

Guided to Islam by the Torah: The *Risāla al-hādiya* by ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī al-Muḥammadī¹

Camilla Adang

The present contribution offers, for the first time, an English translation of *al-Risāla al-hādiya*, a polemical tract written by ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī al-Muḥammadī, a Jewish convert to Islam who lived in Istanbul in the early Ottoman period. Apart from the information provided by the author himself in the tract—from which we learn that he converted during the reign of Sultan Bāyazīd II (ruled 886/1481-918/1512)—we find additional data in the well-known bibliographical survey *Kashf al-zunūn* by Ḥājji Khalīfa, also known as Kātib Çelebi (d. 1067/1657). In this work, which lists books according to the alphabetical order of their titles, two entries may be found on our author, or rather his tract, one under *al-Risāla al-hādiya*, the other under *al-Hādiya*. The tract is described as a short refutation of Judaism in three parts (whose titles are given by Ḥājji Khalīfa); the author is named as ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī or al-*Daftarī*, who converted to Islam from Judaism, and who knew the entire Torah by heart. During the reign of Sultan Selīm I (ruled 918/1512-926/1520) he became a *daftarī* (that is, an official in the Ottoman financial administration), and he founded a mosque and a number of religious endowments.² Unlike other converts to Islam, ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī does not provide a detailed explanation of the reasons or circumstances of his conversion to Islam. As various others before and after him, he suggests that it was the very Torah that inspired him; if only people would understand it correctly, they would become convinced of the truth of Muḥammad’s mission, as he himself had. He mentions the encouragement received from Sultan Bāyazīd, but it is not clear to what this amounted. An identical claim is made by the author of a very similar, though less sophisticated tract, who goes by the name of Salām ‘Abd al-‘Allām.³

¹ I use the opportunity to thank the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, which funded the research for this article. I am grateful also to Judith Pfeiffer, Yaron Ben-Naeh and Yasin Meral for providing me with bio- and bibliographical details about the author of the tract presented here (or his namesake), as well as to Sabine Schmidtke for her valuable comments.

² Muṣṭafā b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qusṭanṭīni al-Rūmī, *Kashf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn* 1-2, Beirut 1413/1992, vol. 1, p. 900; vol. 2, p. 2027. Cf. Moritz Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden*. Leipzig 1877 (reprint Hildesheim 1965), p. 64 § 51; idem, *Die arabische Literatur der Juden. Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte der Araber, größtenteils aus handschriftlichen Quellen*. Frankfurt am Main 1902 (reprint Hildesheim 1986), pp. 268f., § 223. Steinschneider mentions the tract, but does not seem to have been aware of the second entry in the *Kashf*, under *al-Hādiya*.

³ See on this tract Joseph Sadan, “A Convert in the Service of Ottoman Scholars Writing a Polemic in the Fifteenth-Sixteenth Centuries” [Hebrew], *Pe‘amim* 42 (winter 1990), pp. 91-

In his *Künhü l-akbbār* the somewhat earlier writer Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī of Gallipoli (d. 1008/1600), lists a former Jew named ʿAbd al-Salām among the *defterdār*s (finance ministers) who served under Selim I.⁴ The famous traveller Evliya Çelebi (d. 1095/1684), perhaps taking his cue from Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī, also mentions the Jewish convert ʿAbd al-Salām as *defterdār* during the reign of this sultan.⁵ Although neither of these sources adds that this official is the author of *al-Risāla al-hādiya*, it is very tempting to attribute the tract to him, for how many former Jews named ʿAbd al-Salām could have been attached to the imperial treasury under the same ruler?

In the Ottoman records, the *defterdār* ʿAbd al-Salām is mentioned as the owner of various properties, some of them purchased from Jews in different quarters of Istanbul and attached to his own *waqf*.⁶ Some of these transactions seem to have benefited the Jewish community,⁷ and it may well be to this patronage that the Jewish author Yosef Sambari refers in his *Divre Yosef*, completed in 1673, when he describes a *talmid hakham* in Istanbul who went over to the religion of Ishmael and changed his name to ʿAbd al-Salīm Efendi. In this position he was able to help and support the Jews at the time of their sorrow and to cancel a number of harsh enactments that had been imposed on them. He wrote a letter to the Jews in which he said, referring to himself: “The Lord has created every thing for its own end, even the wicked for the day of evil.” (Prov. 16:4).⁸ Sambari’s statement suggests that ʿAbd al-Salām enjoyed considerable influence with the authorities.

104, and idem, “Naïveté, verses of Holy Writ, and polemics: Phonemes and sounds as criteria: Biblical verses submitted to Muslim scholars by a converted Jew in the reign of Sultan Bāyazīd (Beyazıt) II (1481-1512),” in *O ye Gentlemen. Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk*, eds. Arnoud Vrolijk and Jan P. Hogendijk, Leiden 2007, pp. 495-510, which is a somewhat revised English version of the first article, and now Camilla Adang, “A Polemic against Judaism by a Convert to Islam from the Ottoman Period: *Risālat Ilzām al-Yahūd fīmā zaʿamū fi l-Tawrāt min qibal ʿilm al-kalām*,” *Journal Asiatique* 297.1 (2009), pp. 131-151.

⁴ See Joannes Schmidt, *Pure water for thirsty Muslims. A study of Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī of Gallipoli’s Künhü l-akbbār*, Leiden 1992, pp. 260, 355; Mark Alan Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Freiburg 1980, p. 36.

⁵ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi seyāhatnāmesi*, vol. 1, Istanbul 1314/1896, p. 345.

⁶ Hājjī Khalifa mentions the establishment of *waqfs*, but without naming them. However, the Defterdar Abdüsselam Camii in Izmit, ca. 100 km east of Istanbul, and the Defterdar Abdüsselam Bey Medresesi in the Istanbul suburb of Küçükçekmece, both attributed to the famous imperial architect Sinan (d. 996/1588) and his school, may be associated with him. If he was able to commission Sinan this must mean that he was wealthy as well as influential.

⁷ See Dilek Akyalçın, *The Jewish Communities in the Making of Istanbul Intra Muros: 1453-1520*, MA Thesis, Sabancı University, 2003, pp. 60f.

⁸ Yosef Sambari, *Sefer divrei Yosef by Yosef ben Yitzhak Sambari. Eleven Hundred Years of Jewish History Under Muslim Rule*. The full text edited on the basis of manuscripts and early printed editions and annotated by Shimon Shtober, Jerusalem 1994 [in Hebrew], pp. 389-90.

According to Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, ‘Abd al-Salām, the author of *al-Hādiya*, was not ‘Abd al-Salām the *defterdār* and property-owner; the latter apparently hailed from Egypt and came to Istanbul after Selim’s conquest of Egypt. The *Hādiya* was written earlier, and dedicated to the previous sultan, Bāyazīd II. However, İhsanoğlu has another candidate: İlyās b. Abram (Eliahu ben Avraham), a Jewish doctor and scholar from Spain who came to Istanbul after the expulsion of 1492 and soon converted to Islam.⁹ Eliahu ben Avraham is the author of a well-known Arabic tract about the bubonic plague which he dedicated to Sultan Selim I after his move to Istanbul. Attractive though İhsanoğlu’s theory may be, there is no evidence linking Eliahu to ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī.¹⁰ Further research is needed to decide conclusively whether al-Muhtadī and the *defterdār* are one and the same person, but this is beyond the scope of this contribution.

*The Rightly-Guiding Epistle*¹¹

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent, in whom I put my faith.

Praise be to God who in the end of time graciously bestowed upon his servants the message of his Beloved who was sent from among the Banū ‘Adnān, the illiterate Hashimite Arab prophet who was sent to men and jinn alike, and by whom the [sequence of] the prophets was sealed, and whose nation includes the martyrs and the righteous. May God bless our messenger Muḥammad, and grant him benediction and salvation—[he] who was exclusively granted six things that the [other] messengers were not given¹²—and his family and companions, who strove in the way of God with their hearts and souls, even if the critics scolded them.¹³

⁹ Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, *Büyük Cihad’dan Frenk fodulluğuna*, Istanbul 1996, pp. 89-96; see also Mehmed Süreyya, Nuri Akbayar, Seyit Ali Kahraman, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, vol. 1, Istanbul 1996, p. 139.

¹⁰ On Eliahu ben Avraham and his work, see Ron Barkai, “Between East and West: A Jewish Doctor from Spain,” in *Intercultural contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Benjamin Arbel, London/Portland 1996, pp. 49-63.

¹¹ The present translation is based on the edition by Sabine Schmidtke in “The Rightly Guiding Epistle (*al-Risāla al-Hādiya*) by ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī al-Muḥammadī. A Critical Edition”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 36 (2009), for which five manuscripts were used. The relatively large number of manuscripts, dating from different periods, is an indication of the tract’s continued popularity. No full analysis of the tract is undertaken at this point; I refer the reader to a forthcoming collection of polemical treatises from the Ottoman period, three of them by Jewish converts to Islam (edited by Camilla Adang, İlker Evrim Binbaş, Judith Pfeiffer and Sabine Schmidtke) in which such an analysis is undertaken and the style, contents and reception of the treatises are discussed.

¹² The authoritative *ḥadīth* collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim contain traditions according to which the Prophet listed not six, but five things that were exclusively granted to him among God’s messengers: He was sent to all of humanity rather than to any particular nation; the spoils of war were made lawful for him, which had not been the case for his predecessors; the whole earth was made pure for him and a source of purification (namely with sand in the absence of water), as well as a suitable place for prayer; God had rendered

Now then, ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī al-Muḥammadī,¹⁴ the poor soul who is desirous of the eternal benevolence of Aḥmad¹⁵ says: His Eternal Happiness¹⁶ supported me and cast into my heart the love of Islam and the Muslim, and hatred of those who are neither scholars nor students. I perused the books of the Torah, one after the other, and found therein evidence of how the Jews are thwarting God, exalted is He, and Moses, peace be upon him, one foul thing after another, when “trading the grace of God for unbelief. They established their people in the house of perdition: Gehenna, exposed to its flames; a wretched abode”.¹⁷ “They are content to be with ones who stayed behind. God sealed their hearts, so that they did not believe”¹⁸ until they saw the painful punishment, for they rejected the prophethood of the Seal of the Prophets, which is tantamount to rejecting the prophethood of the *Kalīm*¹⁹ and they did not turn to God in repentance, so how can they say: “We have turned unto you”²⁰. O you who stubbornly oppose the clear truth, be mindful of that which has been imposed upon you in the Torah, the truthful words of God, He who hurls the truth against falsehood and shatters it, for He is the annihilator [of falsehood] who dispenses justice,²¹ and if you do not, woe to you from what you ascribe [to Him], and beware, after the establishment of proof, of the sword of a sultan who walked the path of Jesus in time (?), resplendent with the gleam of trust and protection; a sultan who accumulated all his praiseworthy qualities in the rich pastures of sound action, between the sheep and the wolves, lightning sparking off his sword’s edge. He will deliver you from the gaping chasm through [his] benevolence and charity, solicitude and graciousness.

These are the proofs excerpted from the book of Moses, peace be upon him, concerning the Seal of the Prophets, Muḥammad the Chosen One. If you repent and return to belief in [the true contents of] this book²², you will be safe in the security of Islam from the evil nature of the End that will come upon humanity in the course of time. But if you do not embrace Islam, you will not be safe from

him victorious by instilling fear in his enemies, even those at a month’s journey’s distance; he had been given the right of intercession.

¹³ Possibly a reference to the Shi‘ites who are known for their hostility to those of the Prophet’s Companions who did not support the candidacy of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib for the succession to Muḥammad.

¹⁴ These names were not chosen fortuitously: *al-muhtadī* means the one who has been rightly guided viz. to Islam, in other words, a convert, while al-Muḥammadī seems to be a name that is common for converts, like al-Islāmī. Perhaps the translation “the Muslim convert” might be justified. We do not know what the author’s original, pre-conversion name was.

¹⁵ I.e., Muḥammad.

¹⁶ The sultan.

¹⁷ Qurʾān 14:28f.

¹⁸ Cf. Qurʾān 9:87, 94.

¹⁹ I.e., Moses, the one who was addressed by God and conversed with Him.

²⁰ See Qurʾān 7:155. The verb *hāda/yabūdu* of course echoes the word *yabūd*, Jews.

²¹ Cf. Qurʾān 21:18.

²² I.e., the Torah.

the edge of the sword of the sultan, son of the sultan, Sultan Bāyazīd Khān, may God assist him in perpetuating the religion and may He assist his empire in fighting the unbelievers and the heretics. He who says Amen!, God will save his soul. This call encompasses all of humanity.

When I gathered the proofs setting forth the evidence against the despicable sect, I used it as a means to enter [the sultan's] service by addressing it to his noble name, seeking to obtain the greatest measure of his all-embracing grace. I entitled it "The Rightly-Guiding Epistle". It is divided into three sections, and on God we rely for the [just] division.

The first section deals with the invalidation of the proofs of the Jews; the second with the confirmation of the prophethood of Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, on the basis of phrases [taken] from the Torah after its alteration by the Jews; the third section demonstrates that they have altered certain words in the Torah.

As for the first section [on the invalidation of the proofs of the Jews], the exegetes of the Jews claim that the religion of Moses, peace be upon him, will be eternally valid, and say: "We have found [certain] sayings in the Torah that demonstrate the eternal validity (*abadiyya*) of the religion of Moses, peace be upon him, such as the words of the Exalted: '*washāmrū banī Isrāyīl hasba bath ladhūrusam barīth 'ūlām*',²³ till the end of the verse. [In Arabic²⁴] this means: "the nation of the Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath throughout their times as an eternal covenant ('*abdan abadiyyan*'). Now this verse [so they say] demonstrates the eternal validity (*abadiyya*) of [the commandment of] refraining from work on the Sabbath. If God, exalted is He, would order an end to inactivity on the Sabbath in the Glorious Qur'ān, this would imply a contradiction in the words of the Creator, far is He exalted above this!

This being the case [so they say], the religion of Moses, peace be upon him, must be eternally valid, and therefore they say: we shall not obey a messenger who abolishes this precept.

I say: [Our] reply to their claim is that even if the verse which occurs in the Torah is qualified by something that according to the Hebrew language²⁵ conveys [the concept of] eternity, namely the expression '*ūlām*', [this] *abad* has two meanings; the first is that of a lengthy duration, and the second absence of finiteness. What is meant by [the expression] *abadiyya* that is mentioned in this verse is the first sense, not the second one, and the eternal validity of the religion of Moses, peace

²³ Exod. 31:16.

²⁴ *Wā-mā'nāhu bi-lughat al-'Arab*.

²⁵ All the manuscripts consulted actually read *lughat 'Imrān*, which would mean "the language of Amram", who was Moses' father. Since this is a highly unusual way to refer to the Hebrew language, which is obviously what is meant here, preference is given to the reading *lughat al-'ibrān*, the language of the Hebrews.

be upon him, is not implied by the second sense, which is what you mean, and no contradiction is implied either, because every commandment comes down from God, exalted is He, for a particular period because of a certain wisdom and a benefit.

If these incompetent people among the exegetes of the Jews object, saying: “What is your proof that what is meant by *abadiyya* in the verse quoted is the first sense rather than the second one?”, we say: “You have taken the second sense from the saying of the Exalted ‘*ūlām wā’id*, where He says in the Torah: *Adbūnāy yamlak ‘ūlām wā’id*,²⁶ which [in Arabic] means: ‘God reigns forever’. And you say: If ‘*ūlām* is combined with *wā’id*, this combination [of words] means *abadiyya* in the second sense, but if ‘*ūlām* is not combined with *wā’id*, then what is meant by ‘*ūlām* is *abadiyya* in the first sense. Now, in the above-mentioned verse the saying of the Exalted: *washām rū* is not [thus] combined, so know that the intended meaning is the first sense, not the second one.

Similar to this is what you [Jews] object with regard to the Torah, saying: God, exalted is He, says in the Torah: *Kī tiqnab ‘abad ‘ibrī shash shānīm ya’bud wabasabī’at yašā ḥuḥshī waim yūmar ha’abad aḥabī adbūnāy waishbī wabānāy lū ašā ḥuḥshī [...]* *waraša’ adbūnaw udhunū bimarša’ wa’abadū l’ūlām*.²⁷ This means [in Arabic]: If you buy a Hebrew slave, this slave shall serve for six years, and in the seventh he shall go free, but if the slave says: ‘I love my master, my wife and my sons; I will not be set free’, then his master will pierce his ears with an awl and he will serve him forever (*abadan*).

Elsewhere in the Torah God, exalted is He, says: *wa-safart sab’ shānīm sab’a fa’amīm wa-hayū tisa’ wa-arba’im sana wa-qadastim thanath bā ḥamīshim aw qarāthim darūr bāraš la-kul yūshabīb hiya wa-hā-‘abad ‘ad thanath ha-yūbal ya’bud wa-yašā ma’imakh lū ymākhar mim karath ‘abad*, until the end of the verse.²⁸

This means [in Arabic]: “Count seven years seven times, so that they shall be forty-nine years, then [in] the fiftieth year you shall hallow and proclaim in the land, and the herald shall say: After forty-nine years every person shall become free, and the slave who was in the jubilee year shall go free, and shall not ever be sold (*abadan*)”. There is a contradiction between these two verses, because the purport of the *first* verse is that if in the seventh year the slave says, “I love my master, I will not be set free,” he will forever serve his master (*abadan*), whereas the meaning of the *second* [verse] is that in the jubilee year *every* slave will be set free, and there is a clear contradiction between these two [statements].

You reply to this objection that *abad* has two meanings, that of lengthy duration and absence of finiteness, but what is meant by *abad* [in these two verses] is the

²⁶ Exod. 15:18.

²⁷ Cf. Exod. 21:2-6.

²⁸ Cf. Lev. 25:8, 10, 40-42.

first sense, not the second, because the expression *‘ulām* is not combined with *wā‘id*, so [in the end] your reply is in fact [identical to] our reply.

Then [the Jews] say: If the religion of Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, were true, it would be abrogating and the religion of Moses, peace be upon him, abrogated, because on most issues the precepts of the Glorious Furqān²⁹ differ from those of the Torah, which would imply regret on the part of the Creator, exalted is He, and God, exalted is He, is far from that, and highly exalted above it. Moreover, He says in the Torah: *Lū ish al wa-kadhbab wa-bani Adam wayatanakham*,³⁰ until the end of the verse, which [in Arabic] means: “God is not a man [...] nor a son of man that he should be regretful”. According to this [verse] the eternity of the religion of Moses, prayer and peace be upon him, is required [so they say].

In answer to this objection I say: We do not accept that this implies regret on the part of God, because the meaning of regret is that the one who regrets performs an act, and then realizes the inappropriateness of this act, and even the appropriateness of its opposite, and says: ‘If only I had not done that’, and God, exalted is He, is free from this, because He knows from eternity all that was and all that will be, and in His hands is the dominion over all things.³¹

At the basis of [their] objection lies a lack of understanding of the meaning of regret. It is similar to when a doctor says to a sick person, for example: “Do not eat meat, for it is harmful to you”, then after some time has passed and the condition of the sick man has changed, the doctor says to him: “Eat meat!” This distinction is not attributable to the doctor’s knowledge, but rather to the shift in the patient’s condition and the change in what is beneficial to him, and it is the same here. Consider this.

Then they objected and said: God, exalted is He, says in the Torah: *Kī yaqūm ba-qirbakab nābī ū ḥūlam ḥalūm wa-nathan alayka ūth ū mūfatb lamūr nilkhab aḥarī lūham aḥarīm wa-na‘budum lū tishma‘ lū wa-hanabī hābū yūmath*,³² and the rest of the verse. The meaning of this verse [in Arabic] is: “If a prophet should rise up from among you, or sees an event, and he brings you proof and evidence but says: ‘Come and worship another deity (*ma‘būd*)’, do not accept him, nor obey him, nor sympathize with him, but kill him. This verse [they say] proves that not a single human being must be obeyed, whoever he might be, if he says: “I am a prophet, so obey me, and worship with another [kind of] worship”, because this contradicts the Torah. According to this [verse], then, the eternity of the religion of Moses, peace be upon him, must be accepted.

²⁹ I.e., the Qur’ān.

³⁰ Num. 23:19.

³¹ Cf. Qur’ān 23:88.

³² Cf. Deut. 13:2-6.

I say in response: this is an abominable error and a tremendous misstep, as will be clear to anyone endowed with the slightest [degree of] discernment, and you err with regard to the meaning of “another deity” like someone who lacks any insight or understanding, because you have taken [the expression] “another deity” [which occurs in the verse] to mean “another [kind of] worship,” and [in fact] say: “If a man should claim and say, ‘I am a prophet, so obey me and worship with another [kind of] worship’,” we do not accept his words and will not obey him, but we will kill him; we will not sympathize with him at all, because his claims contradict what is stated in the Torah, as is imagined by the Jews—God’s curse be on all of them; “surely God’s is upon the evildoers”.³³ And know, o Jewish people, that what is meant by “another deity” is not “another [kind of] worship” as you claim, but rather another god, as is stated in the Glorious Qur’ān: “Whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work, and make none the sharer of the worship due unto his Lord”.³⁴ This being the case, our lord and master, and lord of the prophets, Muḥammad (may God bless him and grant him salvation) did *not* say: “I am a prophet, come and worship another god”, which would allow you to say: “We do not follow the lord of the messengers, may God bless him and grant him salvation”.³⁵

Then they say: We shall not obey anyone after Moses (peace be upon him) even if what he says is in accordance with the Torah, as long as he does not produce a miracle. As for the miracle that [your] prophet, prayer and peace be upon him, produced, claiming: ‘this is from my Lord’, we have seen it and heard it, and it is not a miracle and does not constitute proof in our eyes, but it is [just] eloquence and stylistic beauty, and it is possible that someone more eloquent and more stylistically gifted will appear after [Muḥammad]. Don’t you see that [in the same way] Plato, Aristotle, Euclid and Ptolemy [each] appeared [consecutively] at a certain point in time and that their speech was characterized by eloquence and stylistic beauty – even if none of them was a prophet?

We say: the relation between [these] sages is not like the relation that obtains between the prophet and others, because even if the sayings³⁶ of the sages are dissimilar, still one is comparable to the other. As for the sayings that were brought by the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him salvation, they were not matched by anyone at any time, and had it been from other than [God] “they

³³ Qur’ān 11:18.

³⁴ Qur’ān 18:110.

³⁵ The point made by the author is that while the Torah condemns the worship of another god, this does not apply to a different way of worshipping the same deity, who is the one and only God worshipped by Muslims and Jews alike. There is no reason not to accept Muḥammad, since he never called to worship another god; on the contrary.

³⁶ All manuscripts have *kamāl* here instead of *kalām*, which is obviously required by the context, as is shown also by the Qur’ānic verse in the next sentence.

would have found therein much incongruity”³⁷. Their analogy, then, is like an analogy with a discrepancy.³⁸ Consider!

Then they said: We do not obey a single human being as long as we have not heard the voice of God, exalted is He, even if his precepts should be in agreement with those of the Torah, because God, exalted is He, says in the Torah: *Ha-darwārim ba'alub dibbar adhūnay al qahalkam qūl jādhūl wāyikdarwam 'al sana lūhath ābab nīm wātmr wa-hin qūl adhūnay sama'nu mitūkb hā'ish*, and the rest of the verse.³⁹ The meaning of this verse [in Arabic] is: “These are the words God spoke to your congregation with a great voice, and God wrote these words on two tables of stone, and you said: Here we have heard the voice of God from the midst of the fire”. Now this verse demonstrates that as long as we do not hear the voice of God we are not required to obey any prophet, which is indicated by the fact that God, exalted is He, enjoined [the Israelites] not to obey Moses [until] after they had heard the voice of God and acknowledged it saying: If we were to hear the voice of God during the time of another prophet, like we heard it in the time of Moses, peace be upon him, we would obey, but we did not hear it and therefore we do not obey him.

We say in response: At that time the Children of Israel said to *Haḍrat* Moses, peace be upon him: “O prophet of God, beseech God, exalted is He, on our behalf so that we shall not hear the voice of God [again] or else we shall die at once”, as God says in the Torah: *wa-yūmrū banū Isrāyīl im yūsūfīm anaḥnu lsmū'a qūl adhūnay 'awd wa-matnu qarab wa-sama' kul ashir yūmar adhūnay alakhab wa-sama'nu wa-yūmar adhūnay haḥībū ashar dibarū*.⁴⁰

The meaning of this [in Arabic] is: “The Children of Israel said: ‘If we hear the voice of God another time we shall die. Draw you near [to Him] and listen to all that God, exalted is He, shall command you, and we shall hear it from you’. And God said: ‘They spoke well’.” From this it becomes clear that God, exalted is He, accepted their wish that He, exalted is He, refrain from making His voice heard, which is why He said, “They spoke well”.

Then the Jews said: God, exalted is He, said in the Torah: *kl hadāwār ashar anī maṣaw atkhab lū tūdif' alaw wa-lū tighragh mimanū*, and the rest of the verse,⁴¹ which [in Arabic] means: “Every commandment that I shall command you, do not add

³⁷ Qurʾān 4:82. According to Muslim belief, the Qurʾān is God’s word and neither the Prophet nor any other person had had a hand in its composition; it is inimitable and no one will be able to match it, unlike products of the human mind. The inimitability of the Qurʾān is regarded as a miracle.

³⁸ In Islamic legal theory this is regarded as a faulty and invalid type of reasoning by analogy; see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. Third revised and enlarged edition, Cambridge 2003, pp. 273f.

³⁹ Cf. Deut. 5:22-24.

⁴⁰ Cf. Deut. 18:16-17, Deut. 5:24, 25, 27, 28 and Exod. 20:19.

⁴¹ Cf. Deut. 12:32.

to it nor detract from it.” So how can we [possibly] add to it or detract from it? But if we obey [your Prophet Muḥammad] we are bound to add and detract [some], because some precepts of [your] Furqān differ from the precepts of [our] Torah.

We say: The answer to this is that the adding and subtracting that is not permitted is adding to or subtracting from the *conditions* of the commandments, not to or from the [essential] commandment itself. It is like the fact that in the Torah there was just *one* fast, then afterwards the prophet Jeremiah, peace be upon him, added four fasts [to that one], and you obeyed him;⁴² the prophet Solomon, peace be upon him, added one commandment which in the Hebrew language is called *‘erubin*;⁴³ and the prophet Mattathias,⁴⁴ peace be upon him, added a commandment called Hanukkah, and you obeyed in all of that, and similar cases are too numerous to be counted.

You objected to [the new dispensation] saying, How can we obey a commandment not imposed upon us in the Torah, when it is prohibited in the very Torah to add to its commandments? But you [yourselves] answer that what is meant by [the expression] “every commandment” is: the *conditions* of every commandment, that is, “do not add to the conditions or detract from them”. As an example, you mentioned the commandment of the priestly blessing (*barakat al-imām*) which was laid down in three specific verses, as He has clarified in the Torah,⁴⁵ and you say that the blessing of the priest may neither consist of two, nor of four verses. Also, it is not allowed to exchange these specific verses for other ones, and it is likewise with regard to every one of the commandments of the Torah. Thus you replied, and your reply is essentially [the same as] our reply.

Then the Jews said: God, exalted is He, says in the Torah: *Tūrā širwā lanū Mūsā biya mūrāshab qblth Ya‘qūb*.⁴⁶ [In Arabic] this means: When *Ḥaḍrat* Moses, peace be upon him, passed on he said, with regard to the Torah, that it became the heritage of the community of Jacob. This verse demonstrates that it is not required to obey anything but the precepts of the Torah, and therefore they say: we do not obey anyone whose precepts differ from the precepts of the Torah.

We say: We do not accept that what is meant by the [above-mentioned] saying of Moses, peace be upon him, is what you mention, but rather [hold] that what Moses, peace be upon him, meant by these words is that the children of Jacob,

⁴² It is Zechariah rather than Jeremiah who is credited in the Hebrew Bible with the institution of four additional fasts; see Zech. 8:19.

⁴³ See the Talmudic tractate Eruvin.

⁴⁴ The text has Mathiyā³, but the context makes it clear that Mattathias is intended, the father of the Maccabee brothers who revolted against Seleucid rule in Judea in the 2nd century BC. Cf. 1 Macc. 4. Neither in Judaism nor in Islam is Mattathias regarded as a prophet.

⁴⁵ Cf. Num. 6:24-26.

⁴⁶ Cf. Deut. 33:4.

peace be upon him, obeyed the Torah, and that obedience to the Torah is confined to them [alone]; Moses, peace be upon him, does not mean that the community of Jacob, peace be upon him, is confined to obedience to the Torah [alone] or that their obedience cannot be to anything but the Torah.⁴⁷ As for the counter-arguments they put forward, they are very weak so there is no point in mentioning them.

Then I say to them: O Jewish people, if you refuse [to acknowledge] abrogation, this will be refuted as well. Don't you see that certain commandments that are laid down in the very Torah have for some reason themselves become abrogated, such as the daily worship of the prophet Aaron, peace be upon him, inside the tabernacle; when the sons of the prophet Aaron, peace be upon him, introduced a foreign [i.e., unholy] fire [into the tabernacle], God, exalted is He, caused them to die, and then God, exalted is He, commanded Moses, peace be upon him: Say to your brother that he should not enter the tabernacle except once a year and not go in at all times.⁴⁸

Similar things are numerous. So why do you deny that abrogation exists in the very Torah, and how can you deny that the Qur'an abrogates certain precepts of the Torah? This is manifest to whoever contemplates and abandons obduracy.

The second section, on the confirmation of the prophethood of the lord of both worlds, Muḥammad (prayer and peace be upon him), from the Torah itself, [even] after the Jews had altered it

The first proof is God's saying in the Torah: *wa-yūmar adhbūnāy nābī aqīm laham mi-qarab aḥīhim kāmūkbah wa-natbitī dabaray ba-frw wa-dabar alīhim kul ashar aṣawānū wa-hayah hāyish ashar lū yisma' al baray ashar yadabar bi-smī anūkbī adrūsh m'amū*, and the rest of the verse.⁴⁹ Now, the meaning of this verse [in Arabic] is: God, exalted is He, said: "I will raise up a prophet for the Children of Israel from among their brethren, like you, and I will put my words into his mouth; and the prophet shall speak to them all the words that I shall command them, and the man who will not listen to the words that the prophet shall speak in My name, I will require [it] of him". There are three aspects to this verse, each of which demonstrates the truth of the prophethood of Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him.

The first aspect is that the expression "from among their brethren" points to the prophethood of Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, because the ones that are meant by the "brethren" in [the phrase] "from among their brethren" are the brethren of the Children of Israel, who are the Children of Ishmael,

⁴⁷ The point is, of course, that Jews may, or rather should, also accept other laws, viz. that of Muḥammad. Apparently a critique of particularist tendencies within Judaism.

⁴⁸ Cf. Lev. 10:1-2; 16:1, 34.

⁴⁹ Cf. Deut. 18:18-19.

peace be upon him, and there is no one among the prophets of that descent except our Prophet Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, so know that this verse indicates the truth of his prophethood, peace be upon him.

The second aspect is that the expression “like you” points to him, for “like you” is addressed to Moses, prayer and peace be upon him, and what is meant by it is that he is “like you” in that he received the scripture containing commandments and prohibitions, and among the prophets who are acknowledged by the Jews none rose up who was like Moses in that he was given the scripture. Know, therefore, that it is Muḥammad [who is being referred to here]. No one can say: How do you know that what is meant by the expression “like you” is “like you” in the sense that he, too, received the scripture containing precepts, when it is possible that what is intended is that he is “like you” in another one of his characteristics?

For we say: Before this verse God, exalted is He, says something which [in Arabic] means: “Say, o Moses, to the Children of Israel: Do not obey that which the masses obey, because they obey sorcerers and astrologers, and you are not like that; rather, God will raise up for you a prophet from among your brethren like me, so obey him.”⁵⁰ This in fact means “obey a prophet like me who shall bring precepts that contradict the precepts of the sorcerers and the astronomers”. This verse, now, demonstrates that what is meant by “like” is the likeness that is in the revelation of precepts to him.

The third aspect is that God’s words, exalted is He, “I will put my words into his mouth” indicate that the scripture will be revealed to this prophet, and this prophet is [therefore] Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, and the one who is meant by this prophet is not Joshua ben Nun as the Jewish scholars imagine when applying this verse to him, for these three aspects each indicate that the one intended is not Joshua, for Joshua belonged to the Children of Israel, and was not from among their *brethren*. In addition, he was not “like” Moses, peace be upon him, because the scripture was not revealed to him. Moreover, [God] did not put His words into [Joshua’s] mouth, and this is very clear.

The second proof: God, exalted is He, says in the Torah: *wa-lū qām nābī ‘ūdḥ bāsra’yīl kamūshbīya asḥar yaḍ’ū adūnāy fānīm alfānīm*, and the rest of the verse.⁵¹ [In Arabic] its meaning is: “No prophet will rise up from among the Children of Israel like Moses whom God, exalted is He, knew face to face”. This verse indicates that someone like Moses will come from among others than the Children of Israel, and we have not found anyone like Moses, peace be upon him, from others than the Children of Israel, except Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him. As for the leading exegetes of the Jews, they said that the prophet who came from among others than the Children of Israel was Balaam ben Beor, but this is

⁵⁰ Cf. Deut. 18:14-15.

⁵¹ Deut. 34:10.

an absurd error and a patent lie, for Balaam, even if he would be a prophet in their view [which he is not], is not like Moses, peace be upon him, for Moses, peace be upon him, was a messenger [of God] to whom the scripture was revealed, while Balaam was not a messenger in their view either. In particular, we do not accept that he was a prophet; rather, he was a governor who was divested of his position, and in the end he died an unbeliever, so how could he be like Moses?⁵²

The third proof: God, exalted is He, says in the Torah: *Adūnay mi-sinā bā' wa-zarah mi-sā'ir lamū hūfiḡbah mi-bar fāran wa-atbah marbūth qūdas*, and the rest of the verse.⁵³ [In Arabic] this means: “The might of God came from Mount Sinai and rose up from Mount Seir and shone from Mount Paran and gave from the multitude of holiness”. This verse, now, includes [a reference to] four books that were sent down on the part of God: the first is the Torah, which was sent down to Moses, peace be upon him, on Mount Sinai, and the Jews followed him; the second is the Evangel (*al-Injīl*) which came down to Jesus, peace be upon him, and the Christians followed him. The Christians, now, were from the lineage of Esau, the brother of Jacob, and he was king on Mount Seir, as is mentioned in the Torah.⁵⁴ The third [scripture] is the Glorious Qur'ān which was sent down to Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, who was from the lineage of Ishmael, peace be upon him, and Ishmael was associated with Mount Paran, as is made clear in the Torah.⁵⁵ Mount Paran is a mountain in the Ḥijāz. The fourth [scripture] is the Psalter (*al-Zabūr*), which was sent down to David, peace be upon him, and it is indicated by the expression “the multitude of holiness” as is clear from the tales of the prophets⁵⁶ and the Psalter [itself]. If [the Jews] object that the Psalter should have been mentioned after the Torah and before the Evangel and the Furqān, according to the [chronological] order of their revelation, we say: the reply to this is that the Psalter was devoid of precepts, and therefore [God] put it last and mentioned the other [books] according to their order of revelation. This verse is the strongest evidence and the most convincing indication of the truth of the prophethood of Muḥammad and Jesus, prayer and peace be upon both of them, because no one rose up from Mount Seir and shone forth from Mount Paran except the two of them, and here, too, the Jews have absolutely nothing to go on.

The fourth proof is the saying of the Exalted in the Torah: *wa-yiqrā' Yā'qūb al bānaw wa-yūmar ilayhim bāsfū wa-ajḏba lakum ashbar yiqra' atbkam bāḡrith hay-yāmim lū yāsūr shabaḡ min Yabūdab wa-mahūqaq mi-bin rijlaw 'adb kay yābū Shilū wa-*

⁵² For the enigmatic figure of Balaam, the “gentile prophet”, see Num. 22-24.

⁵³ Cf. Deut. 33:2.

⁵⁴ Cf. Gen. 33:16.

⁵⁵ Cf. Gen. 21:21.

⁵⁶ Arabic *qisaḡ al-anbiyā'*; probably the biblical books of the prophets are intended, rather than the popular islamized accounts known under that name.

*lū yiqbath ‘amīm.*⁵⁷ [In Arabic] this means: “Jacob told his sons, saying to them: ‘Gather together and I will tell you what will happen to you in the last days. The judge will not depart from Judah nor a ruler from between his feet until the coming of the one for whom and unto whom the nations will gather’”. In this verse there is an indication that our master Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, will come after the termination of the rule of Moses and of Jesus, prayer and peace be upon the two of them, because the one who is meant by “the judge” is Moses, peace be upon him, since after Jacob there was no lawgiver until the time of Moses except Moses [himself], peace be upon him. The one meant by “the ruler” is Jesus, peace be upon him, for after Moses, peace be upon him, until the time of Jesus, peace be upon him, there was no lawgiver except Jesus [himself], peace be upon him, and after the two of them there was no lawgiver except Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him.

And know that the one meant by Jacob’s saying “in the last days” is our prophet Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, because in the last days, after the rule of the judge and the ruler elapsed, no one has appeared except our master Muḥammad, peace be upon him. [God’s] words “until the coming of the one for whom ...,” meaning the rule, also point to him, as is indicated by the wording of the verse and by its context. As for His saying, “and unto whom the nations will gather”, it is an obvious sign and a clear indication that the one intended is our master Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, because the nations did not gather except unto him. The only reason why the Psalter is not mentioned is that it does not contain precepts, and [moreover] the prophet David, peace be upon him, was [himself] a follower of Moses, peace be upon him, and the announcement of Jacob [specifically] refers to a [new] lawgiver.

The fifth proof: It is clear that most proofs of the Jewish scholars are based on numerology, that is, the letters of the alphabet. Thus, for example, they looked for an indication of the length of the continued existence of the Temple in the letters of the alphabet, and when the prophet Solomon, prayer and peace be upon him, built the Temple the Jewish scholars gathered and said: This building will remain standing for 410 years, then destruction will befall it, because they calculated the word *bi-zāt* (*be-zot*) in God’s words in the Torah: *bi-zāt yabū Hārūn al ba-qūdas*,⁵⁸ whose meaning [in Arabic] is “*bi-zāt* the priest (*al-imām*)—who is indicated by the name of Aaron—worships in the Temple,” and they ruled that the length of its stay and the rule of the priests there is *bi-zāt* years, that is, 410 years. Similar proofs of theirs are too numerous to be counted.

Now if it is like that, then I say⁵⁹: God, exalted is He, says in the Torah: *wa-yūmar Adbūnay li-brābīm li-smā‘il sama‘tikhab binab barakti ūtbū wa-birbatbī ūtbū wa-bifratbī*

⁵⁷ Cf. Gen. 49:10.

⁵⁸ Cf. Lev. 16:3.

⁵⁹ Meaning: If they can use numerology to argue their point, so can I.

ūthū bi-mād mād,⁶⁰ which [in the language of the Arabs] means “God, exalted is He, said to Abraham: behold I have accepted your plea with regard to Ishmael and I will bless him and multiply him and make him fruitful *bi-mād mād*.” Now when the numerical value of the letters [in the expression] *bi-mād mād* is calculated, the outcome is the name of our prophet Muḥammad, prayer and peace be upon him, because the numerical value of [each of] these two expressions⁶¹ is ninety-two. That which demonstrates what we have said is the phrase “I will bless him and multiply him and make him fruitful *bi-mād mād*,” because the blessing of the children of Ishmael, his multiplication and his fruitfulness occurred only through [Muḥammad], and there is one word in particular in which God, exalted is He, mentions the blessing of Ishmael, his being multiplied and rendered fruitful: [the expression] *bi-mād mād* which He did not mention in [His] blessing of his brother Isaac, peace be upon him, and this is a clear proof.

They objected to this proof saying that the [letter] *bāʾ* in [the expression] *bi-mād mād* is not an integral part of the word but rather an auxiliary letter that establishes a connection. If the [numerical value of the] name of Muḥammad is to result from it, a second *bāʾ* is needed, and it would have to say *bi-bi-mād mād*.

We say: it is well known among them that if two *bāʾ*s come together, one auxiliary and one an integral part of the word, the auxiliary one is elided and the one that forms part of the actual word remains. This is common among them in countless places, and there is no need to mention it here, and this is what we reply with regard to the second *bāʾ* in *bi-mād mād*.

The third section demonstrating the alteration of some words in the Torah, from a number of respects

The first aspect: We have found in the Torah that they possess that in the early days there was a king who was associated with Canaan who was called “the Canaanite”, and Abraham [lived] in his kingdom. It was struck by a famine and Abraham, peace be upon him, moved from one corner [of the kingdom] to another, and thus we find in the Torah they possess: *wa-yaʿbūr Ibrāhīm bā ariṣ ʿadb maqūm Shakhm ʿadb Aylun Mūrah wa-ba-Kanāʿanī az ba-ard*.⁶² [In Arabic] this means: “Abraham went in the land from the town of Shekhem to the desert of Moreh while the Canaanite was in the land at that time”. From his words “while the Canaanite was in the land *at that time*” one may understand that at the time of Moses, he was *not* in the land, but this is untrue, because the Canaanite never moved away from his place and from his kingdom except in the time of Joshua ben Nun, because God, exalted is He, says in the Torah: “O Moses, you will not oust the Canaanite from his kingdom, but [only] Joshua, peace be upon him, will oust him”. Now if that were so, the expression “at that time” is a mistake which

⁶⁰ Cf. Gen. 17:15, 20.

⁶¹ I.e., of *bi-mād mād* (Hebrew: *bi-meʿod meʿod*) on the one hand, and *Muḥammad* on the other.

⁶² Cf. Gen. 12:6; 13:7.

occurred in the wording of the book of the later [scholars]. The greatest of the exegetes of the Torah among the Jews, whose name is [Abraham] Ibn Ezra, understood this alteration and said: “In the expression ‘at the time’ there is a great secret on which the one with understanding keeps silent”.

The second aspect: In the Torah they possess we found: *wa-yaʿal Musā al Har Nabū wa-yamuth sham wa-yaqbur utbū wa-yabkū banī Isrāyīl ath Mūsā thalūshim yūm*.⁶³ [In the language of the Arabs] this means “And Moses climbed Mount Nebo and died there, and he was buried there and the Children of Israel lamented Moses thirty days”. What is to be understood from these accounts which are presented in the past tense is that these events took place in the past, but it is well known that the Torah was revealed to Moses when he was healthy and alive, not *after* his life, and it is even said: “He died there and was buried and they lamented him”, which points to their alteration of the Torah which is found nowadays.

The third aspect: We have found in the Torah: *Wa-lū yādaʿ īsh qabūr āthū ʿad hayūm badhab*.⁶⁴ [In Arabic] its meaning is: “No man knows his grave, i.e., the grave of Moses, peace be upon him, until this day”. From its meaning their alteration is clear, because His saying “until this day” shows that Moses, prayer and peace be upon him, died *before* this statement was made. This in turn shows that it was not revealed to Moses, peace be upon him, and this is obvious, so one should consider it.

Know that the Torah that the Jews possess contains many examples of such sayings. For this reason the above-mentioned exegete [Ibn Ezra] said: “If you understand the secret of these words and the like of them, you will distinguish the truth, and one should look at his interpretation.”

Know, furthermore, that we have already found in the most famous interpretation of the Torah called by them the Talmud,⁶⁵ that in the days of King Ptolemy (Talmāy), who lived after Nebuchadnezzar, the king had asked the Jewish scholars for the Torah, and they were afraid to show it, because he objected to some of its commandments, so seventy men from among the Jewish scholars gathered together and altered whatever they wished of the words which this king objected to out of fear of him. Now, if they admit to the alteration carried out by them, how can it be believed and how can one rely on a single verse? God is the one whose help we seek in the search for the truth at which “falsehood cannot come [...] from before or from behind”.⁶⁶ Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds, and our perfect prayer be upon our lord Muḥammad.

⁶³ Cf. Deut. 34:1, 5, 6, 8.

⁶⁴ Cf. Deut. 34:6.

⁶⁵ Cf. Babylonian Talmud, tractate Megillah 9 a-b. The reference is to the production of the Septuagint; see Abraham Wasserstein and David J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint. From Classical Antiquity to Today*, Cambridge 2006.

⁶⁶ Qurʾān 41:42.