

Limmud Festival 2022

## Yehuda Halevi – physician, poet, philosopher, mystic

Robert L Stone, author of *The Golden Bell* (2022)

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### Iberian Peninsula, 1137 CE



Wikipedia Maps

### Significant events

(... some of the dates are tentative or speculative)

- 1071 Yehuda Halevi born in **Tudela** in the Emirate of Zaragoza
- 1085 King Alfonso VI of Leon-Castile conquers Toledo
- 1088 Yehuda moves to **Córdoba** to study medicine, meets his beloved (for whom the name Deborah is used in *The Golden Bell*), then moves to **Granada** to study with Moses ibn Ezra while continuing his medical education as apprentice to the Emir's physician
- 1090 Almoravids invade Granada and send the Emir into exile – Yehuda moves to **Seville**
- 1091 Yehuda moves to **Lucena** as amanuensis to Yitzchak al-Fasi, Head of the Yeshiva
- 1094 Yehuda moves to **Toledo** and marries Deborah
- 1099 Crusaders conquer Jerusalem
- 1109 Anti-Jewish riots in Toledo – Yehuda and his wife and daughter move to **Córdoba**  
Yehuda becomes a leader of the community, a prominent physician and increasingly famous as a poet and philosopher
- 1140 Yehuda leaves Deborah and his daughter and grandchildren to sail across the Mediterranean towards Jerusalem – spends the winter in **Alexandria** and **Cairo**
- 1141 Yehuda sails from Alexandria and travels via Ascalon to **Jerusalem**, where he dies in June or July

## חי הברית דודי – The slave of love <sup>1</sup>

חי הברית דודי וסִיידָ וְחִי  
הָאֵהָבָה שְׁיָרְתָהּ בִּי חֲצִי  
אִם-לֹא אֵהִי עֹבֵד לְאֵהָבָה רְצָעָה  
אֲזַנִּי וְלִבִּי בִּתְרָה בַּחֲצִי:

By the life of our bond, my love, and by your life  
And the life of the love that shot its dart at me,  
Truly I have become the slave of love: it has  
Pierced my ear, it has split my heart in two.

*Translation by Robert L. Stone*

*pierced my ear:* ‘But if the slave declares, “I love my master, and my wife and children: I do not wish to go free,” his master shall take him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the door-post, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall remain his slave for ever.’ (Exodus 21:5-6). *Translation based on Etz Hayim chumash, p. 358* <sup>2</sup> (The Hebrew *el-Elohim*, here ‘before God’, can also mean ‘before the court’.)

## בֵּין הַהֲדָסִים – Among the myrtles <sup>3</sup>

עֲפָרִים עֹמְדוּ בֵּין הַהֲדָסִים  
דְּרוֹר מֵרָחֹק אֶל הָאֲפֹסִים  
הֲדָס חָמַד נְעִים רִיחָם וְנִתְּן  
כְּנִפְיוֹ כְּכְרוּב בְּעֵדָם פְּרָשִׁים  
יִדְמָה הֲדָס רִיחָם לְכַסּוֹת  
וּבְשִׂמְיָהֶם עָלֵי רִיחֵהוּ מְכַסִּים:

The lovers stand among the myrtles,  
Their love-myrrh ascending to perfume the void.  
The myrtle, desiring their succulent odour,  
Spreads its wings like a cherub around them.  
The myrtle seeks to envelop their fragrance,  
But their joy overwhelms its scent.

*Translation by Robert L. Stone*

*spreads its wings like a cherub:* ‘... he made the cherubim of one piece with the cover [of the ark], at its two ends. The cherubim had their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They faced each other. The faces of the cherubim were turned towards the cover.’ (Exodus, 37:8-9) *Translation from Etz Hayim chumash, p. 559*

## The opening of Sedra T'ruma, Exodus 25

- וַיְדַבֵּר יי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לְאמֹר:  
 דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ־לִי  
 תְּרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ  
 לְבֹו תִקְחוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמָתִי:  
 וְזֹאת הִתְרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֲתָם  
 זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנְחֹשֶׁת:  
 וְתַכְלֵת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְיָשׁ  
 וְעִזִּים:  
 וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים  
 וְעֵצֵי שִׁטִּים:  
 שֶׁמֶן לַמָּאָר בְּשָׂמִים לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה  
 וְלִקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים:  
 אַבְנֵי־שֹׁהַם וְאַבְנֵי מְלֵאִים לְאַפֹּד  
 וְלִחְשׁוֹ:  
 וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם:
- <sup>1</sup> And the ETERNAL spoke to Moses, saying:  
<sup>2</sup> Speak to the Children of Israel that they take Me a donation from every man, as his heart may urge him you shall take My donation.  
<sup>3</sup> And this is the donation that you shall take from them: gold and silver and bronze,  
<sup>4</sup> and indigo and purple and crimson, and linen and goat hair;  
<sup>5</sup> and reddened ram skins and ochredyed skins and acacia wood.  
<sup>6</sup> Oil for the lamp, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense.  
<sup>7</sup> Carnelian stones and stones for setting in the ephod and in the breastplate.  
<sup>8</sup> And they shall make Me a Tabernacle that I may abide in their midst.

*Translation: Based on Robert Alter* <sup>4</sup>

## From Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari*

Soon after [the Tabernacle] was completed the Divine Presence encamped within it, because the construction fulfilled the two criteria which form the pillars of the Torah. The two criteria are: one, that the commandment must come from God, and two, that the commandment must be accepted by the community wholeheartedly. The Tabernacle [fulfilled these two criteria, in that] it was commanded by God and it was constructed by the entire community, as it says, 'from every person whose heart inspires him to give.' It was done with the community's complete desire and will, and the resulting resting of the Divine Presence was therefore completely appropriate, as it says, 'they shall make for me a Tabernacle, and I will rest in their midst.' (Third Essay, 23.3)

*Translation by N Daniel Korobkin* <sup>5</sup>

**From Yehuda Halevi,  
אָנָה אָמְצָאָךְ? – ‘Where can I find you?’**

מְקוֹמְךָ נִעְלָה וְנִסְתָּר.  
כְּבוֹדְךָ מְלֵא עוֹלָם.

יְהִי אָנָה אָמְצָאָךְ?  
וְאָנָה לֹא אָמְצָאָךְ?

....

בְּכֹל לְבִי קָרָתִיךָ,  
לְקָרְאֲתִי מְצָאֲתִיךָ.

דְּרִשְׁתִּי קִרְבְּתְךָ  
וּבְצִאֲתִי לְקָרְאֲתְךָ.

....

Where can I find You, God?  
But where can I not find You?

Your place is high and hidden/  
Your glory fills the world!

....

I longed to be near You,  
Went out to seek You,

I called You sincerely,  
and found You *me* seeking!

*Translation based on Raymond P. Scheindlin* <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hayim Brodie, (Heinrich) Brodie (Ed.), *Diwan des Abu-l-Hasan Jehuda ha-Levi (diwan yehuda ben shmuel halevi)*, Berlin 1894/1930, with an introduction, index etc. by A. M. Haberman, 4 volumes (Gregg International Publishers Ltd., England, 1971), Vol. II, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Etz Hayim; Torah and Commentary*, The Rabbinical Assembly of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (Jewish Publication Society, New York, 1999),

<sup>3</sup> Hayim Brodie, op. cit., Vol. II, p.18. The phrase *Among the myrtles* occurs three times in Zechariah, 1:8-11, see below.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary by Robert Alter* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2019)

<sup>5</sup> Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari – In Defense of the Despised Faith* (translated and annotated by N. Daniel Korobkin (Jason Aaronson Inc., 1998). For the Sufi origins of the language used here by Halevi, see Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Halevi's Kuzari* (State University of New York Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi's Last Pilgrimage* (Oxford University Press, 2008). For an excellent collection of translations of Halevi's poetry, see also Yehuda Halevi, *Poems from the Diwan*, translated from Hebrew by Gabriel Levin (Anvil Press Poetry, 2002).

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*Among the myrtles: Zechariah, 1:8-11.*

‘Last night I had a vision of a man riding on a bay horse, standing among the myrtles in a pool. Behind him were bay, sorrel and white horses.

I asked, “What are those, my lord?” and the angel who talked to me said, “I will show you what they are.”

Then the man standing among the myrtles spoke up and said, “These are the ones sent out by God to roam the earth.”

And they confirmed to the angel who was standing among the myrtles, saying “We have roamed the earth, and the entire earth is still and quiet.”

*Translation by Robert Stone*