdom decreed should be created down below… When an individual person or community is purified, the Divine light rests upon them, and presides over them using wondrous and awesome miracles which depart from the natural order. This is what we call Divine ‘love’ and ‘joy.’ (Korobkin Translation, Feldheim).