

## *Reply to Natalia (part 2)*

(paving the way for Tight Spot 1)

*Dear Natalia*

سلام الله عليك ورحمة منه وبركات

*Salâmû Allah A'laykê Wa Rahmatan Minhû Wa Barakât*

*As* you may have probably noticed, I have dealt in *part 1* only with one facet of *Jewish Karaism*, mainly; with their disagreement with the *Rabbanite sect*, and their passionate denunciation of the claim of the latter concerning their so called; *Oral Law*.

*Now*, let me introduce you to the other facets of this sect, within its historical and social setting, in which its members were bred up in, since without such knowledge, one can easily take the wrong course in explaining things or events contrary to their natural happening, and the more so if one has to deal with thoughts and ideas.

To this end, I found it practical to make use of a concise and well reflected upon article, written by *Dr. DANIEL FRANK*, having in mind myself, two avowed aims behind this choice;

- a) *First*; to save myself the time and the hassle of writing anew on the subject or to translate relevant material from Arabic sources, due to my many other activities,
- b) *Second*; to give you the necessary confidence and trust in these historical matters, by referring you to an independent and neutral specialist who writes on these subject's matters in English.

*Note*

I have underlined with different colors, some relevant material of interest, and left the original links of the text unchanged, so as to give you the opportunity, if so are your wishes, to check the original text as well as the cross references of the author.

*So please, take your time in reading this text, so as to familiarize yourself with the plain meanings of the words and phrases, as they are supposed to have had in the minds of the different authors, who used them according to the language of their times and the historical setting in which they lived.*

## *Dr. Daniel Frank's article on Karaism*

The Karaites (*qara'im, or benei miqra*) take their name from the Hebrew word for Scripture. The sect's scripturalism originated in its rejection of the '**Oral Law**' embodied in rabbinic literature. Like earlier scripturalist groups - notably **the Sadducees**- **Karaites sought to derive their practices directly from the biblical text**. While **Karaism** is usually traced to mid-eighth-century **Iraq**, the early history remains murky. **The sect crystallized in the Islamic East during the late ninth and early tenth centuries, calling forth stern reactions from the leaders of mainstream rabbinic Judaism**. Although harsh at times, **the ensuing polemics stimulated both Karaite and Rabbanite scholarship in the fields of biblical exegesis, Hebrew grammar and lexicography, jurisprudence and religious philosophy**.

The two groups differed sharply over points of **law and practice** - the calendar, dietary laws, Sabbath regulations - but **typically concurred on questions of theology**.

1. **The Mu'tazilite phase**
2. **The post-Maimonidean phase**

### **1. The Mu'tazilite phase**

**Early** medieval Jewish thinkers of both Rabbanite and Karaite persuasion found the **kalam** (speculative theology) of the **Muslim rationalistic school known as the Mu'tazila congenial to their outlook and adopted many Mu'tazilite ideas** (see **Ash'ariyya and Mu'tazila**). The Mu'tazilites' uncompromising definitions of God's unity and justice inform the writings of leading Rabbanites like **Saadiah Gaon (الغاون سعديا)** (d. 942) and **Samuel ben Hofni Gaon (الغاون)** (السموأل بن حُفني) (d. 1013). **During the mid-tenth to mid-twelfth centuries, their Karaite contemporaries also produced works closely modelled upon Mu'tazilite patterns**.

**Widespread knowledge of Arabic facilitated the appropriation of Islamic theology by Eastern Jewish thinkers.**

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<sup>1</sup> I (Amrani) transliterate in Arabic only those names belonging to the Islamic Civilization.

Paralleling the doxographic interests of his Muslim contemporary, the *mutakallim al-Ash'ari* (المتكلم الأشعري) (d. 935), *Ya'qub al-Qirqisani* (يعقوب القيرقيساني) (d. after 938) betrays a lively interest in the history of Jewish sects. His *Kitab al-anwar wa'l-marakib* (كتاب الأنوار والمراقب) (*Book of Lights and Watchtowers*), a comprehensive Karaite code, incorporates discussions of ; **epistemology, philosophy of law, and theology.**

In this, it resembles the codes of later thinkers active in the Islamic world such as Al-Ghazali (الغزالي) (d. 1111) and Maimonides (ابن ميمون) (d. 1204).

While *al-Qirqisani* lived in *Iraq*, the main centre of Karaite spiritual and intellectual activity during the tenth and eleventh centuries was *Jerusalem*.

**Ascetic** and **apocalyptic** in outlook, the *Karaite* Mourners for Zion preached a strict regime of repentance, prayer and Bible study.

**Their writings evince a certain hostility to 'alien wisdom' but do endorse some Mu'tazilite teachings.**

**The commentaries of Japheth ben Eli** - originally covering the entire *Bible* and largely extant in manuscript - **include long speculative excursuses and strikingly apply kalam doctrines to the explication of such passages as Genesis 1-2, Genesis 22 and Job.**

**Karaism became truly scholastic with the assimilation of works emanating from the Mu'tazilite school of Basra.**

**The writings of the Mu'tazilite theologian 'Abd al-Jabbar** (d. 1025) (القاضي عبد الجبار) **powerfully influenced such leading Karaites as Yusuf al-Basir** (يوسف البصير) (**Joseph ben Abraham, d. 1040**) and **Abu'l-Furqan ben al-Asad** (أبو الفرقان بن أسد) (**Yeshu'ah ben Judah, d. after 1065**). **Structured around the doctrines of divine unity and justice, Yusuf's "al-Kitab al-muhtawi"** (الكتاب المحتوي) (**Comprehensive Treatise**) **is a compendium of Karaite kalam. Its forty chapters grapple with most of the salient issues confronting Jewish (and Muslim) mutakallimun.** (المتكلمون) Under the rubric of divine unity we find;

**discussions of epistemology and the obligation to engage in speculative theology (chapters 1-2), physical theories (3), existence of the Creator (4), the divine attributes - omnipotence, omniscience,**

*existence and eternity - and their essential nature (5-11), divine incorporeality and unity (12-14) and **the createdness of God's speech!!!!** 😊 (15). Under the second major heading of **Mu'tazilite theology, divine justice, we find discussions of God's will and self-sufficiency (chapters 16-17), theodicy (18-26), human free will (27-31), revelation and divine obligation (32-36) and reward, punishment, merits and repentance (37-40).***

Like “**Abd al-Jabbar**”, **Yusuf** was a **jurist**. Theology naturally impinged on his juridical writings. In discussing circumcision, for example, he considers such questions as intention, compensation for suffering and the nature of obligation.

His disciple **Yeshu'ah ben Judah** (يشوع بن يهوذا) prefaces a treatise on marriage law with an elaborate epistemology. His Bible commentaries **show a much greater interest in kalam** problems than is evident in those of his predecessor **Japheth ben Eli**.

**Like** the **Mu'tazilites** - but **unlike** the **Rabbanites** - both **Yusuf** and **Yeshu'ah** believed **that all bodies are composed of atoms, in which accidents reside!!!** 😊 {see **Atomism** (نظرية), **ancient** (القدماء); **Occasionalism** (لمناسباتية)}.

Among **Muslims**<sup>2</sup>, **atomism** was typically linked with **occasionalism, continuous creation** and **the rejection of natural causality**.

The **Karaites**, however, **seem to have affirmed a form of natural causality as a corollary of their theory of creation**.

**Karaite teachings** found a receptive audience among eleventh-century **Byzantine Jews**, some of whom studied in **Jerusalem**.

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<sup>2</sup> This is specific to Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites and not to the traditionalists who evinced speculating about things they don't know any about!

*They produced the **earliest Hebrew translations of Arabic speculative writings** over a century before the famous translations of the **Ibn Tibbon family in Provence.***

*Despite their odd renderings of technical terms and slavish adherence to Arabic syntax, these Hebrew versions, epitomes and anthologies linked later Byzantine Karaites to the earlier tradition.*

The transmission process culminated in 1148-9 with the completion of **Judah Hadassi's Eshkol ha-Kofer** (*Cluster of Henna*), an encyclopedic code in rhymed Hebrew acrostics.

*Although more original in form than in content, the work notably includes a creed - a mark of Islamic influence - anticipating **Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles"** by a decade.*

Hadassi's ten articles address:

*(1) God's existence, unity and wisdom; (2) divine eternity and uniqueness; (3) the world's createdness; (4) the revelations to Moses and other Hebrew prophets; (5) the truth of the Torah; (6) the distinctiveness of the Hebrew language; (7) the unique and eternal sanctity of the Temple site; (8) **the resurrection of the dead!!!! ☺**; (9) divine judgment; and (10) reward and punishment.*

*Most of these articles align with positions developed in **Kalam treatises like the** al-Kitab al-muhtawi ([Comprehensive Treatise](#)).*

Numerous harsh, anti-sectarian remarks in the writings of twelfth-century Andalusian Rabbanites **indicate the spread of Karaism to Islamic Spain.**

In an autograph letter, **Judah Halevi** (d. 1141) reveals that he began his **Kuzari**<sup>3</sup> in response to questions from a **Karaite**. The third part contains an informed attack on Karaite practice and a staunch defense of rabbinic tradition.

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<sup>3</sup> The full title; "The Khuzari; An Argument for the faith of Israel"

In *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* (*The Book of Tradition*), **Abraham Ibn Daud** (أبراهام بن داود) (d. circa 1180) **chronicles the history of Rabbanite scholarship in order to prove the validity of the Oral Law.**

***In documenting the heresy of Spanish Karaites, he even mentions how Rabbanite Jews were given license to persecute them !!!!.***

The great exegete **Abraham Ibn Ezra** (أبراهام بن عزرا) polemicizes against numerous **Karaite legal positions** and records his disputations with the sectarians (for example, in commenting on Leviticus 7: 20). While a vigorous Karaite community clearly existed in twelfth-century Spain, neither the names nor works of Spanish Karaites have survived.

***And although the Andalusian Rabbanites seem to be implacable foes of the sectarians, Ibn Ezra, at least, regularly cites the commentaries of Japheth ben Eli and Yeshu'ah ben Judah in non-polemical contexts; their philological, rationalistic approach clearly appealed to him.***

## 2. The post-Maimonidean phase

Later **Byzantine Karaites** similarly admired the clarity, erudition and rationalism of **Ibn Ezra** and **Maimonides**. Writing in fluent Rabbinic Hebrew, **Aaron ben Joseph** (d. circa 1320) and **Aaron ben Elijah** of **Nicomedia** (d. 1369) engage, criticize and frequently borrow from them and other Rabbanite authors. The latter Aaron is remarkable for his trilogy: **'Ets Hayyim'** (*The Tree of Life*), a theological *summa*; **Gan Eden** (*The Garden of Eden*), a code; and **Keter Torah** (*The Crown of the Law*), a commentary on the Pentateuch.

Modeled on the "**Guide to the Perplexed**" (دلالة الحائرين)<sup>4</sup>, **'Ets Hayyim'** is the first substantial Karaite work of **religious philosophy**

😊 composed **in Hebrew**.

Its technical vocabulary is largely Tibbonid, although the older Karaite terminology also persists.

<sup>4</sup> "دلالة الحائرين" written by Maimonide in Arabic.

Like *Maimonides*, *Aaron* clearly deems **religious philosophy an authentic!!!! and original component of Judaism!!!!** 😊

But while *Maimonides* hails **Aristotelianism!!!** as **the soundest speculative system!!!!** 😊, *Aaron* clings to the **kalam !!!!** of his ancestors.

Where *Maimonides* subjects **kalam theories to rigorous criticism** (*Guide to the Perplexed* 1: 73-6), *Aaron* defends **Mu'tazilite teachings or seeks to harmonize them with Aristotelianism** - sometimes through terminological sleights of hand.

Consequently, **'Ets Hayyim'** is more a **kalam** response to **Aristotelianism** than a Karaite critique of Rabbanism.

During the fifteenth century, **Byzantine Karaites and Rabbanites** reached an intellectual rapprochement. Increasingly, Karaite disciples incorporated the scholarship of their Rabbanite teachers into their own compositions.

However, while Rabbinic writing began to take new turns, Karaite literary activity became increasingly derivative, and though small sectarian communities still flourished (notably in Poland, Lithuania, the Crimea and Egypt), the great age of Karaite intellectual achievement and innovation had effectively come to an end.

Today, Karaites in Israel, Europe and the USA face the challenge of establishing their own communal identities as minorities within minorities. **The old philosophical problems that exercised their ancestors are all but forgotten.**

# *My Comments*

I list below, five **equivocal** and **ambivalent** sentences marked with dingbats in this text, which are of relevance in cracking out the codes associated with the puzzling question of **Tight spot 1** in your letter, mainly;

**I) the createdness of God's speech!!!! 😊 ,**

**II) all bodies are composed of atoms, in which accidents reside!!! 😊 .**

**III) the resurrection of the dead!!! 😊 ,**

**IV) Like Maimonides, Aaron clearly deems religious philosophy an authentic and original component of Judaism!!!! 😊 ,**

**V) But while Maimonides hails Aristotelianism as the soundest speculative system!!!! 😊 ,**  
**Aaron** clings to the **kalam** of his ancestors !

*Let me now restore all these equivocal muddled point to their historical reality ,by putting each within its historical context, freed of the dogmatic and forced typological interpretations forced on them by the philosophizing theologians .before we can proceed any further.*

*To be continued*